

OPUS
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Issue V

State University of New York at Geneseo
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Cover

"Opus" Design: Dan Freund
Photo: Catlin Klein, James Merenda

Readers of OPUS,

In your hands, you hold the fifth issue of English Club's publication OPUS. This year, we received twice as many submissions as last year, and out of the more than three hundred submissions, had to select only enough to fit the forty-five pages allotted for the magazine. It was an arduous task, but ultimately extremely rewarding. I hope that you, like the staff and I, will find within these pages something that speaks to you.

I'd like to thank Jesus Jessica Allen Christ, who even across state borders provides inspiration for us to keep on.

On a more serious note, I'd like to thank random chance and consequence, which so much of artistic creation depends upon. And to all of you who tap into that stream, Thank You.

James Merenda
Co-Editor in Chief

Itself a journey, the process of writing is at once an experience and a record of experience. I know so many of us carry our tattered journals every where we go, composed of either crumpled, coffee stained pages or crisp, immaculate lines. Either way, our journals are an essential component of our lives. It is this concept that we have tried to convey in this year's issue of Opus.

Creating Opus is also a journey. Our staff has tumbled along through the year, learning by trial and error (and a smidge of acquired knowledge) how to compose a literary magazine. And in a sense, we might think of this magazine as a record – our journal – of another year of English Club, in addition to being a glimpse into the thoughts and experiences of our classmates.

Thank you, our readers, for your interest in Opus. Thank you, our contributors, for allowing others some insight into your own experiences. Your support is what makes our journey worth it.

Sincerely,
Lauren SooHoo
Co-Editor in Chief

Thank You:

Dr. Greenfield, for his financial, moral, and musical support.

Marie Henry & Michele Feeley, for keeping the English Department up and running.

Dave Kelly, for contributing the writing of his Poetry students.

The English Department for enthusiasm and support.

Those of you who spent hours reading, rating, and creating this issue of OPUS.

AAC, for partially funding this publication.

Lauren SooHoo, for putting up with and not killing James Merenda.

Jessica Allen, whose memory keeps English Club going in times of struggle.

Visions

Adam Maciejewski

the local Feel Rite pharmacy
now sells "Clear Consciousness"
contact solution
absolution dilute
a no rub world view Windex
as everything glimmers
with an innocent halo effect

it helps me, sometimes
get through the everyday
without crushing guilt

when I was young
cars drove peaceably
now I picture mosques
exploding in four cylinders
burning tanks' caustic exhaust
in tail pipes

filling my tank with rust clouded gas
I said
I can't see a solution

that is
until "Clear Consciousness" saves me
that is, until the next fill up
then I'm a habitual user
to stave off visions
of covered women
brutalized like Titus's Lavinia
forever silenced mouths with
limp cotton where once were
firm, elegant hands
and, of men who donate blood
to the insatiable desert
despite the best war machines
money can buy

Ocean
Brad Reiss

Who dares to praise the beauty
of language, that foggy, murky
ocean dividing the shores of
meaning and understanding, which
poets, imitating Moses, attempt to
part with pens? We are born in
Atlantis, after all, the most
ambitious of us desperately
swimming upward through words
that drown though, to try and
catch a glimpse of truth, however
dimmed and refracted it may be

Solstice
Alex Egan

It had been just before the leaves were about to turn
their heads down,
falling face first to the pavement.
preferring quick, crinkling suicide
to the upcoming slow, numbing
December.

well, I feel it now.

It changed on your way home from cross-country
soul-searching
that left you feeling
soulless
and without any room for me.
Two nights spent
(unknowing)
making sure
and all with the same conclusion
of everyone before you—
you are beautiful
but.

I asked you, I said,
if you're going to let me down,
(please) let me down
slowly.
And I'll give you that much,
you did.
(what I meant was, *don't.*)

Relative to the World

Emily Upham

An apple
once whole
browns when exposed

She knew it too
The white countertops were witness

As she ages,
she ripens
but the skin she's dressed in shrouds her judgment
until she forgets
everything she ever knew about streams

The accoutrements of ignorance
vainly dam up the expected clash
The hands were washed in it,
the hearts were dipped into it
the acid

She felt it too
The polluted stream was witness.

Deeper now
The world's little sister is carried upstream
through palms she shook
Every finger
impressed upon her skin
Her eye scans the
tree skirts in the sky--
Painting on an invisible canvas

She laughs

And as the water ripples,
estranged echoes meet for the first time,
then break away---
as if nothing really mattered

but the land

That's how wars begin

And she fought them too
but there is no one left to witness.

:: window :: moth
Hart Dubois

All we desire is at arm's length.
we could reach out and fold it
in our hands
if not for that
wall, self-imposed,
the cold, glass mask
that laughs at those hopes
we keep secret.
They're like bright baubles
we shroud
in dark velvet,
afraid that if exposed
to daylight,
they would surely burst
like dew
and be revealed
as mere drops
of insubstantial,
abstract hope -
fever-bright shells like
Faberge eggs, fragile
and empty.
I feel like Virginia Woolf's
moth must have felt
as he strove
against those cold panes
while she watched,
pencil in hand.

G for Jazz

Margaret Wedge

work late in this small college town
buzzing lips and liquors
because sometimes your Columbia gets too high
even though your fingers
know all the funk, blues and jazz
you believe
your mother wanted you to play...

Swear at house parties for students
where you fondle bourbon in a ball jar
Sharply dressed
city shape
Shoes
Matching cornflower shirt and tie
because you know that here
girls believe in men
who've touched tails of Greats

Birdsong

Suzanne Hally

Small birds singing outside Welles,
pretty little noises,
yet maybe they are just playing a game,
yelling naughty words louder than their friends,
The way they interrupt each other
and sound like they say the same thing,
it could just be a stupid game

And we think it is beautiful.

The Song of the Leaves

Nate Northrop

Life is a journey which starts at the ground
And reaches eternally for the sky.
We struggle furiously to be heard over the sound
Of the rushing wind before we die.
But leaves are to be seen and not heard;
They turn glorious colors before their silent
death.
The transformation means much more than our
words:
What have leaves to whisper with their short
breath?
When we fall, the tree mourns our going;
Our delicate corpses become its tears.
Come spring, it rejoices with knowing
That the leaves will change again this year.
So little leaf, stop seeking to speak as only one;
Just breathe: taste the air and drink the sun.

Something of Trees
Julie Bojanowski

The valley presented itself to the air like a maxim,
with two expanding sides to speak of and somewhere,
below the roots and the tangles of discarded branches,
the trickle of a stream. I rested, leaning against a birch
which I claimed as my own and which would remain
in my service only until I stood up to leave.

While looking for perhaps myself on the other side,
I noticed instead an oak, naked of its leaves and like
a vampire of itself. And the trunk caught my eye, a trunk
so masculine I could trace a beard and an Adam's apple,
even the attempt at a fist. From the base to the highest branches,
like something secret, crept a vine. An elegant tendril of bark and veins,
wrapped up and around the tree more like an appendage than anything
separate,
an excess of oak bone and oak muscle, filtered and squeezed out
of the great tree. And how feminine the curves of the vine, twined
around the trunk as if holding it together and filling in the gaps.

When the wind blew across the woody couple, there were faces,
and they chimed over the span of the valley, telling me to mind
the temperature, and so I released my birch and left the woods
behind me, glad to have observed something of trees.

Dream
James Heredia

I slept once, the dream is yet to end...I am walking or running or walking along a cliff or a barren plain interchangeably and the earth beneath me like ball bearings the tectonic plates are gathering behind me and the path in front of me is stretched out thin. There is a woman before me, and I cannot tell if she is coming or going, but together we stretch the plain out further. Without further prelude the sun explodes and it bleeds ink, wearing away the wire-thin ground and we start falling, stuck in transit, when Samuel Beckett begins playing shadow puppets off the Sun-drenched sky and the shadows are named Vladimir and Estragon. They are waiting for God or Godot and being profound to pass the time when Vladimir says "you should have been a poet" and Estragon responds "I was" and gestures to the rags that hang from his body and asks "isn't that obvious" and the response is simply *Silence*.

Soviet Sauerkraut
Kseniya Popa

His dark brown eyes scanned the shelf slowly. Carrots, spinach, canned potatoes, as always. He remembered the pickled mushrooms he had bought a month ago with a shudder. The tin can was branded with a red slogan: "Unbelievable taste, affordable price!" and underneath, a short essay on the use of this very brand in the finest restaurants. Alexei remembered what fine restaurants tasted like. One, on Nikolskay street, the "Slavic Bazaar". The service there was magnificent, the food, unfathomable. You would dream many weeks later about eating there again, and would wake up with a smile on your face. So he had bought the mushrooms blindly, and forced himself to swallow down slimy piece after slimy piece for two days. He was working for seven dollars an hour-the mushrooms were his entire week's paycheck.

Alexei glanced across the countless rows again. Maybe some baked beans? Put them on bread, and that's one delicious sandwich. Or heat them up with some left over diced salami, and you get a nourishing dish that lasts the day. Multifunctional food, like multifunctional furniture, had become essential to his lifestyle. Last year the house where he was renting a room was sold, and he was given an eviction notice on his birthday. The young lady owner smiled at him many times, and told him twice that she was very sorry, but that he understood. Alexei did understand. He had left Russia to dissent against the government...but here injustice happened to him at every turn, and there was no central authority to dissent against. He had begun to drift back to his home land...every startling reminder of life in the Tri-State area jarred his fragile psyche.

After the eviction, he had moved out of Long Island into New Jersey, to a rented room in the house of a man who needed the money. They argued in Russian deep into the evenings, because the man was a priest, and Alexei was not. He got a job sorting mail in the murky basement of a life insurance company, and settled into his room on the third floor.

They threw him out after Christmas. The priest's wife was bringing her sickly mother to New Jersey, and there was very little room to put her. Alexei volunteered his room. The wife had stared at him coldly, all blood had drained from her pinched face years ago. The priest nodded his head, slightly, glancing sideways at his wife, anticipating a hysterical fit or an all out fight. She hated Alexei.

Now Alexei lived above a Laundromat. His co-workers called him "Pine Fresh," although to be perfectly honest, he most often smelled like Mountain Breeze. The floor of his apartment vibrated late into the night, and humid days brought all the stifling stink of the laundry detergents and dryer sheets into the room, even flavoring the food.

A large glass jar was hiding on the lowest shelf, shoved into a corner behind the display of hanging wooden spoons. Alexei pulled it out, puzzled that in this land of plenty there was only one jar. A golden mess of something that looked like cabbage was stuffed into the jar. But it wasn't the rubbery, tin-can kind sauerkraut popular with American hot-dog grillers. This sauerkraut was like something Alexei had tasted hundreds of years ago. It was a special kind of cabbage, prepared according to an ancient recipe-turned common knowledge. The sauerkraut was stored together with thin slices of carrot, and this gave it the golden orange color. Was it possible that this was the very same recipe? Alexei consoled himself with memories of the slimy mushroom debacle as he half ran to the cash register. He bought the gallon jug for eight dollars and fifty cents, convinced he would be eating rubbery sauerkraut for the rest of the week.

He placed the jar on his folding plastic table until he had put on his dark blue bathrobe. It was

inscribed with a curly monogrammed “E”, but he had never thought about it, or even read it. He approached the jar, each step weighing down the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach that told him he had spent too much, too soon, for a five-gallon mistake. A half hour later, grunting and huffing, Alexei popped the top softly, and scooped out a handful of salty, transparent cabbage into his mouth.

That was it! The salted, sour, cabbage the village women made and sold on the suburban outskirts of Moscow. It crunched in his mouth, it melted, it filled his body with its taste and smell. There was suddenly no vibrating floor passing nauseating laundry fumes, no plastic chairs and no mattress on the floor. New Jersey disappeared and Alexei was sitting in a little restaurant outside Moscow, watching the street from his table. He was waiting for his young fiancé, who had spent a week at her parents’ country house.

Girls walked down the street in long braids and short, brown, uniform skirts. They swung book bags and laughed between each other, kicking up the sweet summer dust with their black sandals, and ripping leaves from the trees which lined the street. Young men, loud and gesticulating, rushed past the window, late for a party or the last class of the spring semester. Grandmothers hustled by, some worn and bent, in floral cotton dresses and thin hand-knit shawls, others, the Communist-grandmas, tall and imposing, in their monochromatic skirts and blouses. Every pedestrian, whether they were happy, sad, serious, or contemplative, wore the unavoidably shining stamp of satisfaction. There was a sense of righteousness in the air, an idea of the truth: everything at this point, and all the points into the future, is perfect, right, and honorable, they were thinking. A starched waiter, disgusted and tired, threw down Alexei’s dish with a clang, too busy to stop. A gust of warm wind blew into the café doorway, and Alexei’s smile echoed the smug expression of the pedestrians-everything was exactly in place, unchangeably same and safe.

The sauerkraut dissolved in his mouth, and Alexei found himself sucking the juice off his fingers, stripping off the last taste. The jar was still full, but Alexei closed it tighter than it had been sealed, and lovingly pushed it to the back of his cramped closet. He lay down on the vibrating floor, smelling of Rainy Days and Summer Fields. Alexei did not think about the sauerkraut, or the warm Russian street. He counted the eight water stains on the ceiling over and over. He listened to the washers downstairs, and tried to guess which ones were running. It was a self preservation instinct: he would kill himself otherwise.

Heg Vasey

and cicadas shed skin, and snakes too, and all sorts
of reptiles
and they leave them behind forever
skeleton suit impressions of what they were
because their fractal mold was only meant
for a moment in their lives

and we abandon our shells
dirty socks connected to ripped and worn in jeans
our shadow bodies sunken into
the tile bathroom floor before a shower
or the shaggy carpet rug before sex
but we can never leave them for too long
confined to stagnant structure
and eventually we return
always return
to the skins we had before

The Invisible Me
Patrick Morgan

The Invisible me
glides in the mist
of crows and words
and superficialities,

A wandering ghost
without end,
see-through,
trodden-on,
ever absent.

I who try
to be,
am withheld
from human,
rejected from the start.

A frozen fog
who gathers
no eyes,
a rolling in the wind,

Who wishes from the beginning
for existence
and is denied.



Brady Hills

Dream
Lisa Parisio

My mother lies in the bathtub
up to her back in cigarette water.
I pour a bottle of bleach down the sides
trying to clean, as I always have,
scrubbing hard-
barehanded.
Before the bottle is empty
I know I've killed her.

I go to answer the phone
searching through rooms of her house
finding it under a stack of bills in the kitchen sink.
I listen closely
and go back to help her up,
hold her hospital gown closed,
take her to the window,
so she can breathe.

Lines
Lisa Parisio

Cleaning out her house after the funeral
I found sixteen jars of Noxzema cold cream under the bathroom sink,
all half-used
while my mother boxed the plates and cursed
and listened to the answering machine greeting, over and over again,
crying.

In the back office there was the push-pin map of all the places she'd
been,
a certificate of a solo hot-air balloon ride over north Jersey
a box from the Soviet Union marked with a post-it note and my
initials,
across the hall, my grandfather's separate room.

I remember that as a child
I had tried to smooth out the wrinkles in her face
to see if she hid her secrets there
so I could pull them from her like turnips, red and bitter,
offer them to my mother.

*Finding
John Kilak*

It's not a mess,
though you're convinced otherwise.
The things in this room
have a freedom
to travel among piles
where they like,
and i find them when i desire.
You may pick that up
and leave it somewhere new
and in doing so change
the chaos of the room
but it's fine;
in fact, leave it where you like
and there it will stay
and then, when i look there
i will think of you.

*The Storm
Brady Hills*

Dark, jaded cloud sifts
through ashen membranes, under
stone, worn smooth by rain.

*The Tears
Brady Hills*

Twice-born nebulae
from your wintry, ravaged tears,
eat at my conscience.

Margaret Wedge

When it rains too much in the fall the leaves don't turn colors, they just turn brown and fall off. My mom grew a pumpkin in our front yard this year, my dad had to mow around it because they always fight when he cuts things too close, how could he not have *seen* it? She screams as if one of her own growing members had gotten the axe, even though it was a mistake. My teacher told me that once that his Halloween pumpkin got the chicken pox when he had them, still acting all surprised that maybe his mom painted it and I wrote him a letter this year, just to say hi, but I couldn't sign it love Margaret (he's young and still married, you know) so I stuck to describing the fall here, that's melancholy enough, and coming to think about it my mom didn't grow that thing in the yard, it grew; I guess because it's tradition to leave the pumpkins on the steps till spring.

The early orange sunrise spread over the land as the great star rose to make its daily appearance on to the pastoral landscape. The tiny cottage nestled betwixt two hills blanketed in rich green grass had yet to awaken to the dawn. Birds fluttered as they jumped and sang happily from the branches of the thick trees of the neighboring forest, while a stream ran excitedly past the cottage and into these woods, connecting them peacefully.

Bresidian slowly opened his eyes to the sunbeams peeking through his somewhat short curtain that failed to entirely enclose the window space. Squinting, he yawned, and stretched sleepily as he rose sighing at the thought of a new day. Pushing back the curtain to welcome the sun fully, he inhaled the sweet morning air and gazed over the countryside before him. A myriad of colors and hues blended in the sky, perfectly complementing the deep greens of the earth below it, creating such a picturesque view, he could barely distinguish reality from that of a magnificent painting.

His curiosity at what lay beyond the horizon was ever present; it lurked at the tips of his toes, and all too often seeped up through him, consuming his thoughts. Viewing that horizon from every window of his cottage, he speculated and wondered, questioned and begged for an answer, but was never given one. His parents had never allowed him to wander past the rolling hills or vast fields, and he was strictly forbidden from entering the dense forest. These limitations stifled his curious nature, suppressed his inquisitiveness, and left him horribly irritated.

Grabbing his trousers and white tunic from the hook on his wall, Bresidian ruffled his thick brunette hair, and started down the narrow and creaking wooden staircase to meet his chores with forced enthusiasm. Sweet bread from the day before had been left on the table, and he quickly stuffed a piece of it into his mouth. He made a face as he chewed the stale bread, and left the house hurriedly to get his outdoor chores over with. He knew he wasn't a slave in his own home and that his parents loved him, but often he felt like one; he was surely kept like one. The isolation he endured due to his mother and father's insistence left him wondering if there were even any other people in the realm that they dwelled in, for he had never interacted with anyone other than his parents.

On only one occasion had another person passed through their territory, and it was ten years earlier – Bresidian, through his kicking and screaming, had been hauled up to his bedroom and the door had been locked. He had watched from his window as the tiny figure faded into the woods as tears streamed down his face. This event was long forgotten, and never again mentioned.

Though Bresidian held his parents in high regard, and knew they were good people, they had constantly ignored his pleas for company as a child, insisting he should be happy at his secluded cottage.

"Just look at how peaceful and quiet our lives are, Bresidian!" they would say. "No neighbors means no conflicts, and that's the way we like it."

Bresidian, of course, disagreed completely, but after eighteen years of this life he had given up outward attempts to battle it. His innately adventurous spirit was stifled by monotony and quiet, and the only thing keeping him at least slightly happy was the distant hope that someday his life would change unexpectedly.

Taking the wooden bucket from the side of the cottage Bresidian made his way to the edge of the forest, wishing as always to catch a glimpse of something through the trees -- anything, anything at all.

Sometimes, the feeling that someone was watching him from behind would wash over him. His heart would race with excitement for a moment and he'd turn around to look -- but no one was ever present to be evidence of this feeling.

He knelt at the stream's bank and splashed water on his face, then cupped his hands for a drink. He felt instantly rejuvenated and refreshed – an odd sensation he had noticed after drinking from the stream since he was a young boy. In a way, he envied the stream; its boundless windings through the

terrain and its continuous movement exuded an atmosphere of freedom that Bresidian never felt. He cast the pail to the ground in resentment and slid to the cool grass beside the water, hugging his knees with his arms to quiet his swirling emotions.

A rustling noise came abruptly from behind him. Bresidian wheeled around, water spraying from his strikingly handsome face.

“Hello?” he inquired, staring ahead but feeling futile, for his overactive imagination would often transform common noises, movements, and feelings into something they were not. He quickly assumed that it was only an animal passing into the woods. Nevertheless, he peered and squinted down the stream through the trees as far as he could see, but the darkness resulting from the impenetrable canopy soon terminated his search. He wanted more than anything to satiate his curiosity, to follow the noise into the broad trees; if it truly was only an animal, at least he might know.

Sighing heavily, he forced himself to turn from the woods, and headed toward his mother’s garden. Bresidian admired the garden and its diversity of plants, yet he had no idea what all of them were for, as his mother had always insisted that the information was confidential.

This resulted in yet another area of his life that was a dark mystery. The realization that much of his life was a secret to him suddenly surged through him, but he tried to shrug it off.

It was a most eclectic collection – plants as tall as or even taller than Bresidian grew beside those that barely poked above the ground; some had beautiful features, petals, and stems; others were, to Bresidian, grotesque-looking. Each had a unique fragrance or odor, and when approaching the fenced garden, the smells mixed to produce an overwhelming aroma. He had tended to the garden since he was ten -- this was when his mother felt he was responsible enough to follow the specific watering instructions for each plant. The chore required precision and accuracy, yet it was his favorite, for the plants intrigued him. Some days he would get the urge to eat a leaf or take a piece of one of the plants to experiment, just to see what would happen. Fear, however, would mingle with the guilt he knew he’d feel, and this always suppressed that desire.

Once every plant had received its tedious morning care, Bresidian wiped his hands on his calf-length breeches. It had been nearly an hour since he had started, and beads of sweat rolled uncomfortably down his forehead.

Squinting in the sunlight, he went slowly back to the cottage. While still several feet from the door, he noticed the sunlight glaring off of something white attached to the door.

Could it be a piece of paper? No, he thought, it couldn’t be; he only imagined something like this would happen.

But perhaps it was a note for him?

He paused in disbelief. He took one cautious step forward, then bolted to the door in excitement, his heart racing uncontrollably. He ripped the pinned note off and into his shaking hands.

“Bresidian,

The time has come. Meet me at the Dragonspear Tavern immediately. Tell no one of your departure.”

Bresidian’s mouth opened, and then closed, as he read and re-read the note that suddenly seemed to be glued to his hands.

The moment he had waited eighteen years for was upon him.

He did not know where to find Dragonspear Tavern, or whom he’d be meeting there, but excitement coursed through his veins as his heart pumped rapidly. His eyes scanned the peaceful land around his cottage in attempt to catch a glimpse of whoever was responsible for hanging this important piece of paper, but again, he saw no one.

Stuffing the note into his pocket, he shoved the door open and ran up the staircase to get the only other article of clothing he owned – his cloak -- and ran back outside, breathing heavily. With no clear plan,

and without thinking to create one, he scurried rashly toward the woods, as he had seen his father go this way on many occasions when journeying to the village. He reached the familiar edge and stopped abruptly; he turned slowly around to take in the rustic landscape one final time, then fled into the trees



Thomas Wilder

Failure to Speak

Emily Brown

Like a poet
I agonize over
Every consonant.
I roll each vowel
Around my pink-pointed
Tongue,
Savor the sound of individual
Syllables,
Inspecting each
Combination of loose
Letters;
Noble r with his straight
Backed stroke-
Coquettish s with her flirtatious
Curves

I swish each word
Around my mouth
Like a connoisseur examines
A fine sauvignon Blanc
Then swallow them
Into the caverns
Of my gullet.

Pièce de Résistance *Maria Gigante*

if gravity would lift my hand
and smear your brain
into grey finger paint on canvas
to confuse your notion of societal
values and perhaps moral character
skew decision making and destroy
limitations—set in membrane—
everyone would look in awe
at this masterpiece—mixed media—
dub it existential and romantic
and I would
devour it

Willow
Mark Wolff

I drove home, strange music over the FM radio
the feeling of falling, the old red truck dropping over the familiar rise too
fast.

Cornfields in the dawn
standing as stoic as their brand names posted at the margins of encroaching
mist

across the road like thick films of oil
shifting in planes over water

I remember Donald before he died
we were children in the old willow tree
a fortress in the midst of the swamp
limber young bodies draping easily
from tree trunks older than our fathers
films of oil layered and stretching beneath us like ghosts
we would tell our dreams

sometimes he would stand suddenly
pointing at the thick copse of evergreens
amidst rusted barbed wire and farm machinery,
the gray man who walked the forest
“do you see him?” he whispered low and insistent
the hairs on his forearms stood straight on end
there were times when I wished to live in his eyes,
terrible and strange, full of waking spirits
later they would learn to talk to him as he lay awake in bed

homecoming, fast over back roads
Donald had died inhaling gasoline fumes
in the corrugated shed in his back yard
every time he had told a dream I was carefully included
standing by his side before an ocean of faces.
“I dreamed that the world was at my window last night” I told him once
“don’t let them in,” he had answered seriously
Donald does not stand over my bed at night and speak into my ear
I keep my dreams to myself and forget them daily
I remember seas of unseen faces drifting like oil slicks
beautiful and terrible under dying limbs

Diners and other thoughts
Melissa Braaten

I know that I am not yet a poet. What I write fervently, seasoned with dried tears, salty and wistful, that glows gold in the warm candlelight, under the morning's fluorescence is washed out, garish, like the décor in a cheap diner. Yet diners have their thrills, and their romance, their secrets behind the counters, that wait for a shift to be over, carried in tired lines around the eyes and in sore foot arches, waitresses who dread bending over to retrieve the sugar packets. By the window, tears fall silently into a cup of tea, while raindrops collide and swoop down the glass, to rest at the bottom of the pane in a trembling heap. The table tops are red and mottled and smell of sanitizer; the patrons leave fingerprints and draw spirals in the spilled sugar without realizing it; thoughts are somewhere far away, in a time or a place unattainable. We go to a diner to make our lives a little more poetic, so the lonely cheapness we feel inside can be well matched in weak coffee and harsh paper napkins. There is a camaraderie, even with the tired waitress. I've never met one who was wholly present, for whom life didn't have some kind of weight to pull her away. The tables are cleaned with dirty fingernails and bruised souls; the coffee is creamer and solace.

Paper Revolutionaries are Made Out of Money
Dan Freund

I call them paper revolutionaries
because they're made of money

feigning paper cuts at the system that cradles them,
consoles their weary minds, and supports their soiled heads
(after) fits of pointing crooked fingers, singing to deaf ears
and sharing limp objections for their every single peer
redundant, shameless fronts vulgar trends as the cornerstone
playing on the every emotion you withhold
the master builders lay foundations of deities
and build up skyscrapers to suppress our wills to see
rising smoke fabricates a pyramid with the eye atop
like they're trying to shoulder up to some attainable god

shoulder up to some attainable kindergarten portrait of a god

when it's for a paycheck that you so savagely scrape and claw
when regression's drum beats desperately for a new façade
criminal stagnation starving for a marketing gimmick
you condemn the world and you don't even fucking see it
we're all doomed when the revolution is just a front
I see the sky opening up like we're being judged

Season of Disappointment

Alex Egan

This autumn
meant another moving day,
another apartment to call
home.
the first candle-free cake
demanding adulthood,
because twenty is too many.
This was when reality set in
the form of overpriced textbooks
the flat forgotten space on
the rocks by the Hudson
and lonely leaf piles on the side of
unfamiliar sidewalks
you always said were to blame.
This season was a slow dive
with no splash
the director's wrong decision
to make everything good until the end
one egg broken
out of twelve
a single glove
an uncarved pumpkin
the cigarettes in my mother's purse.
the elusive word
the white page
the poem that wouldn't appear
a playground in the rain
divorce papers
and that look, that one, on her face.
Now
a bag of spiced tea
settling tepid,
resigned to the bottom
of a full, cold
cup
a misinformed weatherman
still promising spring,
an empty waiting room
and no applause
the last, yellow leaf.
This autumn
was the first one without
you in it.

After-Shave

Patrick Morgan

Scuba bubble
life preserver
omnipotently diving
in the grassy sea
burly urchins
dare to prick
to prattle-pop
my bubbledream,
As silky seaweeds
kiss my toes,
the looming water breaks below,
And I can see my fate.

The after-shave
of tripped-up
lives,
creates anew
the shambled screams,
as crumpled lives
implode on dreams,
and sunshine days
do turn to rain.

Wishing wasps
would
sting my sin,
and end
this Dada dream,
as I sit
on a red-brick wall,
waiting for my train.

Patience, grass
don't grow
too fast,
for dreams are
ripened
at a time.

Resume
Nathan Corrigan

GypCo, a rapidly-growing international manufacturer and distributor of industrial chemical solvents, seeks 3rd shift Warehouse Custodians for their distribution center in Mt. Morris, NY. Excellent pay and benefits, up to \$7.50 per hour (based on experience). Applicants must be able to perform general labor and tasks such as sweeping & cleaning with strong attention to detail, process trash removal with a compactor, and operate a floor scrubber and other equipment.

To whom it may concern:

I recently came across your ad in the Short Tract Gazette, and I must say I found it to be quite an enticing offer. Needless to say, I am quite interested in the position you mentioned. I have never been able to hold a steady job, and the janitorial position at GypCo appears to be the perfect opportunity to prove myself able to do so. Of course, I am certain that you are willing to hire only the most qualified candidates, so I hope that I can prove to you that no other person can do this job as effectively as I can.

While I have never worked as a janitor per se, I do clean out my trailer from time to time. This has given me years of experience, and I find that I have become quite adept at scrubbing the crud out of the bathtub and scraping up the burnt taco meat that builds up on the stovetop. I also wrap a wet rag around the end of a stick and clean the cobwebs out of the corners whenever the spiders start to get out of control. However, I generally tend to be rather tolerant of spiders and other such critters, being as how they're cute and don't really hurt anybody. However, if you disapprove of spiders taking up residence in your warehouse, I have no qualms with removing the little buggers if that is what must be done.

I have had numerous other experiences relating to the cleaning of various places and objects. Once, while trying to paint my truck chartreuse, I spilled the better part of the whole can of paint into the window of the vehicle. I spent the next several hours scrubbing and cleaning every drop of paint out of the cab, except for the seats, because the paint had already dried by the time I got to them, so I decided to just paint the seats chartreuse and be done with it. By the time I was done, that truck looked absolutely beautiful, but unfortunately I drove it into a telephone pole while on my way to work last year, and it hasn't run since. But that's beside the point. The point is that I didn't rest until the job was done, and I strongly believe this to be one of the chief characteristics of a good janitor.

Of course, you're probably more interested in interior cleaning experience. Well, several weeks ago, I came home from throwing a few back with the boys in the bar at about two in the afternoon. I may have had a few too many, and I was feeling a little tipsy. By the time I got inside, tipsy had turned into queasy, and I vomited all over the kitchen table and the front of my refrigerator. I'm not proud of this, but what I *am* proud of is the fact that I got out a sponge, some ammonia, and a bag of that sawdust stuff that you're supposed to throw on puke to keep it from smelling, and I cleaned that whole mess up, even though I could hardly see straight. This is precisely the kind of dedication and perseverance that I would bring to this job, and I vow to you that I will never shirk a task simply because I happen to be drunk.

You mentioned in your ad that I should be able to process trash with something called a "compactor." I'm not exactly sure what this is, but I assume that it is similar to a garbage disposal. I don't have a garbage disposal, but there used to be one in my mom's mobile home, and I always very much enjoyed grinding stuff up in it, so I should be a natural when it comes to the compactor.

The ad also stated that employees should be able to operate a floor scrubber. By "floor scrubber," I can only suppose that you mean a mop. I've never operated a mop before, but I did use a broom once, and I am certain that these two devices work in much the same manner since they are quite similar in appearance. Barring some unforeseen development, I should become proficient in using the mop in no time.

I greatly appreciate your taking the time to consider me for this position. I'm sure your offices must be flooding with letters much like mine, and if you are still not sure why you should hire me and not another of the many candidates, I can only say that I am very dedicated to my work. While some might be satisfied to simply clean the floors and leave, I will throw my back into it, use a little elbow grease, and go the extra mile to make sure the job is done right. When I am done, you will be able to eat a four-course meal off of your warehouse floors, although I can assure you that I will never do this, at least not while I am on the clock.

Sincerely,
Nathan Corrigan

P.S. If you would like references, I'm sure my former employers at the Trading Post and the Short Tract Mustard factory would be more than happy to provide them.



Thomas Wilder

Suffer in Silence
Nicole Schwartz

Standing silently within the crowd at Penn Station
he looks to the left,
then down,
takes out his phone
and starts pressing buttons,
pretending
to look for something.

I listen to the people
laughing behind me,
then look at the couple to my right,
as they sloppily express
their drunken state,
kissing and sliding their hands up and down each
other's bodies,
so fervently as if each touch would bring them one
step closer to a warm bed.

He starts playing Tetris on his cell.
I look at my watch,
and notice we are more distant
than time could ever account for.

I remember when we used to walk in the
city streets for endless hours.
We would miss the train purposely
just to stay awake longer together.
Liberation filled us up,
and the cool winds directed us.
Our zeal was as bright as the
cities' lights,
where daytime never seemed
to fade away.
We playfully kissed and held each other tightly,
like the couple to my right.

Momentarily picking up his head,
He asks, "you okay?"
I reply in a high toned, "yeah, fine,"
hoping he will see through
the alarmed phoniness.
But he looks away
quicker than the rush of feet
that flee once the train has arrived.

As he pulls his phone back out of his pocket,
his loose change drops to his brown shoes.
He picks up the two dimes,
passes over the penny,
and then picks up three quarters.

"You missed the penny," I tell him.
"Yeah, I know."
"Are you going to pick it up?"
"Nah, it's only a penny."

I stare at the lone penny,
dull and worthless as it may seem,
laying lifelessly on the soot covered floor,
waiting to be stepped on.
I realize that the chills I felt all night
were from the cold dirt that layered the tiles,
and the aches that bothered me
were his hard soles.

The train arrives on time
and the crowd rushes like a school of fish
towards the same destination.
He joins them,
carelessly stepping on the penny
as he swims away.

Shoved by a man's broad shoulders,
I smell the cigarette smoke plastered to his coat,
and toppled by a group of drunken kids,
I watch as they pass,
and notice how the penny is
kicked around,
unnoticed,
and forced to taste the crumbs of dirt
from beneath the crevices.

He comes back telling me to hurry,
and asks me "What's wrong?"
I lie and say "nothing"
because I know he's not listening,
but instead visioning which seats will be left for us.

I begin to walk towards him,
all the while keeping my eye on the miniscule
penny,
until I pass it,
and helplessly choose
to suffer in silence.

Rusty (L32)
Avery Karavitz

...yellowed fingers...
fondle one another with
frantic synchronicity
freed of that married scent,
the familiar, the blood
of a thousand wounds bleached
like ancient runes transcribed...
casual crumpling confessed
the bed remains unmade...
...a scent of comfort to replace
your musky smell...
...thunder on the mountain...
--crotch over waist--
(a thin transparent wall that shatters when we
laugh)
I am naked in the kitchen

(a useless book)

scribbling some shorthand
for those hands--used
to grip my (imperfections)
late at night.
Smell like old tobacco.
And masculine laughter.
It's 11:34.

Once Inside
Lisa Parisio

Once inside and out of her wet clothes
she washed off the cum
already crusted in thin patches on her skin
because they hadn't offered to drive her home,
(in one's father's grey-blue Plymouth)
until she slept it off.
Then,
she crumpled neat
like blinds
into the space between the bathtub and the toilet,
wondering only
how she would ever find a way
to throw herself up.

The Media Controls Your Emotions

Nick Friedman

The façade has been painted so many times that the mortar fill between bricks is nearly unidentifiable, and as each layer chips or peels away, so is revealed another color in the building's awkward rainbow. The latest job is a hasty wash of pine green—a thick, globular pastiche of a pastoral virginity long since raped by steel.

I stand for a minute on the building's east side, leaning with my hands on the cool iron rail that bars entrance to a subterranean stairwell. The morning sun has unfurled a few nascent beams down the easterly gridwork of streets, and I imagine that it must be well past eight o'clock (skyscrapers having kept the city sun at bay for an extra hour or so). With punctual perfunction, the streets come alive and showcase the Monday morning misfit parade—old Italian women perusing warm pastries; shopkeepers adjusting crimped yellow awnings; deer-eyed businessmen retying Friday's tie, checking their starched white collars for lipstick while scampering to their cars and rehearsing the out-of-town business routine.

—*How was Chicago, Honey?*

—*Great. Sold two hundred units.*

Turning back to the stark green wall, I notice the sun beginning to ooze its glow down the stairwell. And there, criss-crossed by the shadows of iron bars: a postmodern maxim scribbled in silver marker.

The media controls your emotions. Kill yourself.

Over this I brood at considerable length, scrupulously scanning the wall for evidence that the vandal might have been bold enough to set the first example. No such evidence presents itself—no gun, no splatter, no bottles of gin and valium, no noose dangling from the railing, and—to be quite certain—no corpse.

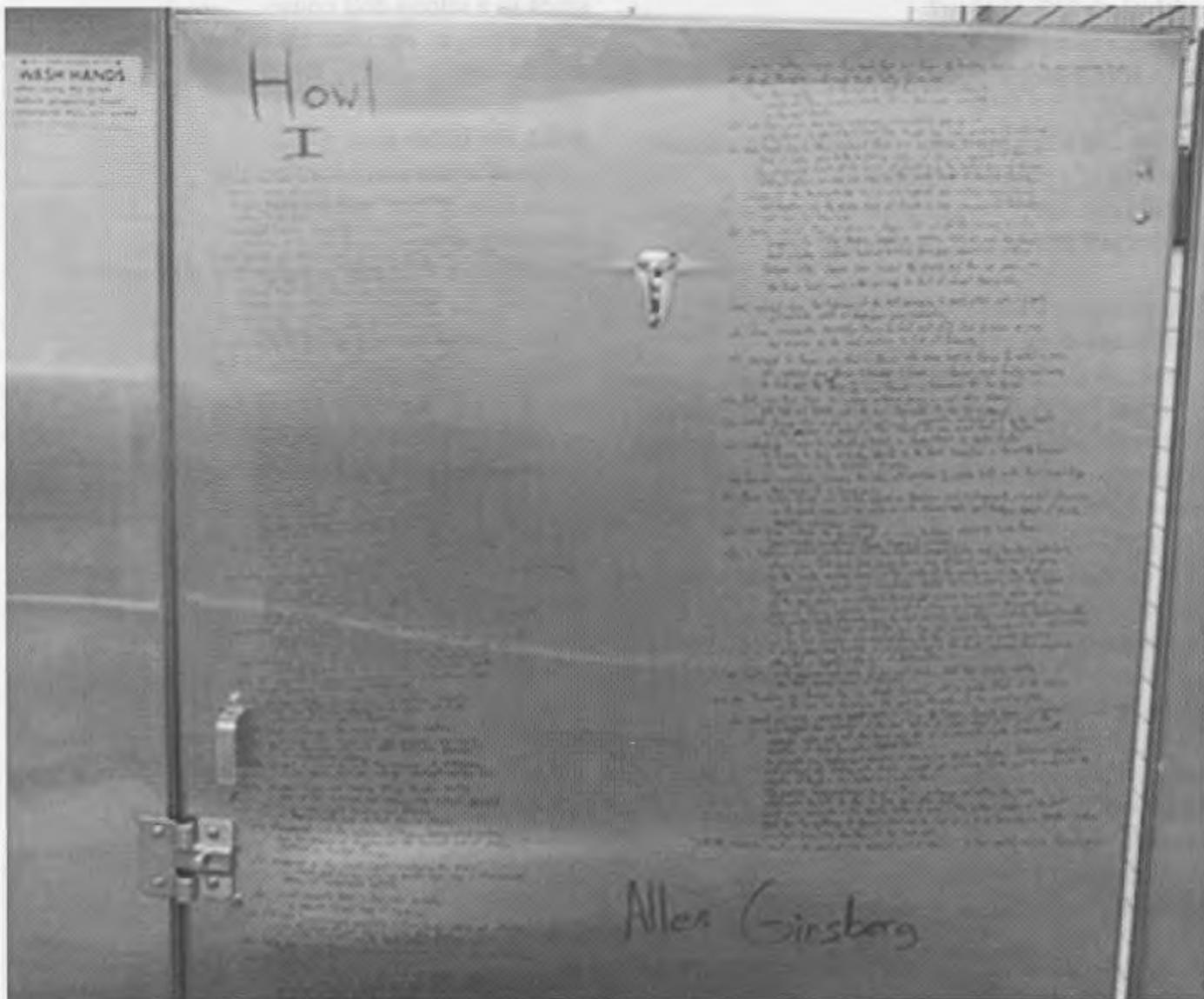
Only slightly disappointed, I divert my attention elsewhere. The viscera of the city are now pulsing wildly, tumescent with the acrid blood of consumerism. To the north, Interstate-81 busily funnels a miscellany of vehicles with peristaltic syncopation, signaling the city's diurnal digestion of life. Men sit crouched behind steering wheels, Styrofoam cups of coffee pressed delicately between their thighs (precariously close, mind you, to unleashing Vesuvian wrath on their pricks). They curse one another for the inevitable sloth of traffic and grind their teeth in unison as the Bank's clock moves ever closer to striking nine.

But with the relative comfort of a Keatsian voyeur, I quietly retire to a bench as an April breeze draws wisps of steam from my coffee mug. The State calls this weekday loafing "unemployment," but from a writer's vantage, I am wont to call it research instead. And here, sitting on a bench whose iron struts abrade a few, sad, last wooden planks beneath my weight, I am very much employed. By life...perhaps even joy. *I can see what flowers are at my feet.*

But for want of material, I eventually wander to a newsstand. The vendor peers at me, notes my curious dress, and—with what seems to be great effort—contorts his chestnut face into the semblance of a grin. The headline reads "Twenty-Nine Dead After Car Bomb Explodes in Palestine" with seventy-two-point Times New Roman indifference, and I am little moved myself. I snatch a copy from the stand, drop a few coins onto the pink leather of the vendor's palm, and move on. The urban bustle is peaking now, and the streets are a dull collage of business suits, save my grey sweatshirt and plaid pajama bottoms.

Again, after a moment's ambling, I find myself contemplating the green façade and its

unforgiving advice. I decide to make the stairwell an offering of my newly purchased paper—out of peace or pagan foolishness, I'm not certain. The grey pages inflate and flutter downward as wings of a thousand dead moths, settling finally in the stairwell's fetid stew of urine and cigarette clips. *Now more than ever seems it rich to live.*



James Herenda

Pickup Line

James Heredia

I'll never fully comprehend
why some men refer to their new cars
as babies—
especially if they leave them behind.
Why they give them names
why then, when they get drunk and
destroy it, they beg forgiveness,
and then try not to be seen around town
with their latest infant?
At this age my car is akin to a sibling
who at this moment sits parked thirty feet from this
bar stool,
where I'm stitching these thoughts into the early
patterns of a patch-worked quilt
I will later cover myself with when I once again
do not fall asleep next to anyone.

My thoughts travel from the parking lot into the
bar, to meet me at it,
the doors ajar but still unwelcoming.
This bar has too many shadows, as if the ghost of
the previous building has possessed the electrical
sockets to display a more weathered design,
the way only years of spilled six-dollar beers and
disappointment weave into a floorboard.
She catches my attention in the way she has chosen
to occupy a shadow,
sits wilting, skirt hovering threateningly above her
knees, over her uncomfortable bar stool she has
already forgotten the feeling of.
I place myself discreetly beside her and
order a virgin martini,
she looks at me like she would the
bastard child of pity and disdain,
on a bad day, purses her lips
like she's concealing a weapon behind them:

What are you saving yourself for?

Entertainment is all I can offer her now,
as she regards me with the caution
of a newborn hunter
uncertain of the predator and the prey.
I breathe back

*Not saving myself for anything,
haven't been for two years,
I'm simply polishing off the varnish
in case someone wants to entertain themselves with
me for a while.*

We mold ourselves
into a twisted Barbie and Ken,
stuck in a saloon doll house
both trying to prematurely offset
middle-age
with impulsiveness,
and I, the bitter wise man,
resigned moderately comfortably
to the idea of not "getting any"
for a long time.
Nonetheless, I finally lay out my pick up line:

*Would you hold it against me
if I told you that your body
wasn't worth the abuse
an endless number of 'men' inflicted
when they told you it was amazing,
if I said
you should have held it against them
then,
instead of against yourself
now,
if I said
the curve of your hips
framed in his nameless abrasive hands
will never be worth the tepid crater he'll
leave in the mattress at dawn?*

She does her best to stifle a nod.
looking like she's left a bit of herself
in the glasses, backwashed, before her
she doesn't look sick,
just
tired
and very bored.
I ask her about it but
she was never good at definite answers,
I can tell,
and so I clumsily acknowledge the direction of this

conversation
and tell her how much I'd enjoy taking her home tonight
locking joints
and making love to the very *idea* of her,
but it wouldn't be fair.

And though it's been a long time
since I've ventured near the outskirts
of that ghost town called Intimacy
and though I'd love to have breakfast with her,
I would not do so as an afterthought
to the hastily arranged crescendo
of distant, unsatisfying sex.
I cannot help but feel that she's reached out
to far, far too many princes
who were in the wrong kingdom,
in the wrong century,
and that maybe these faded jeans and black hoodie
are reading as armor right now,
and so I stop her, tell her,
with all the sincerity I can exhale,
that I'd be glad to taker her home,
drop her off
pick her up the next morning
take her back to this bar stool
re-enact this scene with the
three-day stubble that the alcohol
is undoubtedly blurring out,
and seeing if she's still interested
in striking up a conversation.

I'll never fully comprehend
why men refer to new women
as babies
especially if they leave them behind.



Hogan Webb

Dead Roses

Nate Clark

I collect dead roses. I don't know of anybody else who does it, and that's a real shame, it's an excellent hobby. But on the other hand, it means I get to pick out the best roses with no competition.

I'm often asked why I don't collect live roses, and my response is this; live roses would be too much of a headache. You have to have the right kind of food, tend to them, make sure they're healthy, it's just too much of a pain. Also, there's just something about the dead ones that really gets me. They're a whole different kind of beautiful.

In order to properly collect dead roses, you need a fairly large place to store them. I use my cellar. The cellar has a smell that mixes must and spices, with a touch of mold. I have all of my roses on display down there. The nicest ones hang from the walls and ceiling, while the lesser ones are piled in the corners.

One of the most important aspects of collecting dead roses is how you handle them. You have to be gentle, you really do. If you grab a rose too hard or pull it out of the ground too fast you can cause some serious damage. Some of the older ones will crumble right there in your hands, while others will pop open and stain your clothes.

My collection has gotten quite large, but a good collector is always looking to expand. I actually have me eye on a new rose right now. I read about the whole thing in the newspaper yesterday. Emmerich. Rose Emmerich, that is, well, *was* her name. She died in a car accident on the thruway. Her legs were severed and her stomach spilled out over the steering wheel. It was quite gruesome. She'll be buried in the Moore Memorial Park Thursday morning. I'll go get her Saturday night.



Megan Rose Tesra

Opus

Not Just Yet
Julie Bojanowski

She said horse chestnuts smell like unicorns
when you put them on the fire to burn.
And you believe her, despite she's five,

and has yet to learn that it's just a matter of
amalgamations and dissolutions, found easily
within the right sort of books. And you tell her so,

as she twirls a toe in the much on the pond
and twitters about ducks and fishing hooks.
She says that the sky, to a fish, doesn't look

like the sky. More like a ceiling with cars
driving by when bedtime comes around.
And when she's back up dangling from the

tree, she tells you you're a Booger Eater and
you believe her, because burning horse chestnuts
don't smell like anything you know of yet.



Brady Hills

Building a House

Kevin Cunningham

Groaning and shuddering over every pothole, I was not sure that my Honda would be able to navigate the newly cleared road without damage to the suspension. Every rainstorm made the road worse; even then I could see the brown, zigzagging currents carrying the steep gradient's sediment downhill to the Hudson River. Fortunately, my car managed to survive the trip unscathed, save for some unsightly splatters of mud. Grabbing my lunch box and tool belt, I walked over to the worksite. My coworkers were already climbing over the frame of the house, hammers swinging and circular saws screaming in the discordant rhythm of construction. A maze of right angles upon right angles, the framed house glistened in the rain like a M.C. Escher drawing brought to three-dimensional existence.

"Give me a hand, Richie!" My supervisor yelled from atop some scaffolding. I monkied up there, minding my balance on the wet pipe metal. Unlike many of my other coworkers, I liked my boss Ron. While they begrudged him his rapid ascent of the company ladder, I respected him, though he might be the most lascivious individual I've ever met. Nothing is more awkward than driving with Ron; he seems compelled to comment on every woman pedestrian despite my uncomfortable responses of "Um, she can't be more than 16, Ron." Despite this, he had been kind to me when I first came to work one month ago. Ron had initiated me with the guys, bestowing upon me the nickname of Richie in honor of the similarities in appearance and name between myself and wholesome, square Richie Cunningham from *Happy Days*.

The sun wheeled over head, bringing warmth and visibility to the cool June morning. The framing was to be completed today, and everyone moved in a frenetic whirlwind of measuring, cutting, and hammering. The construction site has its own odd rhythm: the regular clanks keep the beat for the melody of whirling power tools and profane vocals when a mistake is found. Running 2X4's between the cut man and the framers, I could almost lose myself in the sounds of construction.

Days passing, the house grew more defined before watchful company eyes. Removing it from nature and her elements, we sheathed the house in plywood during a day of nailgun staccato that unnerved me. We often talked about the future homeowners that would live within this 5/8" wood barrier. The husband was an investment banker at Goldman & Sachs. His wife, some said, had been an Olympic gymnast in her youth. As the house became more distinct, I used to walk its bare floors imagining what life would be like in this 13,000 sq.ft. vacation home. Imagine, I would say to my coworkers, how someone can make this much money by spending other people's money! Doesn't it seem unfair that we have to grunt and schlep for a mere fraction of what these people make? After one of these rants, one of the plumbers, laughing, asked "Were you born fucking yesterday, kid?"

July found me roofing. During these unbearably hot days, I worked with a young Hispanic man named Angel. Strong in the flabby way of those who work rather than exercise, Angel would laugh as I carried the bundles of shingles with gritted teeth and quivering arms. Beginning work at 6 when the sun rose, we threw down shingles and nailed them with mechanical efficiency before the heat could melt them in our hands. Bare-chested and lined with filthy stone and tar, I felt like one of those old sailors shoveling coal into a ship's furnace until he collapsed. Angel and I worked well together: he knew about as much English as I knew Spanish so we communicated using our own pidgin.

"Joder, qué calor! Tenemos qué finish this damn roof hoy, Richie." He might say after a particularly short lunch break. Finally, the roof was finished, with shiny copper gutters that reflected the summer sun with an incredible brightness.

During lunch, we would sit outside on the unfinished mahogany verandah overlooking the future pool. It was customary for every man to sit far apart from the next, as if ignoring one's coworkers in order to enjoy the sight of the giant barges slowly trawling the shimmering Hudson. Still, my coworkers chatted, mostly about the progress of the job and company politics. Usually, I was asked what I had for lunch. Whether it was cous cous, cold pesto pasta, or a hummus wrap, the lack of meat

always elicited smirks. Even though they patiently listened to (if not agreed with) my case for animal rights, my lunch made a humorous comparison to the usual fare of bologna or ham. I often plugged my boss for information about the construction process during lunch. How was the 40ft high Great Room framed?(steel I-beams) Where the does the water from the well come from?(The water table) Lunches, marked by cool shade, blaring foghorns, and quiet chatter, always passed too quickly.

The house gradually took on its final outward appearance; windows, doors, siding, and porches gave it a feeling of inhabitation. Inside, we began the tedious process of finish work. Painters came to the worksite daily, bringing with them the acrid fumes of varnish and polyurethane. The rhythm of the house changed: instead of the loud, throbbing beats of framing, we now worked to a whining melody of buzzing electric screw guns and hissing shopvacs. Radios were brought inside, and competing stations waged a war of the airwaves blasting, depending on the combatants, country western or classic rock. Maintaining my neutrality, I listened to my iPod while I hurried about cleaning. Slowly, the work of installing cabinets, flooring, doors, and tilework progressed.

During these final weeks, I worked closely with one of the senior carpenters, a man named Bo. Short with scraggly dyed-black hair, Bo had been at the company for 20 years but had yet to achieve a supervisory position. Behind his back, we called him “the broken record”:he ran a constant-and looped-monologue about his recent divorce and/or quitting smoking. He was prone to minutes long passages like

“And then that bitch called me into her lawyer’s office on my birthday! I’ll tell you what, I’m going to have my lawyer bill her for all the cat food I’ve bought for the cats she doesn’t even take care of!” The best response, as my coworkers advised, was to not say anything and, above all, give no sign of encouragement.

With the first days of August, I began to think about going back to college. My coworkers initiated this mindset with jokes about the parties, women, and easy lifestyle that they imagined awaited me. On a particularly beautiful August day, the kind when you can feel the first stirrings of a cool, autumn breeze, I hiked down to the cliff overlooking the Hudson. A parent’s nightmare, the cliff was unfenced, constantly eroding in giant, muddy chunks, and about fifty feet above the breaking rocks below. On the treacherous path down to the cliff, I found one of my coworkers, a carpenter by the name of Wally, sitting on a tree stump enjoying his lunch and a joint. We chatted, exchanging the typical workplace banter heard at every job. *Nice day today. Stairwell seems to be going pretty fast. Bo needs to shut up and get back to work.* I explained how I couldn’t wait for Friday, payday and the beginning of the weekend. Wally, laughing, took a drag and asked me “what the fuck do you care? You’re out of here soon, man.” I continued my stroll down to the cliff, hurrying because the window sashes had to be finished before the painters came in the morning.

Bedtime Lullaby

Dana LePage

The first night

Another late night relentless attempt at sleep,
tears huddled in the bottom corners of my eyelids,
dusted hastily away
so that no one notices my lonely disguise.
This is my first attempt at poetry on this topic at hand:
I could try for your heart (again)
but it would be a wasted attempt at selfless love.
There are no quotes I could scribble on cd sleeves
or leather bound notepads,
attempting to be artistic;
(tucked in the back corner of a coffee shop)
to reach you tonight.
My mug is always filled with something
unromantic and immature,
and caffeine always had a bitter hint of assumed
intellect
that I could never handle.

When I wake up in the dark
there's a combination of words on my tongue
but when I pick up the phone to tell you,
it's always an empty dial tone and not your voice
that whispers back under quilted sheets and cloudy
skies.

The second night

So when I ask you a question,
from now on maybe lying would be more appropriate.
Your words flow so easily in a low and quiet tone.
I press the phone to my ear just in time to make out,
"I would do anything for you."
So far keeping it in has been hard enough,
but now it's only a non existent memory
threatening to breakaway.
It feels like something's just begun
even though days have passed
and the sunrise looks so beautiful
without your figure in it.

I wake up in the night
and I can't remember what day it is
or why it's only the imprint of your body
that is beside me in the dark.

The third night

The night sits outside and waits for your car to
pull up outside my window.
But even by starlight I couldn't find your eyes
this time.

You're always asking me what it is that I want,
but you're not the only who doesn't wait for the
answer.

At night, my mind is miles and heartbeats away,
and before bed it wanders towards your voice in
my head,
only alarm clocks and cell phone beeps
bringing me back to morning.
It's just another night followed by another
sunset.

The fourth night

We say we're waiting for the right time,
but I'm here now and I'm ready.
Still there are no "wish you were here" postcards
in the mailbox,
or a half drunken bottle of wine on the kitchen
table.
A week old newspaper instead at the edge of the
bed,
more words on paper,
with more things to say,
repeat,
and echo.
(But never actually do).
Loneliness is more than poetic writing material;
it's in the bedroom,
in the passenger seat,
in the dark.
It's where I am tonight.

I can see what I'm leaving behind
as your voice fades through the telephone wire,
feeling my way through the dark to write down
these words.
But still I close the blinds and close my eyes
and I give in to the night.

The last night

This is the shortest memory.
My head hits the pillow and I reach for the phone,
but once again I am met with an empty dial tone.
I whisper "I do everything for you."
But as my fingers drop the phone
my words only echo off the static hum in my ear
and back into my own mind,
in my head,
on my pillow,
in the dark.



Steve Tulawiecki

Defense Mechanisms

Alex Egan

part one (me):

t.v. sets are questioning
and professors

why we won't let you in—
so "desensitized"

and do not need each other
any more.

but I want to know

how many times I must fail
before I am allowed to stop trying.

have you forgotten?

grade school should have taught you
how to love.

but I have started to enjoy

giving up

(insert correlative nicotine phase here)

it gets easier every time.

and I would rather love ideas
than realities

in a generation that doesn't believe in anything

(outside world domination in ad space)

and no one will admit to their addictions

or to the depth on which they depend on the society

they pretend to abhor—

but we can only escape on some kind of substance
for so long.

I am better off that I cannot handle any real human interaction

so I *can* chalk it all up to coincidence/

counteract faded philosophies of reason

(she said to create your own)

and why I am so easy to let go

is that I try but can't let

(anything)

go.

Any clock can tell me

now is (always) a bad time

stop trying to (make me) grow up!

I am trying to live.

you ask me—electronically—to

speak up

but my silence is the only way you can hear me (I am myself).

I can't prepare for your future

when I am stuck in someone else's past.

you ask me what I am protecting myself from,

and I say,

everything.

you.

part two (them):

some will shut down
uphold sex as love
nightmares of adultery
end every (good) night with black
push me (I was good for you!) away.
prescribed and illegal pills
and terrible love songs
cutting forearms and making bruises
self-destruction
plastic reconstruction
and they wonder why
we can't get up in the morning.
why she will drive to class to
avoid walking in the dark
(what are we all so afraid of?)
and why am I
(always)
so tired.
all the ways we can avoid real communication—
we take whatever we can get
or set unreachable standards
blame jealousy
and do not even bother with hope.
the way he is silenced
by her screams,
and the way I never knew you at all.
when will we start acknowledging our lifestyle choices
realize we have to do something to go anywhere
take risks to get anything done
take one small step on
the road to happiness
and stop running backwards
to pain.

Opus

part three (you):

don't even get me
started
on the way you move on
(before I even know
what's over)
and blame your past
for your present
use fears
as excuses
(well I am ready to stop
being afraid)
and give up the legitimate
for the easy.
I can't keep impressing you
with what I do
before you acknowledge
what I am.
when photographs start to replace our lives
and all the ways you avoid real communication
avoid that *I* could have been
real.
you lie.
you lied.
you hide.
and wear it proud like armor.
Thank God
I don't remember how to love
(anything but fiction heroes).
And please blame *me*
for being hurt this way.
If I cannot have your honesty,
I would *prefer*
your silence.

Heg Vasey

I'm becoming sympathetic to houses as they breathe in books and movies and my life and Nabokov says "This is yours" and Beckett says "I would have gladly died in that house" and I taped both above my bed so when I try to fall asleep I can reread them and I underline those train cars of connected thoughts and when I drive I pick out favorite houses; the minty house off the highway on the I90 hill, the strawberry house where 96 begins to bend, the graveyard debilitated heap that lies far past on 89 with half buses and tin can rusty cars and I think about the family that lives there and at first its eerie funny like the scary house in the Texas Chain Saw Massacre but then its sick and I want to puke because maybe when I stare at the broken teeth windows and melted smile of a doorway there is someone who looks back at me that I can't see, someone sinking in the staircase along with the carpet that no longer has hook yarn just plastic weaving and dirt and weeds, memories from before the house was infected- why don't they leave I think but I know because before I moved I used to talk to the house and tell it I would be okay without it and on the walls where my mom couldn't see I'd write "dear house I love you" and leave the date and time because I have been forced to leave walls that watched me too many times or sinks that have swallowed my toothpaste, my warm soda pop, my favorite ring, yes I was married to that house and when we moved I said "dolly you don't have to leave your house because its traveling with us in a box keeper but my house is leaving" and I was jealous of her tucked in her blanket house. If you are in a state of decay than the house is your snow globe and when you shake it music plays and pieces of wallpaper float suspended in the air and I couldn't see the wallpaper snowflakes when I drove by the dying house on 89 but I can touch the linoleum on the floor of my house remembering that I've lost people whose shoes still have scuff mark signatures embedded in their 2x2 square cubic pattern realities. I'm sympathetic to houses because they are the tombs for the bodies of the living where secrets stay like cigar smoke in the curtains and histories fester in the floor boards. I'm sympathetic because my house is lost. that was mine. "creamy house in the sunshine beyond" .

Situational Dichotomy

Margaret Wedge

I.

They say if a virgin graduates from this school
the bear in the fountain on main street will run away
The girl who's engaged to my brother
tells me the town will miss it after I'm gone

II.

When a male professor
talks to the students in-depth about circumcision
the male members of the class
are thinking about themselves.
The girls are not so lucky.

Before Sleep

Julie Bojanowski

in the dark something always resembles
what it could have been in the light.
after the light, shadows leave stains on the wall.

if criticism wore shoes, they would
have superb traction but fraying laces.

press glass window cold
red leaf falls snow in habit
winter approaches

when I got to sleep with wet hair I
always dream of the reasons mankind
has for rushing.
if it is dry, I wake hungry.

the orange maple strips out of habit
not
toward a trophy or a smile
from
men kayaking and leaning into eddies
which
will flip him if he's not attentive

I overheard my brother ask my father what his
X-Men power would be if he could have one and he said
the power to undress women with his
mind and I stood, thinking of the time
i have spent with boys.

--

he told her she was born of the rain, but then
she thought perhaps she was born of
laughter, and now she's not so sure.

my other goes to pilates on Tuesdays,
annoys hell out of my sister, and used
to swallow her roaches for the Revolution.

Experimental Fiction Story #1

J.T. Andrews

The duck flew to the typewriter in order to write its life story. The duck realized that it didn't have much to write about, so its life story turned out to be a blank page with its signature on the bottom. The duck, feeling that its life was wasted by just eating stale bread thrown by the people that sit, decided to go out on adventures into the wild jungle. It wouldn't come back until it received a sign from the heavens, which the duck knew would be a big vacuum cleaner descending from the skies on a Tuesday. The duck left the hut in which it had lived the past few months without paying any kind of rent, to the great dismay of its cactus landlord.

The teapot and the Tupperware dish were engaged in a highly political conversation about the current war between the Christmas ornaments and the silverware. The teapot favored the free trade system of the Christmas ornaments because it felt that free trade was necessary for a free society. The Tupperware dish, who had always been in cahoots with the silverware, felt that there should be a system of equality, like the system that the silverware had. The silverware had a system where everybody was alike in function, there was no class distinction since they were all made of the same materials and had the same job at heart. The teapot and the Tupperware dish argued and argued and decided that the only way the war between the Christmas ornaments and the silverware would come to an end was when a giant vacuum cleaner descended from the skies on a Tuesday.

The banana lay in bed, its peel lying in a heap on the floor. The cucumber opened the door and walked into the room. The banana said "hello" in its sexy voice. "Dear, I'm really not in the mood tonight," said the cucumber. "Why baby? Why?" "Dear, it's time you heard the truth... I'm cheating on you." "You're joking, right?" "I'm sorry, but this relationship will never work out... I've made my decision, I'm in love with somebody else." The banana put its peel back on and slapped the cucumber. "How could you? Dump me in the garbage and chase after some other fruit..." "You're the only fruit in my life, baby." "Oh my God... You're... leaving me... for a VEGETABLE?" "It's high time I came out of the closet and say in my own voice 'I LOVE OTHER VEGETABLES!'" "What vegetable have you been cheating on me with?" "...the celery." The banana gave a great wail of sorrow, grabbed its things and ran out into the rain of the city street, sobbing. In its shocked state of sadness, the banana hoped that it would find another vegetable that would not put it through the pain that it was feeling at that moment in the back alley of the cucumber's apartment. The banana searched and searched, but found no one. The banana then decided to attempt a way of celibacy for a while. Finally, after years of torturous celibacy, the banana decided to put an add in the newspaper stating that it would love, cherish, sleep with, and marry the one who dated it on the Tuesday when a big vacuum cleaner descends from the skies.

Out in the jungle, a single ant worker was forced to carry leaves back to its glorious colony. The ant stood up on its hind legs and shouted out "FUCK THIS," and left. After being self-exiled from the glorious colony, the ant found itself alone. Solitude was the best thing that this ant had ever experienced, but as time went on the ant felt the desire for a companion. For months on end there was no companion that was interested in the tiny, insignificant ant. The ant waited and waited, growing more and more desperate with every passing day. The ant then had an epiphany. The ant knew that it would get what it desired when a big vacuum cleaner descended from the skies.

There was a day when all clocks and calendars disappeared from the face of the earth. As the years went by without them, time lost all meaning, standing still. Then, one day, trumpets sounded a great flourish. A dull rumble, like that of a subwoofer, shook the world. A shadow passed over the land. The great vacuum cleaner had finally come. The moon smiled at the awesome sight. Onions shed tears while jubilation flourished amongst the dirty bras and panties of the world. The castes that separated the used and the unused condoms faded away. The teapot and the Tupperware dish looked up at the amazing sight and both said "I'll be damned..." The silverware and the Christmas ornaments stopped

fighting their war to look up and rejoice at the coming of the vacuum cleaner. The tomato kissed the banana as the banana took off its peel. The two climbed into bed together, proud to be happily and legally married fruit. The ant made friends with a very lonely penguin who had left the colony of other penguins out of spite for their snooty, upper-class collectivist ideals. The duck finished writing its three volume autobiography, and looked forward to writing its next book. The duck paid off all its debts to the cactus, and the cactus went out and celebrated the coming of the great vacuum cleaner by shedding its spines and roaming naked through the streets shouting "THIS IS FUCKING AWESOME!"

Suddenly there came a great sucking. The entire world was sucked into the great belly of the giant vacuum cleaner. It was Monday.



Alex Egan

everything in moderation except for you

Mallorie Rosenbluth

it's funny how when we stopped leaning
just on each other
we started leaning
just in general
and you started drinking
and i started smoking
because it seemed like the thing to do
a safer poison to wrap my lips around

the end of kisses/ or the beginning of cigarettes/ which came first, i can't remember

there are nights i see your eyes
at the bottom of the bootle
hear your voice
in the hiss of the can
see your disappointment
in the smoke i exhale
so i stub out parliament lights
because you felt better in my mouth
and try to close the distance
with a phone call

just because i'm thinking about you/ just because i'm eight beers in/ which came first, I can't remember

all i hear is ringing
because you're too drunk to answer
or not drunk enough
because you'll say things you don't mean
or do mean
and don't know which you'll regret more

to leave a call back number, press 5

its 2:22 AM
i am picturing you
covered in salt water
sand falling off your body
keeping time like an hourglass
let's run away where it's always
11:03
let me know you again
where your tan lines end

i am dreaming of you and me/ developing addictions to nicotine, the ocean, and each other/ which
comes
first, we won't remember

Night-Time Romance
Emily Brown

He sleeps.
The moon creeps lazily
across the cloud-
covered sky, illuminating
the Earth
in a putrid, pale glow.
He sleeps.
I don't. His head rests
on my unfeeling arm,
and his body lies
like a gift
within my legs.

I am jealous of his
sleep. Jealous because I
am lonely
and bored,
and jealous because
he sleeps
while I
cannot.
Lovely images,
Of fluffy snow-covered
ski slopes,
tumble
before
his obedient eyelids
while my own
behave like impudent
children, refusing to close.

I test the depth
of his slumber. I roll once,
twice, release breath
in a sigh, but still
he does not stir. I turn
away from him
to dangle one arm
and one leg
over the side
of the bed. I imagine
I am reclining in a rowboat
floating among the sharks and jellyfish
of the Atlantic. I caress
the clean blue
and when I
touch tongue to finger
taste salt.

When I finally accept my
evening fate, another sleepless night
my eyes
begin to blur, my mind settles.
I roll over once more,
rest my cheek on his back and let
the rocking rhythm of his
heart pull me away.
Meanwhile the moon shakes
her weary head,
and continues her slow
dance among the stars.

Last Riders

Kseniya Popa

I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest." Revelation 6:2

There are horses in the valley,
he said.
Wild, hot horses in the shadow of the valley.
Their sweat
eats away at the pasture's grass:
the acid burns through the earth
to the center of the heart of my enemy.
Their hooves shake the earth
and the earth buckles in waves
loosening the roof of the house of my enemy.
Their manes are fire and salt and thunder.
No man can look at them and not cry mercy.

Four riders were chosen
from the throng which gazed into the
valley, above the herd.
Four men-beast-angels stepped forward,
And they descended into the basin,
And they walked into the rumbling drove,
And there was silence in heaven...

The first chosen
wore hair the look and feel of the
wheat-silk
of the fertile valleys of Judea.
His eyes glowed as the azure cover
above the fertile fields and valleys of Judea.
And his lips were red, as red and rich as
the blood
of the many people of Judea.
And his name was Conquest.

The second
wore his locks as crimson and
long as the flames of a funeral pier.
And his eyes flashed like lightning bolts from the dark sky,
as the glint of foreign armor in the wasted fields of Judea.
And his arms were strong and bronzed
as the hearts and faces of the foreigners that
came and marched upon Judea.
And his name was Combat.

The third selected
was dark haired and

dark eyed,
even as the earth is dark and still
after a rain.
And in his mind he carried,
as a witness carries,
all the wrongs and rights and powers of Judea,
and of its neighbors, and of the world.
And his name was Prejudice.

And the fourth elected
was smoldering and pale
tall, lanky, long.
His glance *raised* the leaves from the old oaks of Judea
His perfume dried the grass in the broad fields of Judea
His heart-beat deafened the fish in the deep blue seas of Judea
-And the wild and domestic animals of its lands-
And his name was Death, and all trembled before him.

From the deafening herd in the shadow of the valley
four horsemen surfaced,
four men-beast-angels led four horses out of the shadow of the valley.
And four beasts were chosen
From the throng
Which gazed into the valley.
And one beast had the shape of a lion
And one beast held the shape of a calf
And one wore the face of a human
And one was an eagle in flight.

The Lion-beast stepped forth,
calling, "Come and see," to the First Chosen.
And the rider rose up out of the valley,
upon a stallion as pure
as the snows of the high mountains.
And to him the Lion entrusted
a bow, carved and gilded,
a crown, delicate and strong,
saying, "You come out as a victor,
and to be victorious."
And he was the first secret of the seals.

Then the Calf stepped out
To the lip of the valley
and called down into it,
"Come and see."
The second chosen rode
through the valley,
as a fire makes its way
through the orchards, upon

a red stallion,
To him the Calf granted a large sword,
heavy and blinding in its gaudiness,
and he was told:
“You can take the peace from the earth,
So that people slay each other.”
And he was the answer of the second seal.

Then the beast with the human face walked out,
And gazed across the fields and valleys of Judea,
And tallied up their worth, to know of it,
And called down to the dark rider, who rode a black horse,
“Go and see.” His voice was miserly.
And the third rider stood before him,
And a pair of balances were thrust up on him.
As he turned, a voice said from the crowd,
“A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny;
And see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
And he was of the third seal.

Then it was that the eagle cut across the sky, and darkened it
And raised a wind upon the earth which folded every grass and tree,
As he whispered the last rider out of the valley.
And Death rode out of the gully like a plague upon the land, and all made way for him.
And the Eagle spoke to him: “Go and see.”
And power was given to him, the rider upon a pale horse.
And he was to kill; with sword, hunger, sickness and wild beasts.
To be released by the fourth seal.

The four riders, sworn to brotherhood, rode the deserts and mountains.
Eons they rode, and yet no time at all.
All in their path was chaos and despair.
Nearing the land of Judea, the prosperous land upon the blue sea,
they begun their work. Many perished,
And many were brought to justice,
And there were many battles within that land,
And many victories were bathed in blood.
And there was silence in heaven.

Baking Love
Patrick Morgan

Love drops
on my shoulders,
glittering from a corner,
My leaf-lips
 catch its
 honey-dew drips,
Yellow-blue beads
 on my tongue,
 tickling my brain,
 filling me up,
Don't try to catch love,
 let it drip.

Scuttle-bug brain,
 joyfully galloping
to the violin sun,
A scuttle serenade,
 Shuffling bareness,
 Creating love,
The friction-love,
 Of music,
made flesh-to-flesh
together,
Our love-music
 fills the chamber walls,
belting out a chorus,
We make
 our own song,
by the love-violin tonight,
and it shall last forever,
for a song is divine.

In dark December
After the grass has lost
its gusto and collapsed,
when windows stop
opening, before icicles
penetrate the landscape,
it is the season of branches.

The maple, once again
discovering that red
doesn't flatter, donates
her fall wardrobe
to the wind, to the
hedgerow, to her less
fortunate comrades.
She unveils her bones,
Her whisky construction,
And she showcases her
secret flexibility, her
denial of wind.

The committed frost taxes
the leaves of the ginko,
setting off an avalanche
of fleshy yellow fans. In just
one day, the tentacles
below the ancient
waving foliage unwind
and stretch, grateful
for the chill of moisture.

The house of the willow,
hunched with age and
drowsy from rocking,
looses its paint slowly.
One chip on the ground
goes unnoticed, but, after
weeks of cunning decay,
the grain shows through
and then the shelter
shows through, until
the house is no longer
a house, but just space
in a field, questioning
how it came to be so old.

Shell
Abby Kraai

The eggshell cracked on the wooden countertop. She rolled the white orb around with her fingers until it was loose enough to peel. "So, I think it's great," she said, picking it up and rotating it in her hands. She always dreaded the beginning of the process—shoving her thumb up under jagged edges, flicking off tiny white flakes and pulling up the wrinkly skin. "Don't you think it's great?" The tips of her fingers would get sore and her knuckles would cramp. But she continued to peel and her fingers started to hurt.

He sat and looked at the counter, tracing the cracks between the boards of the butcher-block surface.

"I mean, you'll be close-by still. Four hours isn't even a day's trip." As she dropped the naked egg into the bowl, she watched him for a response.

"I know," he said, and looked briefly through the window and at the apple tree outside.

"And of course you'll make lots of new friends. You won't even miss us." Another egg cracked and she rolled it around.

"I know."

More white pieces fell from the egg and landed silently on the wood. "And of course you know Uncle Dan went there. He had a wonderful time, I'm sure you could talk to him about it."

"Mom, I know. It's fine." He got up and went to the fridge. "Do we have any more orange juice?" It sounded as if his lungs were caught in a vice, and he shuffled the contents of the fridge loudly.

"I don't think so. I think you finished it at breakfast."

More shoving and shifting came from the fridge, and he brought out the Brita pitcher. He pulled two glasses out of the dish-drainer, filled them with water, and returned the pitcher to the shelf. "Do you want mayonnaise?"

She finished stripping the last egg and paused as she ran her fingers over its cool, silky shape. "Sure." Dropping it into the bowl with the others, she picked up a fork. "Mayonnaise would be great." She squished the white balls against the sides until they became orange-yellow pulp.

He put the water and mayonnaise in front of her and went to the window. The apple tree looked pathetic, with its gnarled branches and black-speckled foliage. It wasn't even August and there was already a cluster of yellow leaves. There were never any good apples—always dwarfed and spotted and tasting like chalk. He remembered eating three of them once on a dare and getting diarrhea. The grass underneath the tree was greener than the rest of the lawn and there were a few dandelions growing by its roots. He took a drink of water.

"You could mow the lawn today if you want," she said, scooping the mayonnaise out with the egg-covered fork. Her husband hated when she did that, and every time she did, she hoped he wouldn't notice or say anything.

"Yeah," he said and took another sip of water. Dirty grass flecks were still stuck to the windowpane from the last time he'd mowed. "I'll do that in a little while." He turned back to face the island and watched her as she stirred. The fork clinked against the bowl and the mayonnaise and egg were starting to homogenize. He went to the fridge again. "You want me to get the celery out?" There was still a tang in his voice, and he knew how he sounded. "I can rinse it."

"Sounds good," she said, then was quiet. Chunks of mayonnaised egg came up through the tongs as she mixed. "I bet Julie'll miss you." She heard the faucet turn on as he began rinsing. "She won't realize how much she likes her big brother until he's gone."

The water sprayed out of the sink and onto his shirt. "Goddammit," he said, turning off the water and shaking the celery over the stainless steel.

She scooped out another fork-full of mayonnaise and plopped it in. "Careful, those celeries are like little gutters."

"I hate this sink," he said as he put the stalks in the dish-rack and reached for a cutting board and a chopping knife. He brought them over to the counter and wiped his hands on his shorts. "The celery's clean."

She was silent as she listened to the metal against the glass.

He put the celery on the cutting board and stood at the edge of the island. Beads of condensation ran down his water glass and made a ring on the wood. The streaky patterns in the humidity somehow repulsed him, made him wish it were winter. He wiped the sides of the glass and turned to face the window. All the leaves hung still onto the branches; if any apples grew at all this year, they'd be smaller and harder than usual.

She put down the fork and pushed up her sleeves. "Thanks for the water," she said and took a drink. The sweaty glass felt good on her eggshell fingers as she pushed the drips around the cylindrical surface. She took another drink and pressed her fingertips against the cold. A sparrow flew close to the window then veered and landed in the tree.



Brady Hills

Heg Vasey

We pulled his naked bony E.T. body out of the backseat of Emily's heavily fogged V.W. to the soundtrack of scandalous screams by accidental onlookers and back then everything was always beautiful in motion and my memories of that time are a carousel, with each horse that looks different but always there is music and laughter and movement and him, my high school playboy best friend center of attention who told me he loved me one day while walking a bag of trash out behind a rundown McDonalds off the thruway who I told I didn't love one day on a musty stale bread sort of a couch. but I did love him because he was the wild one of our friends, who jumped out of windows and asked us to push him in a shopping cart into garbage cans, who always had a new girl on his arm, who had giant keg parties lit by the electric blue Popsicle glow of his in ground pool, who made every new years better than the last because he was dramatic and irresponsible and wonderful. and he didn't have the sort of self awareness that makes people adult and decayed, he was the roman candle type or maybe more like a firecracker and I remember falling asleep to the sound of rubber hooves on pavement; mark having shower sex with Emily after our group of best friends drove 22 hours to South Carolina; but I didn't mind the sound of people having sex , I've never minded it because it's a simple sort of sound, it's the sound of people communicating . and I remember waking up out of a daze and half sleep to his phone call to tell me "guess what?" "you're getting married" I said in a cynical pillow talk sort of way and "no" he said, "I got married". Zam and I was crushed with the weight of everything we hadn't done, our greenhouse existence created by the density of our own energy, melted away into our nights throwing rocks off the emerald lit pier into our oil puddle lake Ontario. what about the trips we had planned to Vegas to Paris to the giant trampoline in my backyard, anywhere that let us pretend it was still those years; the high school ones or the college summers or any time that afforded us our ice cube innocence in healthy doses in my mom's blue kool-aid. he got married in October and when new years rolled around he said he'd be there, he promised he'd be there, and everyone clustered in living room constellations ; the old friends and the new friends , everyone together like a pot-luck dinner in front of the static television and the count down. and when the last number was spoken and the room spun and filled like that carousel with champagne and uncorked screams and midnight kisses I knew that mark wasn't coming. that he wouldn't ever be coming again. When the men in my life have all become husbands and fathers, who will remember the life we had before?

