Fall 1999

The Lantern Vol. 67, No. 1, Fall 1999

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Ursinus College

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Ursinus College

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Editor’s Note:

The Lantern would like to acknowledge and congratulate the prize-winners for this edition: C.H Edwards for the cover photograph, "In the Shadows,” Padcha Tuntha-obas for her “I write poetry,” and Monica Stahl for winning the prose prize with “Stumble.” Many thanks to our two judges Joel Chace (poetry) and Vincent Leskusky (prose) for making the difficult choices. We commend and thank all of those who submitted to The Lantern and encourage them to do so in the future.

My personal thanks to the entire staff for their hard work. I would also like to thank Dr. Jon Volkmer for his encouragement and advice. My special thanks to Corey Taylor for his enthusiasm, persistence, and many hours spent in the editing room.

To everybody, enjoy this issue of The Lantern and also visit our web page at http://webpages.ursinus.edu/lantern/

oana nechita
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### Poetry

I write poetry

so many poems start this way...

Mantra 99 for A. Joe

Indecision

last night

My Body Cut Off at the Back

Brittany Sestina

The Hearth

To Jane

Attention

chemistry

recombination

Buried

Going Home

Bound for Happiness

### Creative Non-Fiction

Stumble

Punk Rock

Ghost-Spray and a Slingshot
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“I write poetry” releases sounds, words along multilayered currents. Encountering this composition, one sees—even at a glance—the interplay of speakers laid out along stratae, so that what is marked resembles not only clock time but also geologic time; in one’s inner ear occur both channeling and overlapping. The language itself is simple, elemental, yet surprising. Most unexpected, however, is that the mathematical orchestration yields genuine emotion. The other poems in this issue offer significant pleasures. For its breadth, depth, music, and passion, “I write poetry” deserves special recognition.

Joel Chace (Poetry Judge)

Pathos is one of the most difficult effects for an author to achieve. Without sliding into melodrama, “Stumble” both depicts and evokes disillusionment, loss, grief, and confusion. Rather than offer a canned, cliched solution to the protagonist’s doubts, she approaches Tennessee Williams’ notion: “We are children in kindergarten, trying to spell God’s name with the wrong alphabet blocks.”

Vince Leskusky (Prose Judge)
### Theme

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"This story ends with me still rowing."
Anne Sexton, "Rowing,"
From The Awful Rowing Toward God

August 26, 1999...
Portobello mushroom sandwich...621, Rib Dip...102, Tuna Melt... 135, can't cry, can't cry, Vodka...821, can't cry, French Onion Soup...111, can't cry, can't cry. I'm the strong one.

I've never been to a morgue. It isn't like television—there is no ceremony. I watched as the chaplain cursed softly under his breath, impatiently pulling out metal drawers. There were five of us, huddled in a small room that smelled of sour antiseptics and cleaning fluid. Josh's mother held tightly on to her minister's hand, and his father stood off to the left, a clipboard clasped in his spindly fingers.

Earlier in the day, Josh had told me that he had been prepared for this. No, Aaron wasn't sick, but Josh had prepared himself for this the way that all children do over the years, when they lie in bed at night and wonder what would happen if Mommy died, if Daddy died, if sister or brother died. Josh was nothing if not reasonable, logical, practical. I'd seen this in the way that he carried a lint-brush in his glove compartment, in the way that he knew not to pick at scabs or dry skin, the way that he did his own laundry, measuring the detergent exactly and waiting patiently to add it until after the water had come bubbling to the top of the machine. He reasoned to himself that to see his 21-year-old brother dead had been something that he had figured out years before, in the way that he had figured out Algebra or Chemistry.

I looked for a second, long enough to see Aaron, a white plastic bag gathered around his shoulders like a blanket. Josh
caught his breath and pulled me out of the small room and into the elevator. I couldn’t see it, but I heard. I heard Josh’s mother break apart, screaming about baby blue eyes, beautiful eyes. I heard Josh’s father, and I could see him in my mind, standing apart, shoulders hunched over like a broken bridge, his face caught in his hands, quietly sobbing. Josh just held me, held me hard, a boy, a man, one foot taller than me, 120 pounds heavier than me, holding on to me as if I could carry him from a burning building, as if I could pick him up in my arms and take him away from the fire.

They all stepped out of the room, and the minister gathered us all into a circle, saying, “God, give us your strength and your courage. Surround us in Aaron’s spirit of joy and love…”

Manhattan…952, sweet potato fries…168, bowl of soup…101, can’t cry, can’t cry.

August 21, 1998…

“She’s a good girl, loves her mama. Loves Jesus, and America, too…”

It was my last night in Flemington. Josh, Aaron, and I were sitting around in the garage with a couple of guitars and a bottle of vodka. We sang Tom Petty, we sang Guns N’ Roses, and I, gloriously drunk, howled unabashedly like an alley cat.

I was the only one drinking. Josh and I had been dating for a couple of weeks and already he had seen me drunk and crying. Maybe if I had been in a better state of mind, I would have stopped to ask myself what I was doing, what kind of person I was trying to show him. Instead, I drank more, my stomach empty and rolling, eyes half-closed and face flushed.

I was going to cry again. I felt it pushing up through my stomach like vomit; disgusted, I tried to remember my rule. Never let them see you cry.

Aaron and Josh had put their guitars down, and Aaron was staring at the green book lying next to me.
“What is that?”
“Just my journal,” I answered, feeling those conflicting feelings of embarrassment and pride that always came when that question was asked.
“Can I take a look at it?” he asked, grabbing for the book before I could even respond.
“Yeah, but only read the last entry in there. That’s the one I like—the others suck.”
“I wake to the morning, surprised by the shortness of my breath. I thought—”
“Don’t read it out loud, you asshole!”
“that I was taking longer steps, but the stumble is there, there—”
“Aaron, cut it out!”
“like a mouth full of God, afraid to spill.”
“Aaron, can you please stop?” At this point, I was getting upset. He must have heard the panic in my voice, because he began to read to himself. Part of me didn’t want him to finish it, but I let him go, knowing Aaron. He was the instigator—he loved to cause anxiety, to embarrass you until you had to laugh or cry. Like a school-boy, he was forever tugging on your braids and snapping your training bra. And always, there was a twinkle in his eyes that said, Hey, I’m just joking, but how far can I push this?

When he finished the piece, he looked up at me. For a moment, I tried to crawl into the walls, expecting some stupid joke or some harsh comment following by laughter. You had to be careful with Aaron and his sense of humor. He was bouncy and fun, but he was a pull-my-finger type of guy. He would tell you to shut up, make fun of what you were wearing or how you spoke, and he would lunge at you like an attack dog if the mood struck him. Big, and sometimes mean, but it was how you knew that he cared about you.
“What is this about?”
I was kind of surprised by the curiosity in his voice.
Knowing Aaron, I questioned it for a split second before I responded. “I’m not really sure. I guess it’s about a lot of things—about going away, about fear and love. I woke up one morning at 5 o’clock to get ready for work, and the words were just there, in my head.” Hesitating for a minute, I tried to figure out what I wanted to say. “I think that my subconscious knows, but the rest of me only knows bits and pieces. Maybe that doesn’t make sense at all, but I can’t say it any other way.” I looked down, nibbling on my lower lip and picking at the cuticles on my fingers.

“It sounds like a teenage cry for religion,” he said, looking me in the eyes. He always looked you in the eye; he didn’t nibble at his lip, didn’t pick at his cuticles or bite his nails. He looked you squarely in the eyes.

“Religion is a part of it, but it’s more than that,” I responded, not even knowing if I was speaking the truth or not. My body had forgotten the vodka. “I don’t know. I guess it’s about leaving, going to school, when I don’t feel like I should be going anywhere.” I stopped, all of a sudden, feeling stupid and vulnerable. “It’s about knowing that all the good girls love Jesus, and America too. The good girls aren’t afraid, because they know where they’re going.”

“Right, right.” The words dripped from his lips like molasses, slow and deliberate as if he had so much more to say. For a moment, his laughter was caught behind the barrier of his teeth as he grinned, his cheeks round and flushed.

“You’ll be okay. I know this is hard, and scary, and all that shit, but it’s not like you’re dropping off the face of the earth,” he said, laughing. Aaron was always fearless. “You’ll see all of your friends again.”

“I know,” I said, feeling the tears well up, “it’s just hard. I don’t want to go. Do you ever stop and wonder why we do all the things we do? Why we decide that we need to leave everything we’ve ever known? I think about it a lot. Where am I really going?”
“Collegeville, PA,” he said, his voice seeming so solemn that I couldn’t help but laugh. “ Seriously, you’re only going to be a couple hours away. And you and Joshie,” he said, nodding towards his brother, “are good together. You’ll be fine.” He gave me a short hug. “Everyone leaves, Monica. When it’s time to bounce, you pick up and go.”

August 28, 1999...

Chicken club...123, cup of soup...666, Roast Beef and Horseradish sandwich...114, can’t cry, can’t cry.

The chant begins. I’m sitting in the back of the room, and Josh is hunched over in his chair, sobbing uncontrollably. I don’t cry. I think about work, instead. I think about waitressing at the hotel, about using the stupid computer to punch in orders. If I stop to think about Josh crying, I think that I may die a little. I don’t think about tears; I think about sandwiches and appetizers and soups and salads, and I’m trying my best to transport myself into something mindless and easy.

It is the kind of service you see on television, with that little 70’s kind of touch, that peace and love kind of thing. The Bible readings were short, and the rest of the service has been devoted to friends’ and family’s stories about Aaron. Two of Aaron’s ex-girlfriends have gotten up to speak, and I think to myself that there must be dozens of others seated randomly throughout the room. He always was a ladies’ man.

I think of stories that I could tell this audience. I think of the time that Josh and I slept over at Aaron’s house and he bought a case of Molson Gold and a couple of pizzas for the three of us. I think of the time that Aaron and I went out to lunch at the Spinning Wheel Diner while Josh was at work, how he introduced himself to the waitress and asked for her number while I picked at the soggy chicken fingers arranged on a withered piece of lettuce on my plate.

I think of Josh’s graduation dinner, when Aaron toasted him in the middle of a crowded restroom, when he asked the
waitress to take a picture of us, when he told Josh that he was so proud of him, and that he loved him so much. When we all sat there staring at our plates, knowing that we should be embarrassed by the scene he was making, but not really caring all that much about whether people pointed or stared, I could tell them that his apartment smelled like feet, that his toilet was the kind you couldn’t bear to sit on without lining it with toilet paper, that you wanted to go there anyway because his door was open to anyone, and that he always made you feel like you were the most important person he’d seen all day. I could tell them that Aaron was crying out for religion, and that he had found heroin instead—a man-made God when heaven was taking too damn long.

I could tell them a lot of things, but looking at his picture on the wall, I’m not so sure of anything anymore. All I know is that Aaron was a good friend, a good brother, and when good men die, you wonder. When wondering and thinking gets too painful, you shout, you rub bodies and hold hands and sing songs, because you can’t be certain of anything but the feel of skin and the sound of voices.

September 9, 1999...

1999. That was the summer that I waitressed at the Union Hotel. It was the summer that I played frisbee in Minebrook park, that I sat at Dunkin Donuts until 2 o’clock in the morning playing rummy. It was the summer that I first began to think seriously of marriage and finances, that I learned how to say goodbye to someone who wasn’t supposed to leave. It was the summer that I realized that the longer you searched, the harder the questions got. But to give up on the search—that was the hardest part. It was the summer that I first learned to pray.

We are just children. We buy cigarettes and beer, we get jobs and move out on our own, but God, we are just children trying on thoughts that don’t fit, and it’s hard to find you. Really
hard. I want something mindless, something easy.

Portabello mushroom sandwich...621, Rib Dip...102, can’t cry, Tuna Melt...135, I thought that I was taking longer steps, can’t cry, Vodka...821, French Onion Soup...111, can’t cry, because the stumble is there, there like a mouth full of God, afraid to spill.
so many poems start this way...

*C.H. Edwards*

decent idea
modicum of inspiration
one good line.
is that what life is like?
societal specialization
learn something from this
balance
another contradiction
practitioners of excess
oscillate
to the left
somewhere along the line this all lost meaning
sanity detests questions
hit that point
irreversible effect
it's your life
choices will have lasting and irreversible effects
you dream like an aborted fetus
words have sharp edges
+ sharper insides.

so many poems start this way.
Through eyes still heavy with the weight of sleep, I rolled over to look at the glowing red numbers of my alarm clock. 11:46 it read, and I smiled to myself as I rolled onto my back and stared blankly at my ceiling. It was early August and my last day of work was just yesterday, so I decided to celebrate my liberation from the bonds of employment by going to Long Beach Island. As I tore myself away from my comfortable bed, my ears were suddenly assaulted by unintelligible screaming, followed by what some people might call music. It could have only come from one place: my younger brother Christopher's room. He greeted me as he usually does as I wearily stumbled into his messy room.

“What the hell do you want?”

He was wearing blue board shorts with darker blue fuzzy flowers printed on them, and his favorite shirt: plain gray with “Coors Light, The Silver Bullet” written across the chest in red and blue. His short, dark brown hair was matted on the right side of his head and Chris was sporting his glasses, which he never does unless he has just woken up. The scraggily sideburns and chin fuzz created a stark contrast to his baby face and flawless complexion. The silver stud and green hoop earrings in his left ear reflected the pale light of his room.

“What are you listening to?” I asked.

“These are The Vandals. They’re punk rock, baby!”

“Yeah, yeah I know...Hey, what are you doing today? Do you still have summer school?”

“No you retard, I finished yesterday.”

“Did you pass geometry and English?”

“How the crank should I know you moron? I told you I finished yesterday!”

“Oh, whatever. Anyway, want to go to the beach?”

“Hell yeah fool! That's pretty punk rock. We can harass
some idiot tourists and pick up some hottie girls and bring them back here and...

If someone were to place Chris and me side by side, ninety-nine percent of people would say that there is no way we could be related. He already stands at six-foot-two, but he weighs only 150 pounds and has virtually no hair on his body. His skin is of a dark olive green hue and he wears a size fourteen sneaker. Mom and Dad just let him get two tattoos about a month ago: one of his sign, Libra, on his right shoulder and a red and black Ying-Yang on the back of his right calf. Christopher’s big brown eyes gleam with either intelligence or mischief, and it is difficult to tell if the former or the latter is in control.

“What is this crap we’re listening to?” he asked. The sky was blue and sunny as Chris and I drove over the Causeway Bridge.

“Pink Floyd” I said.
“How old are you, forty? Put in something good.”
“This is good, Chris. This is classic.”
“Yeah, and I like school.” He leaned over and took out Dark Side of the Moon and put in 40 Oz. to Freedom by Sublime.
“Dude, what are you doing?”
“Shut the crank up! Now this is good.” He turned up the volume. “This is classic punk rock!” Chris said, imitating me. I laughed.

My brother loves to give people the wrong idea about him. And not just certain people either: he would just as soon make a fool of himself in front of The Pope as his teachers or a random passerby. He is shockingly smart, but not in a bookish sense: it is very hard to best my brother in conversation about almost anything from politics to sports. But from the way Chris carries himself, one could never tell that was the case. Christopher’s attitude makes him equally appealing and repellant to the people that he encounters. He also rarely opens
himself up to others and hides his feelings behind flippant humor. Thus, very few people get to know who my little brother really is. When he announced that he was going to go into the Marines next year after high school, no one believed him. Until he got his delayed entry certification.

As I made the right turn onto the perpetually crowded Long Beach Boulevard, Chris rolled his window down and stuck his head out into the salt air.

“I’ve got the AC on,” I said.

“It’s a good thing you drive like an old man,” Chris said.

“Huh?”

“PORK RIND!” he yelled at a portly kid of about 10 walking down the boulevard. Out my rearview mirror, I saw the kid stop and look at his belly.

“Man, why’d you do that?” I asked.

“For fun. The kid was asking for it!” Chris grinned like it was Christmas morning.

“ Asking for it? He was just walking down the street! He’s probably gonna have a complex now.”

“ Hell yeah! That was punk rock, baby!”

“ Oh, God,” I moaned.

“ Oh shut up, Dad.”

“ Dad?”

“ You’re acting like Dad. You always act like Dad when we’re in public” Chris said.

“ And you always act like a jackass, so I guess I have to act like Dad,” I said.

“ No way. I live my life punk rock style all day, every day! You can’t stop me!”

“ Do they dig punk rock in the Marines?” I asked.

“ Don’t question me! I’ll make the Marines dig punk rock. Of course, I’ll probably get my ass handed to me in the process, but that’s cool too. Now shut up and find a parking spot.”

The beach was gorgeous that day. The water was warm,
clear, and free of jellyfish, which was rare for August. There weren’t too many bennys and shoobies on the island, which was also a plus. Chris and I sat in our beach chairs, he feigning sleep and I feigning to read. We did not speak much, except for the occasional “Holy crap, look at that girl in the bikini” or “Ah, the waves suck today, good thing we didn’t bring our boards.”

I thought about how much Chris had changed in the two years that I had been away at school. When I first left, he was still the same little kid with whom I played street hockey after school until it got dark out. Now, I had a hard time figuring out what Chris had become, and I felt cut off from him. It was like I didn’t even know him. From behind my sunglasses I stole a look at my brother. He was stuck somewhere in that transient state between adolescence and adulthood, which we all experience sometime. But Chris had a reputation for cursing out his teachers, inciting fights, and getting pulled over, all things which I had never even dreamed of doing. Our parents wrote the changes off as “growing up,” claiming that Chris was “trying to find his place.” Maybe, but that answer never satisfied me. Two hours and a wicked sunburn later, we went home.

My mother and father, both sitting in their usual chairs in the living room, were watching Law and Order on television when Chris and I got home. My mother, in that drawl she uses when she knows something is up, asked my brother what grades he was expecting in his classes. I knew what was coming.

“Oh, let’s see, considering I haven’t been going to geometry for the past week, an F, and in English, a C or something.”

“What?” My mother’s jaw dropped.

“What’s wrong with a C?” my brother asked.

“Why didn’t you go to geometry for the last week?” asked my father.

“Gee, let’s see,” said Chris. “I failed all the quizzes and only got a D on our test, so I just didn’t go for the final. I didn’t
see the point."

"Why didn't you go for help?" asked my mother.

"What the hell's the point anyway? I don't need geometry to graduate."

"That was just ignorant, Chris," my mother said.

"Screw you, Mom. I don't need to listen to this crap."

"John, are you hearing what your son is saying to me?"

My father started speaking in his ever-calm tone of voice, and I went upstairs to my room for a nap. I was not sure which I hated hearing more: my brother hurling obscenities at my parents or my parents trying to stop him. But whatever the case was, soon I would be going back to school and I wouldn't have to deal with any of this. I fell asleep to the familiar noise of my brother and parents going back and forth in a volley of arguments about schoolwork, respect, and responsibility.

Two hours later I was awakened by someone entering my cool, dark room. It was Chris. He sat down on the black footlocker at the base of my bed.

"Hey," I said.

"What's up?"

"Nothing. How did your conversation with the parental units go?"

"The same. They're idiots."

"Nah. I just think they're trying to help you."

"Well, they make me feel stupid."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because of school. So what if I fail geometry? So what if I don't like my teachers and I fall asleep in class all the time? What difference does it make?"

"I never did any of that."

"Corey, I'm not you," he said.

"I know that."

"Yeah, I know you know that. The thing is, they don't know that."

"Well, they'll learn eventually," I said. "I went through
the same thing with them, but in a different way, you know? Remember when they wouldn’t let me apply to any colleges I wanted to except Ursinus?”

“Yeah, I guess. But it sucks, man, you know?”

“Yeah, I know that too,” I said.

In the silence I could hear the gears in my little brother’s mind churning and turning. His contemplative face allowed me to read his mind: the little kid I was used to tossing around was getting the idea of growing up.

“Hey,” I said. “Would it be punk rock if we went back out to the island and picked up some hottie girls and brought them back here?”

Chris smiled at me in the darkness. “Hell yeah! That’s punk rock, baby!”
Dreams of a Forgotten Childhood
Natalie MacConnell
Mantra 99 for A. Joe

Tom Lipschultz

I am a vindictive plumber.
I went postal as a postman.
I played the markets and lost.
I exterminated and was fired.
I was a prison snitch but lost my voice.
As a janitor I was washed up.
As a salesman I met only death.
As a carpenter I couldn’t build a career.
As a technician I crashed.
As a landlord I got locked out.
I am still a vindictive plumber.
Why am I vindictive?
I stand in a green shadow.
I pray to a higher power.
I sprawl out on the living room floor and lean forward on my elbows just far enough to see into the kitchen. They’re in there together, their voices too low for me to understand. Mom says we’re having dinner together as a family tonight. I can feel my stomach begin to tighten.

The cartoon network is on. Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Elmer Fudd. They’re arguing over whether it’s rabbit season or duck season. My brothers always get to watch what they want because they’re young. Mom says my shows are too adult oriented for the two of them. I miss being an only child. I remember things being better when it was just me.

Mom announces, “Dinner’s ready.”

I cringe. I need an excuse, a good one. I’ve used “I’m not hungry” too many times before. Besides no excuse is good enough for tonight, not when we’re all eating together in the kitchen like a family. I should’ve stayed over Cara’s house.

“Saleena, Eddie, Tyler! Time for dinner!”

This time it is my father calling. His voice is louder, stronger and more forceful.

I rise slowly and walk towards the kitchen. Eddie and Tyler come running from behind, pushing past me to see who can reach the table first. Tyler wins. Mom tells them for the 100th time not to run on the kitchen floor. I only need to be told once. Mom doesn’t want them getting splinters from the unfinished floor. My father has yet to put down a new one. Guess he’s been too busy with other things. I walk over to my chair, the one by the back door. It’s where I always sit. Mom opens the oven and pulls out the roasting pan. Roast chicken. Maybe I can keep that down. I watch Mom make Eddie and Tyler’s plates first. Then I hand her mine.

“Only a little meat, Mom. White meat only, remember? I like the potatoes and carrots but only a little celery.”
“Saleena, you are just too picky. You know that?”

“Mom, I’ve always been picky! You should be used to it by now.”

“Well, I suppose that’s true. But at least now you eat more than just cheese and peanut butter.” She hands me my plate with a smile. “You’re not as picky as your father, though,” she adds as she carries his plate over to the oven.

“I’m not picky. I just have an acquired taste,” he says playfully.

“Well, now you just have to acquire a taste for good food.” She hands him his plate and winks at him.

I look at my brothers, contently playing with their food. I remember when life was so simple.

“What’s that mean?”

“Nothing, just that you have yet to acquire a taste for my chicken parmigiana.”

“Well, maybe if you seasoned your sauce once in a while and stopped leaving the chicken in ‘til it’s dry and shriveled up.”

“Honey, why are you getting so defensive?” Her back is to my father.

“I shouldn’t have to acquire a taste for your food.”

“Honey, I was just kidding.”

“The problem isn’t me. You should learn how to cook!”

“What?” She places the lid on top of the roasting pan. She’s not smiling anymore.

“It’s not my fault you can’t do anything right, Tracie! All I ask is for a nice meal after working a 12-hour shift. It’s the least you can do.”

“You know something, nothing’s ever good enough for you. Nothing ever reaches your standards and even if something does you’d never admit it.”

Her face is flustered. Something inside me knows she’s not talking about food anymore.

“Whatever you say, Tracie. Just get me a fork!”

“Would you for once listen to me!” She whirls around.
In an instant she hurls a fork across the table at my father. It sails through the air, narrowly missing his shoulder and lands on the floor. The room is frighteningly still. I stare intently at my carrots.

"Saleena, take your brothers in the living room and stay there," says my father.

I hear the words but they are muffled, like when you’re underwater and someone above is talking to you. I am far away and I don’t care to find my way back. But I do or rather I am yanked back by my father’s voice.

"Saleena, didn’t you hear me? Get in there!"

I move quickly now, leading my brothers into the living room. Eddie sits on one end of the couch and Tyler sits on the other. I sit in the middle.

"Why do we have to come in here?" asks Eddie.

"Because..." I pause. "Mommy and Daddy have to clean up the kitchen and we’ll just get in the way."

"Well, why are they fighting, then?"

"They’re not!" The words sound commanding, louder than I expect or would like. I don’t know what else to say. "Just watch cartoons," I add, softening my voice.

The boys watch TV. I stare at the flashes of light on the screen. But I am too frightened to pay attention. I hear their voices but the words are blurred. Maybe I am too far away to hear them. Maybe I don’t want to hear them. I close my eyes. What I want to do is run and hide. I want to retreat to my bedroom. It’s the perfect hiding place, where I always go when the fighting starts. It’s the only place I feel safe. Well, safe enough to cry, at least, alone in the darkness. And if I close my eyes tight enough and concentrate hard I can disappear far from their voices. But I can’t leave my brothers alone. I think, opening my eyes. Not with all of their hateful, hurt-filled words. Even if they are too young too fully understand.

The shouting has stopped briefly. This does not mean they are done. I feel the tension creep into the air as they walk
into the living room and proceed up the stairs. They do not look at us. I know that the fight will continue upstairs. I hear voices but they are not as distant as before.

"What are mommy and daddy doing?" Tyler asks.
"They're talking." I say. He nods, his face unknowing.
"Come here, Ty," I say reaching out my arms.
I hear their voices again, clearly now. They are at the top of the steps still arguing.
I wrap my arms tight around Tyler, not sure if it's more for his sake or my own.
"Tracie, how can you say that I'm insensitive to my family? You don't think I've changed at all?"
"You're always yelling at one of us. Any little thing sets you off."
"But how can you say I haven't changed? Of course I lose my temper sometimes but only when you set me off. I know I've gotten better with the kids at least!"
"You lose your temper with them too. It's no wonder Saleena's afraid to be near you!"
"What? Saleena, come over here for a minute."
I don't move.
"Seleena, get over here now."
I force myself to the bottom of the stairs.
"Are you afraid of daddy?"
I stand silent staring at the burgundy and charcoal designs on the carpeted steps below me. This is the first time I've really noticed them. They look like stars. I begin to cry.
"Saleena, I asked you a question!"
Or maybe snowflakes.
"Honey, you don't have to answer that question."
I am silent.
"Saleena cut the crying and just answer the damn question!"
I wipe my eyes. I look into his face searchingly, hoping to find a trace of the man who would sleep on the floor by my
bed whenever I had nightmares. Instead I am faced with blind, cold anger. I can find no traces of my father there. I look away.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes." I say, my voice colder than I expect.

I do not look at my father’s face.

"I can’t believe this house.” He slams his hand on the banister and retreats.

My mother looks weary from battle. Briefly, her eyes meet mine. She nods slightly but quickly turns away to follow after my father.

"Wait, Honey!"

I sink to the floor, crumpled at the bottom of the steps. I hear the sound of cotton socks shuffling across the thick carpet.

"You OK, Saleena?” It is Tyler’s voice. He plops down in my lap.

"Everything’s OK, Ty.”

I look up at him. His face is soft, youthful and unknowing. And for now, at least, I feel safe.

When I walk into the kitchen the next morning, my father is there. His head is resting face down in his folded arms. My first inclination is to leave but something convinces me to stay. So I stand in the doorway, waiting.

My father lifts his head. His eyes look tired. I wonder what he is thinking but I don’t ask. The distance between us is enormous. I try to remember when things were different. I can’t. Perhaps it has always been this way, my silence. I sit down at the kitchen table across from him. I think that it can be different or at least I hope that it can. So I begin. “Are you leaving?”

“No, of course not. That would be the easy way out. But the easy way isn’t always the best way, Saleena.”

I look into his eyes. “You think I don’t know this?”

“Are you getting smart with me?” His face hardens.

“I’m asking a question. I think I deserve an answer.”
He is silent for a moment and for once, appears to be at a loss for words.

“What do you know about running from your problems? You’re too young to even have real problems.”

“What’s a real problem, Dad? Being dragged into your parents’ argument and then being forced to choose who is right! Or what about having to answer a 3-year old’s and a 5-year old’s questions about why their mommy and daddy aren’t getting along! You’re right Dad. I wouldn’t know a thing about real problems.”

His eyes make me want to cry but I resist the urge to look away. The silence returns but this time it is not my own.

“Saleena…” He begins. “I’m sorry.” His voice is flat. I am waiting for the rest. Until after a moment or two when I realize that it’s not coming. I shake my head in disbelief. Once again the room is filled with silence.

“Well?”

“I’m sure that was real hard for you to say, Dad.”

“I don’t understand. What else is there to say?”

“You’re right. You don’t understand.” I can feel the moisture in the corners of my eyes.

“Saleena, I said I’m sorry.”

“All I’m asking for is the truth.”

“Saleena, I am your father and I do not appreciate being called a liar!”

“Well, I’m your daughter and I don’t appreciate being treated like I don’t matter, like I’m invisible. If you had ever bothered to ask, I would have told you about how much all of this has hurt me. About how it feels to watch your family fall apart and not be able to do anything about it. And how it feels to be unable to protect Eddie and Tyler from getting hurt. I don’t deserve any of this. You’re right, I’m too young to have real problems. I shouldn’t have to deal with any of this. So I’m asking you what are you going to do to make things better? And ‘I’m sorry’ isn’t the right answer to this question!”
The tears fall rapidly now, blurring my vision. I am choking. I try to calm myself down by closing my eyes and breathing deeply. My father says nothing and I am scared that I have made things worse. His hand touches my arm briefly and I am startled. I open my eyes to look at him through the tears. His eyes are moist. This is the first time I have ever seen my father cry.

"Saleena, I didn’t know..." He hesitates. "I never meant for this to happen. You may not believe it but I do still love you, the boys and your mother very much. I know I haven’t done a good job of showing that in the past." He pauses. "I can’t change the past, Saleena."

I look into his eyes. They are softer now. "No one’s asking you to. I never needed you to be perfect."

He looks up, waiting.

"I just needed you to listen."

He nods his head and holds my hand gently. I take a deep breath and think about the possibilities.
Mme. George & Roses
Matthew Terenna
Indecision
Confusion cascading
Down a six-lane highway
Careening with the
Direction of multitude
Love falling from
Soft lips into
Hard crystallized tears
Visions running
Through vernacular
Fortunes spinning in a
Crystal bowling ball
I love you
This moment
This second as
Moment slide
Into each other
You love me
As your pupils expand
With knowledge
Tomorrow the
Next day blazing
With uncreation
It stews in possibilities
How will you feel then?
The next day forming
In perception
Maybes colliding
Into reality
Now . . .
Those seconds have run
Into weeks
Tenderness turned to knives
36
The words of Neruda
Ran over our bodies
Like water
Washing off hope
“If little by little
you stop loving me,
I shall stop loving you”
Prophecy now true
Love smashed
In the Dumpster
Burned on bricks
Ashes of your face
Dirty my mind
Beyond the Gear Shift

Jeffrey Algayer

What a stupid place to put a gearshift. I liked my mom’s car a lot better; her gearshift was up around the steering wheel, but not in my car. No, sir. They had to throw it right between the front two seats. Well, it’s not really a gearshift. It’s an automatic car, so it really only has one gear, unless park and neutral count as gears. They’re not numbered though, so I doubt it.

I looked at my watch. It was 9:58. She had told me that they would probably let her leave at 11:00 but I showed up earlier just in case, you know, to be the caring boyfriend type guy. I guess it wasn’t really necessary. She could always take care of herself. I found that out after our third date. We were at Burger King, (I’m a simple person with simple tastes) and some guy, possibly a gang member of some sort, bumped into her and didn’t apologize. I didn’t see the big deal, but not her. She turned around and starting spewing out words that I didn’t know existed and began taunting the guy to strike her. To make a long story short, she got her apology and I learned that for as long as I lived I would never do anything to piss her off. We really were a strange couple. We’d been going out for about six months and I don’t think anyone has ever thought we were a couple. People probably just thought we were brother and sister. You know how that is, no matter what your differences were, no matter how much you contrasted each other, you loved each other because you were family. That’s how Trisha and I were. Well, except we weren’t family. Same kind of thing though.

Borders. It was a big building, and not just wide, or tall, but just big in general. It just stood out amongst the other stores, like setting up a lot of Barbie houses in your front yard. The big neon sign perched on top shined like a beacon. I was just about to turn off the car when I was distracted by an engine growling in the distance. In my rearview mirror a big yellow truck with
bright menacing headlights was coming right for me. I would see the truck clearly one second and then once it evaded the big helicopter parking lot searchlights, it would disappear again ducking into the shadows like an escaped prisoner.

The truck settled down in the row right behind me. The driver’s side door creaked open and the driver sprung out, leaving the engine on and the headlights blaring. I cracked my neck and rubbed my hands on my khaki shorts to wipe the sweat off.

“G’ evening.” He glanced behind me into my backseat and then back to me.

“Evening sir.”

“Any plans for the night?” he asked and spit on the ground.

“No sir, just waiting for my girl.”

“Mhmm.” He nodded, “Just making sure ya know. This neighborhood, and at night...” he glanced around the parking lot, “just making sure ya know.”

“Yes.”

“You have a good night, and stay out of trouble.” He pounded once on my roof.

“Yes sir, no one wants that.” He was already walking away. I turned off the car’s engine, rolled down my window and stuck my arm out. It was a hot night and the moon stood out amongst the darkening sky. A nice bright red sphere, like an over-ripened pumpkin. When the moon looks bright red, it’s supposed to be hot the next day. The atmosphere, when it’s hot, picks up certain rays of light which create the illusion of the moon being red. Then again, my mom told me that. When I was younger, my mom always liked to make up stuff to keep me quiet. I remember once I wouldn’t eat my green beans so she told me that they were green French fries. Ever since then I used to eat them with my hands and dip them in ketchup. I wonder if I used to use salt. I glanced back up at the moon. Can you over-ripen a pumpkin? Now I wasn’t so sure, and even
if I was sure, I was beginning to doubt that it would be red anyway.

It wasn’t much longer until another car’s headlights filled my car, and as it would have it, the car ended up parking right next to me. I took in a deep breath, an anti-yawn so to speak and glanced down at my watch, 10:09.

“Hey there!” Perky little girl for this late at night, guess she just came from Starbucks.

“Hey.” A nice and shiny black Thunderbird. She wasn’t bad looking either, blonde, white tank top with her bra straps showing.

“Are you waiting for someone too?”

“Yeah, my girl... 11:00.”

“Me too.” She stretched out her arms and cracked her neck, “That felt good.” She smiled at me. She had a pretty smile. “Well, not my girl, my boy. My boy,” she laughed. “That just sounds funny. So what are you and your girl doing tonight?”

“Not really sure yet.” I answered. “She’s going away for the weekend with some friends. Figured we’d do something... I usually just let her decide.”

“Yeah,” she said as she looked at her shoulders and tried to hide her bra straps under her tank top, “I know what ya mean.” She wiped the palm of her hand across her forehead, “Yeah, my boyfriend and I are going to go clubbing tonight. He likes to go clubbing all the time, but I dunno. It just gives me a headache sometimes.”

“Yeah.” I think I was about to say more but I was distracted by her moving around in her car. She was squirming around like a worm in a mud puddle. “What are you doing?”

“These damn beaded seats... you just can’t sit on them... I don’t know why Darrell likes them.” She stopped to clarify, “This is Darrell’s car. He got his license suspended so now I have to drive him around.” She smiled and shook her head, “Whatcha gonna do?”
“Well if you want... you can sit in here with me to wait for Darrell. I can’t promise you my seats are that much more comfortable, but at least they don’t have beads.” She smiled, jumped out of Darrell’s car, and began to make her way over to my passenger door. She had on jean shorts, not real short like slutty short, but a nice length. Nice legs, nice body, Darrell was a lucky man. I leaned over the gearshift and tried to open her door. I pulled on the handle and gave it a shove but only got it open a couple inches. She pulled the door open the rest of the way and got in.

“Every bit helps,” she said, “Thanks.”

Her eyes were a pretty shade of blue. A crystal blue, like a bottle of Polo Sport. I don’t know how long we were looking at each other until she finally broke the silence.

“I’m Ashley,” she said and laughed. I smiled and laughed as well; it just seemed weird to introduce ourselves now.

“I’m James,” I stuck out my hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you Ashley.”

She laughed and we shook hands.

“Excuse me?”

I jumped and hit my head on the roof of the car. I turned around to look at the guy now standing outside my door as Ashley began to laugh. It was a teenage kid, about sixteen, wearing one of those bright Hawaiian shirts that had come back in style. “Hey... uh, I hope I didn’t interrupt you two love birds, but do you have a light?”

“Nah, sorry man...” I said, “I don’t smoke.”

“Yeah, um...” he fumbled, “But shouldn’t you have a cigarette lighter thing in your car... on your uh... dashboard.”

“Yeah, you uh... got a point,” I looked around my dashboard. “Hold on a sec.” I didn’t see it on the dashboard itself but then finally found it under one of the compartments. I looked at Ashley who was trying to hold in her laughter. “I didn’t know where it was,” I smiled, “so sue me.” She continued laughing.
“Thanks man. I was just dying for a smoke, and no more matches, ya know?” I nodded my head and looked at my watch, 10:21. “I hope I didn’t interrupt anything.” He had a big silly grin on his face. He looked at me and clicked his tongue. Just full of tact, this kid.

“So after I leave, you two are gonna jump in the backseat, huh?”

“We’re just friends,” Ashley and I said at the same time. “Actually...” she started.

“We just met,” I said. We both smiled.

“Yeah, ok.” Our surfer friend pulled a joint out of his pocket, “Whatever you two wanna play is fine with me.” The cigarette lighter popped and made Ashley jump. We laughed and I handed surfer dude the lighter. He lit up, handed it back to me and said, “Thanks, now you two lovebirds get back to business.” He smiled and again with the tongue clicking thing. As he started walking away I said you’re welcome but I doubt he heard me.

“We’re lovebirds,” Ashley said and began to laugh. I smirked. “You know, I don’t think anyone has ever said anything like that about me and Darrell. Guess we don’t look like a couple...” I was silent. “So, tell me about your girlfriend. What was her name?”

“Trisha,” I said as I looked across the parking lot and saw the yellow truck police had stopped next to our new friend. He’ll probably offer the security guard a hit.

“And how long have you been going out? Details? What she look like, c’mon?”

“Ok. Um.. We’d been going out for about six months. She’s about your height, shoulder length brown curly hair.”

“Wait a second,” Ashley slapped her hand across my chest, “I know her, like two weeks ago she came along with Darrell and me to go clubbing.”

“No, you’re probably thinking of someone else,” I looked over at the store.

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“Yeah, you’re probably right. This girl was crazy,” she laughed. “This guy stepped on her foot while dancing and she almost decked him.” I looked at the steering wheel and started thinking. Why wouldn’t she have told me again? I got out my wallet and showed Ashley a picture of Trisha. “Yeah, that is her!” I think Ashley realized that I wasn’t sharing in her excitement because her tone changed very quickly. “I’m sorry,” She put her hand on my leg and slowly rubbed it, “I’m sure she probably just forgot to tell you.”

“She’s cheated on me before,” I said softly. “Well she’s not cheating on you now, she was with me and Darrell. And just because she didn’t tell you she went there doesn’t mean anything. Darrell goes places all the time to hang out with his friends and lies to me where he was.”

“Yeah.”

“Just the other night, Wednesday, he told me he had to go to his aunt’s to help move furniture and my friend Jill told me she saw him waiting outside the bathroom at the Cineplex. It doesn’t mean anything. They just lie to us to not hurt us.”

“Hm.”

“He knows I don’t like his friends... They just don’t want to hurt us.”

“The thing is, if she wanted to go out with people from work clubbing, I wouldn’t have been hurt.” I looked down at my watch, 10:35. Why was she lying to me again? “The last time... I had caught her, she said she would never lie to me again.”

“So she forgot to tell you about going clubbing,” Ashley leaned over and put her arm around me. “Big deal. I’m sure she still loves you.” Her face was about four inches from mine.

“You’re so sweet and funny,” she paused, “Who couldn’t love you?” We looked into each other’s eyes. I loved Trisha. Ashley glanced down at my lips and then back to my eyes. I was pretty sure I loved Trisha. I began to move my face closer when headlights filled the car. We both pulled away. A car door
creaked open. I waited a couple seconds and turned to my left. It was the yellow truck security guy.

"Snuck up on ya, I did." He had a big Yoda-like smile. I shook my head and smiled at him. "So, what are we still doing here? Thought you were waiting for your girl?" He motioned toward Ashley, "There she is, what are we waiting for now?" He spit on the ground again.

"Yeah, we just got to talking I guess." Ashley and I smiled at each other. "We'll be out of here shortly."

"Well alrighty, just checking up on ya, ya know?" He took a step back, "Never hurts to check up on someone, mmhmm." I nodded. "Well you two have a good night," he pounded on my roof again. I was about to say you too but he had already begun walking back to his truck.

"He was just checking up on ya, ya know?" She said trying to mimic his voice between laughs. "I'm guessing he was around here earlier?" She laughed again. I looked down at the gearshift thinking.

"You have a car phone in Darrell's car?"

"Yeah," she smirked, "this is Darrell we are talking about. Do you want me to go get it?" I nodded. She got out, walked around to Darrell's car and bent over through the passenger window. I looked to the left and caught her ass straight on. Nice tight jean shorts, and ok, maybe they were a little shorter than they looked before. Either way, it was very nice. Just then I noticed her head shift and she glanced back and caught me looking at her ass. I smiled at her and she smiled back. I can't believe she smiled back. She pulled herself back out of the window, turned around and crouched down next to my door. She handed me the phone, smiled and said, "So did you like that?"

"You are unbelievable." I smiled.

"What?" she said pretending to be not guilty. "Hey, when I'm with Darrell all he ever does is look at other girls. If some guy is going to finally look at me, you think I'm going to
be mad?” She laughed. “So what are you planning on doing with that?”

“Just thought I’d check up on someone,” I looked at her and smiled, “ya know?” She started laughing. I began to dial Jen’s number. Jen was Trisha’s best friend. I got through the small talk very quickly and got right to my question, “Jen, is Trisha cheating on me?” There was complete silence on the other end of the phone. Ashley was staring at the store.

“James...” she started to speak but I could tell she didn’t want to.

“Ok ok, nevermind, you don’t have to tell me,” I said. “Just answer me this, where were you Wednesday night?”

“Wednesday night... I was here.” Jen answered a bit confused, “Why?”

“Ah, don’t worry about it, thanks Jen.” We hung up.

“I don’t understand,” said Ashley.

“Trisha told me she went to the movies on Wednesday with Jen. And Jen says she wasn’t there.” I looked over at the store. “So... who is our mystery movie date?”

Ashley looked at me while working through the situation in her head. “You think Darrell went to the movies with Trisha?”

“Well it wasn’t me,” I looked at Ashley, “and you said your friend had seen him at the Cineplex on Wednesday night. So?”

“Hm.”

“I could be wrong of course, I don’t want you to get upset,” I put my hand on her head, “Just because my girlfriend is cheating on me doesn’t mean your boyfriend is too.”

She looked up at me and smiled. “Why would my boyfriend be cheating on you in the first place?”

I smiled at her. “Get in the car.”

“Yeah, that would be a good idea. My behind the knee areas are getting sweaty from crouching.” I looked at her with a strange look and she laughed. She hopped up, grabbed the
phone from me, threw it into Darrell’s car and began to walk around the front of my car. She stopped and proceeded in doing some sort of Egyptian exotic dance. She then started laughing, ran around the car and jumped back in.

“What the hell was that?” I asked half laughing still.

“It was my dance of love. I did it for Darrell once and he told me that I was wasting his time and to get the hell in the car.” She laughed, “I guess people respond to the dance of love differently.” We both looked at each other in silence. Just then we heard the door to Border’s open and someone walk out.

“What time is it?”

I glanced down at my watch. “It’s almost time.”

“So...Are you going to confront Trisha, work things out?”

“Nah, I don’t think so. I think I’ll be strong for once in my life and just end it.” I looked at Ashley who smiled at me and even though she only just met me, it looked as if she was proud of me. “So how about you?”

“Yeah, I think Darrell is the type of guy who needs his space. I would have to give him a reason at least though, because I’d feel bad.”

“Of course.” I sat there for a second. “Here, watch this.” I leaned over the gearshift and opened the glove compartment and started rummaging through.

“What are you looking for?”

“You’ll see.” Finally I found a piece of paper that had directions written on one side and a pen. “Are you ready?”

She smiled. “Yeah.” We both got out of the car and she ran around and was now standing next to me. I turned the paper over to the blank side and using the light of helicopter parking lot searchlights I wrote:

“Dear Darrell and Trisha, We want to thank you both for cheating on us. You two deserve each other and we hope you will continue your affair and build it into a strong and lasting relationship.”

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Ashley laughed.
“By any chance, do you know what Darrell was planning on doing this weekend?”
“Yeah, he was going to go somewhere with his buddies for the weekend. That’s why we were meeting tonight... why?”
“I hope you two have a great weekend together. If you go to the beach, remember to put on a lot of sunscreen. The moon was bright red tonight, so it should be hot tomorrow. In closing, do not feel bad that we found out, it’s all for the best. Sincerely.” I signed my name and gave the pen to Ashley. She laughed and signed as well. She continued writing and was laughing while she was doing it.
“PS. Darrell, if you didn’t cheat on me with Trisha, now’s your chance. Oh, one more thing, I HATE THOSE DAMN BEADS!!!”
I laughed. “Good closing.”
“I thought so,” responded Ashley.
I got the note and stuck it under his left windshield wiper as Ashley threw Darrell’s keys into his car.
“Hurry up, they’ll be out here soon.”
I jumped in the car, put the key in the ignition and turned to her. “You ready?”
She smiled her biggest smile of the night. “Hell yes.”
I turned on the car and began to pull off. As I pulled around and out of the lot we could see in the distance a couple more people walking out of the store.
“You know,” I began, “the only bad thing about starting over is you have to start back at the beginning.” I glanced toward Ashley who was nodding.
“It’s as if we just wasted the last six months of our lives with them.”
“Exactly.”
“Well,” Ashley said in a slightly more seductive voice than usual, “maybe we should both pick up where we both just left off.”
I started to look over at her face to see if I could figure out what she had in mind but instead her hand was already around my right hand. She pulled it off the steering wheel, beyond the gearshift, and placed it on her left thigh.

“That’s better.” She smiled. “There.”

I shook my head and began to laugh. She put her arm out the window and let out a moan. “Ooh, that breeze feels nice.”

I did the same. “Yes, it does.” She looked down at her shoulders and saw that her bra straps were showing. She looked up at me and smiled. “So where are we off to on this fine and lovely evening?”

“I thought we’d go to my favorite restaurant,” I said as I turned right onto Maple, “It’s right around the corner.”

“Burger King?” she said, and began to laugh.

“We’re simple people,” I said. “And we need simple food,” she added and continued laughing. “It’s almost 11 o’clock...” she said as we pulled into the parking lot, “Wouldn’t only the drive-thru be open?”

“I guess we’ll have to eat in the car. Do you have a problem with that?” I smiled.

“Problem with it? We spent our first six months of our relationship in this car, what’s ten more minutes?” We both smiled and laughed.

I looked over at the menu next to the microphone.

“You want to share a fry?”

“I would love to.”
last night

*benjamin a. jackendoff*

cracked and looted.
breathing doors.
recognizable faces
peering through
peeling shutters.
she was from the past
looking better than
before
completely healed
and in the
darkest corner
of my mind
lurks a crime
of unspeakable
horrors
Father

Kristin Geist
damn it

Daniel Gallagher

“You rat bastard son of a bitch.” I say it quietly. I’m past the point of yelling and into that stage where you’re so angry that curses come out more like growls. I wonder to myself why I even said it out loud. The asshole in the Saab can’t hear me no matter how loud I scream. There’s no one else in my car to appreciate the way I weave multiple obscenities into singular phrases. It’s a talent, if I can say so modestly. Somehow it’s a release though. Just to curse him quietly in the relative comfort of my Volvo station wagon. Just about the only place I feel safe.

He had cut me off about six miles earlier. Almshouse Road was two lanes, but only for about five hundred feet, where the trees broke away to reveal an ill-placed strip mall. Most people just stay in the left lane, since the signs clearly mark that the right lane ends. I, however, attract asshole drivers. Maybe people just think this eighty-seven wagon is an easy target to pass. Not that I blame them. The trim’s falling off in a dozen places, it leaks a quart of oil a week, the front end alignment is so bad that I can make right turns without touching the wheel, and due to the kindness of some local vandals the hatch is smashed in. Jesus, the thing’s one-wheel drive cause my parents didn’t feel like springing the extra two hundred bucks for two-wheel. But hey, they gave me the thing as a birthday present. What am I complaining about?

So, sighting this dilapidated piece of machinery driven by what appeared to a very young kid (most people don’t even think I’m old enough drive on first sight), the asshole in the Saab decides to pass me in a very unsafe and enraging manner. Right there next to me, paying attention to nothing but himself. God I hate that. I’m sure a lot of people would have just let it go, but I detest getting passed by anyone. I come from a family of very aggressive drivers, so when I see the Saab pull out from three cars back in my rear view I immediately speed up.
“Not a chance in – fuck!” The Blazer in front of me decides to brake, which forces me to slam on my brakes, sends the pile of papers in my front seat into the dashboard, and makes my CD player skip. “Goddamn it! You fucking asshole!” I lean out the window screaming, “Learn how to fuckin’ drive! Jesus.” The Saab flies past me and cuts in front of the Blazer at the last second, just as we get to the traffic light at 232. I pull back inside my car and take out a cigarette to try to calm down. It’s not the Blazer’s fault. I know that. He still deserves some creative metaphors for letting the Saab in, though.

Leaning over the passenger seat, I start picking up the papers on the floor. Physics, Mr. Riley. D. Calculus, Mr. Koche. 57. And that rejection letter from Princeton. Huh. I toss them into the back seat.

I glare past the Blazer at the tinted rear windshield of the Saab, trying to think where I can get back at the asshole. I raise my Zippo to the cigarette and flick the wheel. Click. Nothing. Click. Nothing. Click. “Goddammit!” Now I’m getting seriously pissed. My lighter’s out of fluid. Again. Damn minis. And I would gladly use the car lighter, but the jack for the portable CD player’s in there. Not that it matters, because the CD player skips or shuts off every thirty seconds or so, which is due to the fact that the shocks in my car suck. A lot. I could run over a penny and I would feel it. All the luxury and glamour of a station wagon with the discomfort of a truck. Gotta love it.

The Blazer makes a right onto 232 and I’m right behind the Saab. Of course, I proceed to ride on his bumper (standard procedure). He speeds up, but my car holds faithful and keeps pace. After rolling up all the windows and a good deal of coaxing, I raise a small blue flame from the Zippo and can smoke a cigarette. Regardless of this tiny pleasure, however, my aggression toward the Saab is strong as ever. I inhale deeply, letting out barely any smoke. My eyes are fixed on the asshole’s head. At least, I assume that darker spot in the tinted windshield is his
head. I know he can't see my eyes in his rear view behind these dark sunglasses. I love that. It's always easier when people don't know you.

I realize in the back of my head that it would be much safer to let events of this minute magnitude go without comment. In the front of my head I'm thinking this guy just killed my parents and ate my dog for dinner. He has one dimension. Pure, unadulterated asshole. A legitimate fuck. For all I know, the guy's a goddamn saint. Off the road. But that's a different situation.

You can barely fit a toothpick between my front bumper and the rear of this Saab. I can tell it's starting to piss him off, which only encourages my actions. Just as my stone face begins to break into a slight grin, the asshole slams on his brakes. "Son of a motherfucker!" I scream. As he speeds up again I lean out the open window. "Will you learn how to fuckin' drive, you asshole!" I scream at the top of my lungs. The only outlet for aggression. I used to pound the dashboard, but then I cracked it. I can't afford to break anything else in this car. After another brilliant stream of obscenities, I silence myself and try to catch my breath. Inches from the Saab, but the last fit of screaming has left my tar-coated lungs in agony. In addition to that, I've let myself get so angry with this guy, I can feel the beginnings of an anxiety attack coming on.

My breath comes in short rasps. A sharp pain in each temple. I toss the cigarette out the window and try to control my breath, inhaling deeply through the nose and exhaling out the mouth. "One." I count each breath, while maintaining my miniscule distance from the asshole. "Two, in, out, three, in, ou - dammit!" My windshield is showered with pennies. "Jesus!" I scream as another handful of loose change is rifled at my car. The guy in the Saab is leaning out his window and facing me while still driving. Very unsafe.

I can tell he's yelling, but with my stereo up I can't hear a word. I don't really need to either - hand gestures pretty
much sum up his sentiment. I smile and return that sentiment in like kind. He starts motioning toward the side of the road, and I can read his lips saying “Pull over.” This pisses me off even more. Like I’m seriously going to pull off to the side of the road and what? Fight this guy? I mean, Jesus, he could have a gun, or a knife, or be a raving lunatic, or anything. No chance in hell. I signal “Okay” and put on my turn signal. He pulls his head back in the car and starts pulling over. In a sick sort of way I love it. It’s so much easier to release these feelings on a stranger.

I stay right behind him until his car comes to a complete stop. Then I floor it and fly past him back onto the road. “Fuck you!” I’m smiling, triumphant. “Asshole!” I scream it, laughing, and I know he can hear me. I watch in the rear view as he leaps back into his car and pulls out behind me. Feeling immensely pleased with myself, I light another cigarette, but as I lean over to cull the tiny flame from my lighter, I feel something strike me in the head.

“That fucking asshole,” I say under my breath and turn my head as another barrage of pennies is launched from the Saab, now passing me on the wrong side of the road. I floor it, but I have no chance. The transmission groans and the Saab pulls in front of me. I have no chance to pass him back, because Almshouse turns into a goddamn slalom in a matter of three seconds. We race along with nothing but trees and guardrails on either side. My car is straining through the hills and curves, but I have to make it perform like the Saab so I keep pushing, angrier than ever. Instead of screaming I decide I need some good chase music. Rage Against the Machine blares from my ten-year-old speakers. I grip the wheel tighter and tighter as the chase continues. For about twenty-five seconds, anyway, until the CD skips.

“God,” breathe in, “DAMMIT!” breathe out. I have no idea how I can get even with the asshole in the Saab, my CD player is good for nothing, the nonsensical DJs on the radio only 54
piss me off more, and the cherry of my cigarette flies out the window. I'm practically failing out of school, I don't have a girlfriend (she thought I was too strange), and what is that noise! I notice my car making a new noise. There are about twelve unsafe noises my car makes, and I'm used to these. Most of them are caused by old belts and the fact that two of the three engine clamps are missing. I have no idea what this new noise is, but I keep faith in the car. It's always been there for me. Unlike most aspects of my life. I probably should pull over to check it out, but if I have to sacrifice the engine to catch this guy, so be it. Logic is definitely not one of my strong points.

The light at Almshouse and 611 is always a long one. I know this, and as we approach the intersection, I feel a nervous flutter of sick delight as the light turns red. I'm not sure exactly what I'm going to do as I step out of the car. I don't know exactly why I take my father's generic version of The Club out of the back seat. Jethro Tull's "Aqualung" is playing on the radio. My entrance music. I always say that if were in a movie, this would be the song to play every time I walked into a room. A sign? I am very calm as I walk to Saab, shoulders squared, face straight.

"What the fuck do you want, you little prick? You're lucky I don't fuckin' kill you right here." He's got a thick South Philly accent. He's a dirty looking guy, probably in his late thirties. His hair is greasy, slicked back, and hangs right around his shoulders. He has a dark complexion, and probably a week's worth of a beard on his face. His plain white t-shirt is stained in several places, and I can see an unlit stub of a cigar sitting in his ashtray through the crack he has opened in his tinted window. I smash the window with The Club.

"Jesus, what are you fuckin' nuts?" he screams, face contorted. Drama queen. "Son of a freakin' bitch! I oughtta-" But he never finishes that sentence, as The Club comes flying into his greasy mouth. The flawless white paint job of the Saab is stained with blood as I repeatedly bring my weapon back into

He’s hardly recognizable now, but I continue to swing away. “No...” His voice is weak. “I... why are you...” His malformed face can no longer utter any recognizable sound. Teeth are everywhere. I keep swinging. I’m not screaming. I’m not even breathing heavily. He finally slumps over, his head falling on the horn, which blares steadily as I walk back to my car. I throw The Club into the back seat and sit down.

When the light changes, the Saab takes off, and I realize the horn I hear is the guy behind me. How long have I been sitting at the intersection? Christ, where are these disturbed thoughts coming from? I pull off to the side of the road, and watch the Saab speed away, weaving in and out of cars on the four-lane highway of 611. I pull back onto Almshouse and continue home. I drive exactly five miles an hour above the speed limit, maintaining four seconds of space between me and the car in front of me. Passing the Bucks County Correctional Facility. I attempt yet again to have a cigarette. My lighter is dead, but I find an old book of matches in the glove box.

I can’t wait to get home, to collapse in my bed, to get out of this hellish car. I put Sinatra in the CD player, and skip up to “I’ve got you under my skin.” I wonder if the guy in the Saab has pissed off anybody else, and is being chased again. I really don’t care though. Just idle curiosity. I like to make up scenes. In my head. They’re not real. I don’t care if I never see another Saab in my life. It’s interesting to imagine, though.

I’m finally relaxing. The road is empty, the sun is shining, and the breeze through the window is comfortable. Then I hit a pothole and the CD player shuts off. “Damn it.” But I’m too tired to say with feeling.
My Body Cut Off at the Back

Oana Nechita

There is within me
this spilt of bodies –
separate,
as if not halves
of one fruit,
as if not two
hands in prayer.
My ribs – wings of your ribs
My hair – grown from your curls
Your buttocks – rounded from my hips
Your heels – stolen from my balance.
My legs heading west,
Your legs heading east,
Our minds blind
to one another –
We are meant
to circle the globe
before
we seal our backs together.
Moloch

Matthew Terenna
Brittany Sestina

Leah Miller

In a country of old stone
In a land that's steeped in age
The voice will call you home
She can show you her land's soul
Daughter of a forgotten god
In this country by the sea

Sons consumed by angry sea
Watched for by the standing stone
Cursed then by another god
Bare faces untouched by age
Girls in black cry for the souls
That never made it home

Many spirits make their home
Young men who drowned under the sea
Perhaps you'll meet a maple's soul
A mountain lord with voice of stone
Golden ones immune from age
Live near an ancient god

A statue of Mary, a prayer to God
A flower on the hearth of home
Two faiths so different in age
A and of the dead lies over the sea
A body lies under a cross of stone
Old and young deities court the soul

So what touches the Celtic soul?
People bound to earth and god
Strong people with will of stone
Though others may deride their home

60
They cherish their view of sea
Their language of another age

Parchment crumble as they age
But no time can touch the soul
Of this land lost in the sea
Of time and words and god
So it will always be a home
To those lost ones who raised the stone

Brittany's song finds home in the soul
No matter what god is yours, or what age
Such is the power of stones by the sea
Ghost Spray and a Slingshot

Philip Malachowski

My younger brother and I had prepared ourselves for this second voyage to the haunted barn. Jumping off our Huffy bikes, we pushed them off the road and headed into the woods. After we had concealed our bikes in a pre-arranged location, I led the way through the tangled brush and scratching branches. My brother, Chris, carried our equipment in an Indiana Jones backpack.

The sun under which Chris and I journeyed belonged to the tenth autumn of my life. Littering the ground with leaves, the trees had begun to show the first signs of fall. The sun shone coolly, and the air pressed its crisp and dry hand against my brother’s and my cheeks.

“Hey, Phil,” Chris called from behind me. Holding out the backpack, Chris said, “Carry this will ya? It’s getting heavy.”

“Wimp.” Trying to look strong under the backpack’s hefty weight, I fell behind Chris’ lead. The equipment that Chris and I took turns carrying consisted of a Swiss-army pocketknife, string, a plastic magnifying glass, two glass jars (one of which contained a spider that we caught along the way), a small garden spade, a bag of pebbles, fishing hooks, a flashlight, a bug and insect identification book, a mammal identification book, and two Dr. Pepper’s. And, most importantly, we had defense against the barn: a spray bottle of vinegar, which my mom said would kill the ghosts, and a homemade slingshot, which my mom didn’t know about.

Chris and I hiked for about fifteen minutes before arriving at the barn. Climbing a twig-strewn bank, my brother and I looked up at the slender trees towering above us. The pale sun gleamed through the swaying branches, throwing shadows down upon us. Somewhere in the distance, a crow cawed. The air smelled empty, as if all of nature’s energy had been drained from it. Perched like a watchful bird, the barn peered down the...
bank at my brother and me. Fortunately, a snare trap with a skeleton lying near it averted our attention from the vigilant eyes of the barn.

“Cool,” Chris exclaimed. “Phil, check this out.” Kneeling over the skeleton, Chris and I studied the bones.


“Oh,” I responded. “Cool.”

Suddenly, Chris and I heard a sharp crack near the barn. Our heads snapped up and our eyes widened into great, white moons. The woods grew silent and the breeze ceased to blow. Looking up the bank, I realized that the barn had somehow crept up on Chris and me: the crumbling, yellow face stared only ten paces from where my brother and I kneeled.

In fearful awe, Chris and I looked upon the twenty-feet high monster, from whose cracked, wooden mask nails poked out. A loose board swung lazily, making a cracking sound as it rebounded off the wall. Like a network of tiny green veins, strings of ivy wound over the abandoned structure. Burrowing into the bank, the stone foundation—with its crumbling wall and encroaching vegetation—resembled a wounded veteran of some ancient war. Once silver in color, the corrugated roof bled with crimson rust. Struggling to escape, a starling squeezed through an eave of the barn and flew away. Chris and I followed the bird’s fleeting path through the sky.

Swallowing my fright, I dropped the backpack upon the ground. I dug out my choice of weapon, the spray bottle of vinegar, and set it by my side. Next, I retrieved the slingshot and the pebbles and handed them to Chris. Making no effort to take the defenses, Chris stared indignantly at me.

“Yeah, right,” he exclaimed. “You take the slingshot. I want the ghost-spray.”

I stared fixedly at my brother. When I saw that he wasn’t going to back down, I said curtly, “Fine. Take the stupid bottle.” Puffing with feigned indifference, I said, “I wanted the slingshot
anyway. I was just tryin’ to be nice.”

Grabbing the slingshot from Chris, I thrust the ghost-spray into my brother’s eager hands.


“Oh,” I said, my fingers curling around the plastic handle. I stood up with my brother and threw on the backpack. Chris stared expectantly at me.


“Yeah, right! You got the ghost-spray!”

“So! It won’t help if I can’t see the ghost,” Chris said. Seeing that my brother had prepared himself to spend the whole day standing until I gave him the flashlight, I handed over the goods. Smiling with satisfaction, Chris thanked me and proceeded up the bank towards the haunted barn. It stared at us like the skeleton of some dead, forgotten giant.

When Chris and I reached the foundation wall, the breeze suddenly picked up and whispered evil-sounding incantations in our ears. The passing breath tossed leaves over our feet. With reluctant steps, Chris and I finally made our way around the corner of the barn to a stairway built into the foundation.

Standing just outside the stairway, Chris and I looked apprehensively down the hole, opening up into a dark, underground room. Cobwebs and dust covered the stone walls. The debris of shabby masonry, crumbling in its old age, littered the stairs. Floating aimlessly in the breeze, a leaf flew down the stairway and into the barn’s belly, where darkness consumed it.

“Well, Chris,” I said, pushing him towards the entrance. With crazed eyes, Chris responded, “No! You go first!”

“But you have the flashlight!”

Chris looked dumbly at the flashlight in his hand. Thrusting it into my own hand, Chris said, “Now, you have it. You go first.”

I stared incredulously at my brother. “Fine.”
Turning on the flashlight, I pointed the beam down the stairway. It sliced through the dust-filled air. I gathered my courage and stepped onto the first stair, then the second, and then the third. With cobwebs clinging to my face and arms, I slowly descended into the barn's underground belly. Before I knew it, Chris and I stood side-by-side at the bottom of the stairway with the slingshot and ghost-spray in our hands.

Neither of us dared to breathe, as we waited for the ghosts to wrap their icy, bony fingers around our necks and arms.

Several moments passed, and no ghosts had appeared. Chris and I took a deep breath of the antiquated air and found it to be not altogether unpleasant: it smelled like my grandparents' basement. Shining the flashlight around the room, I roughly measured the size to be about that of a small bedroom. An “L” shaped shelf, with soft, rotting wood, lined two crumbling stone walls. On these shelves rested a vast treasure of primitive tools—a hammer, a saw, an assortment of nails and screws, and an array of strange mechanical devices. A pair of decaying leather boots also sat on the shelf. Posted on a hook on the wall behind me hung a long coat, its color and shape concealed by dust and dirt. In the far corner of the room, a wooden case contained empty glass bottles. On the wall next to this case, a small shelf, attached to the wall, held two Folger's cans and several glass jars. Standing next to my brother among these items, I got the feeling that they had been waiting a long time for their master to return. The hammer and nails, the boots, the coffee cans—all of these items were lonely for their owner's touch.

"Hey, Phil," whispered Chris. "It's not so bad in here is it?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "I feel like it's alive ... the whole barn, I mean."

As if in response, a light breeze wandered down the stairs. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught something moving...
on the shelf with the tools. I aimed the flashlight beam at the shelf to reveal the pages of a book gently fluttering in the breeze. With Chris on my heels, I walked to the shelf.

I let my small hand rest on a crisp, browning page of the book. Picking out a passage at random, I clumsily read the following:

I was not frightened, but I made no noise. I did not wish to disturb him. I went softly down to the kitchen which, tucked away so snugly underground, always seemed to me the heart and center of the house. There, on the bench behind the stove, I thought and thought about Mr. Shimerda. Outside I could hear the wind singing over hundreds of miles of snow. It was as if I had let the old man in out of the tormenting winter, and were sitting there with him.

I softly closed the book. On the cover, bound in scratched and worn leather, the title, My Ántonia, was embossed in faded gold ink.

“What does it say?” Chris asked me.

“Something about an old man sitting in a kitchen with a girl named, ‘My Antonia’,” I replied.

“Oh . . .” Chris said. “Hey, Phil. Do you wanna go home now?”

“Sure,” I said, gazing at the book with its proud binding.

“Cool.” Chris turned and began walking towards the sunlit stairway. I looked at my brother and, then, at the book. With mischief in my eyes, I tucked the book under my He-Man shirt and ran up the stairs after Chris.

A moment later, I ran back down the steps, to the bench from which I grabbed the book. I quickly placed my slingshot on the dusty surface where the book had sat, before running back up the stairway into the autumn sun.
Breathing Heat,
Dancing on a tree’s grave
Panting gray thick muck.
Curling, mingling with the trees.
Spicy tangerine fingers reach
Crackle a laugh and celebrate
Luminous confetti.
Unexpected Company

C.H. Edwards
To Jane

Andrew Gerchak

I wish you would have stayed last night. Instead I watched the ceiling dance alone. My wall beneath white paper towels. Stained.

I dream you read more poetry, then pull the sheets up to our eyes. The walls are white. We sleep insane. No phone. No knocks. Just us. Just dreams.
Poppy Hands

oana nechita

My mama’s hands are full, two loaves of baking bread, white on the inside like naked pillows, tanned on the other side like toast, fingers thick as clouds, wrinkled like sheets in the morning, her fingers, blind worms who search in old pockets for lost money, fingers in my hair, caterpillars pulling, nails, yellow as soup, they scratch grease off dinner plates, lottery tickets, and zits on my face, crossing mosquito bites on my legs, two deep lines in my flesh to cure the itch.

My mama’s hands with nipples, warts grown like blueberries overnight, rolling wet on my bare back in fever, bugs’ eyes up and down my skin, hands like canvases cut by inattention, bleeding mouths scream from her fingers.

My mama’s hands like dough, squeezed in sweaty expectation, shaped around glasses of wine half and half with tap water, curved by unfiltered cigarettes, travelling the length from mouth to ashtray, falling stars with smoky tails, joints cracked like artillery in nights of wondering, waiting by the door, hands talking to me, ears closed to words: didn’t I tell you?, they part like wings: get out of here!, they shoo me away like barking dogs.

My mama’s hands plunge in toilets, fearless divers, caress trash cans walls like tongues on ice-cream cones, rip out intestines of pigs half alive, pores gushing savagery.

My mama’s hands smelling like the whole house, kitchen and bathroom, pig-fat soap and corn bread, insides of shoes, onions, chlorine, and basil. My mama with hands broad as a courtyard, I could walk the world on them.

At six years old I know what I want. I want my body wrapped in knee-high skirts over tight nylons, white shirts with starched collars; I want high heels between my feet and the wooden floor of the classroom, high heels to take me along old desks and screechy chairs, high heels to roll eyes down at them.
I want hair smelling of cigarette smoke, fresh coffee, and perfume, hair red and up in a bun, glasses low on the nose, five rings on the left hand, small lipstick mouth, and raised eyebrows.

I want to throw the grade book on the teacher's desk with a thump, look distracted for a moment to build up tension, sit down with great care, flip the pages back and forth, and call out thirty shy names raising their hands above high desks. I want to pronounce 'impletitura', 'trichinoza', and 'poloboc' out loud, write them on the blackboard as if caressing a body, rounding letters with precise softness, point to them with the polished wooden stick, watch Ω-shaped mouths stare at the wonder I am. I want to mark notebooks in fire letters, grade homework in red ink, sign my name under the check. At six years old I want to be her.

I see her fingers, hawks diving in flesh. They plunge on my face like red pens on paper, they too prick and leave marks, red like poppies, their urgency burns beneath my skin, I feel it red and blooming, inundating my pores. My cheeks turn the color of watermelons in late fall, juicing through my eyes, I shut them tight, squeeze them like angry fists, tears, escaping traitors flooding like rivers in spring.

I see her hands travel the length of my body like ships. They know its weak points like a lover, fingers caught in my hair, pulling as if uprooting flowers, they pound on my back as if it were a locked door, they go down on my butt and slam it the way we beat corn with wooden sticks in tight sacks.

I see her tongue, purple snake screaming out of dark cave trying to fly free, spitting out Why did you do that?, and Why?, and Why?, I see her tongue slashing the air like my grandfather's whip.

I see her hands red like poppies, they too are swollen as if ripped from my body. She breathes her Why?'s as if speaking through a mask, her hands collapse on my face once, twice, and then stop. I see them going down along her body, pulsing, engorged by the pleasure of touching my skin, red guillotines
I cannot explain why, I do not open my mouth. I fear my words will roll off my tongue like rocks and crush her, and if I turn my eyes to her she will drown. I fear my scream will deafen her, I let it inflate my insides like a hot air balloon. If she pricks me with her nail I will burst. I cannot run away, my steps will crack the earth in canyons. My arms, extended like octopus branches, will wrap around her tight like a corset. My skin grows purple pansies on the back, I want to take my shirt off and show them to the sun. her, I let it inflate my insides like a hot air balloon. If she pricks me with her nail I will burst. I cannot run away, my steps will crack the earth in canyons. My arms, extended like octopus branches, will wrap around her tight like a corset. My skin grows purple pansies on the back, I want to take my shirt off and show them to the sun.

She doesn't understand. I am six years old and I want to be a teacher.
May

Joe Laskas
Attention

C.H. Edwards

Attention
walls of words
sweet Syntax Seduction
equivocal Side
Slide
between, Betwixt
ruby + Luscious
those Lips
Grown From
erotic hip(s)
crystalline Time
frozen + Caught
overt + Around
piercing, Punishing
those Eyes
nestled to
brain’s Lipid Concubine
time to define
line after Love
believe
balance
don’t Blink
“No.”
“Have you seen what we’re doing out here?”
“I said I’m not interested.”
“So, you’re not interested in something but you don’t know what that something is?”
“Yes.”
I never understood those people. I understood not wanting to have your telescope pictures taken; okay, they’re not for everybody. But when people didn’t even want to gain the knowledge of what all these guys with cameras, shorts that say “SCOPES”, and little keychains everyone keeps looking in were doing on the beach everyday, I almost felt sorry for them.
“Okay, you have a good one out here,” I said.
I talked to another family unfamiliar with Telescope Pictures. They were openly curious.
“We take the pictures right out here on the beach. Then you come in to the studio and pick out just the ones you like. Those are $4.95 each,” I said.
“And they come in those little keychains?” the Mom asked me.
“Yes. The pictures come out awesome.”
It was another great photo shoot. The group was fun. The whole family was smiling, laughing, and having a good time. The pictures were going to be awesome. The day had finished and I spotted Chris. “I can’t believe how dead the beach is,” I said.
“Another waist deep day,” he replied.
When the water was rough the lifeguards would signal that people weren’t allowed beyond waist deep. This meant less people stayed on the beach and those that did were usually grumpy. Not the best conditions for those in our line of work. I flipped open my camera bag and checked my watch. “Let’s go
in," I said.

Yeah."

We automatically moved our camera bags to our left shoulders. The left shoulder was for slacking, the right for working. In slacking silence we trudged across the sand back towards the studio. Chris broke the silence.

"Isn't today the day?"

"Yep, Erin's bus leaves at nine."

"And you're finally breaking up?"

"She's going back to Michigan. I don't want to deal with that."

"It's about time. You wasted your entire summer on this chick. Think about those times you ran wingman for me. Chicks dig you man, and you blow them off because you have a girlfriend. I mean, come on man, you could have gotten laid almost every night. You didn't need Erin."

"It wasn't about sex."

"Yeah, whatever Mike. Don't feel too bad. It's not like we didn't all warn her about dating you."

"Yeah, I warned her too."

We reached the steps and walked onto the world of the boardwalk. My feet weren't bothered, I'd been doing this everyday for three months. We passed the boardwalk game microphone jockey that we passed everyday. "SCOPES," he said.

"I'm getting really sick of that," said Chris.

"I think I'd miss it if it wasn't there. Let's run in."

"Whatever."

So we ran. I've always hated running. Somehow, that summer, I started running and enjoying it. It was a nice way to end the day. We ran along the boardwalk. Hard cement, splinters, rough boards, and nails all being dodged by my bare feet. Of course, the people had to be dodged as well.

"I hate salmon. This is a right-handed society," I said.

"Yeah, what the hell? Is this England? Get on your side
of the boardwalk.”

We ran down the boardwalk to Oak Avenue and then down Oak to the studio. My lungs burned as I entered the studio and the cool air rushed over me. Kelly, the manager checked me in. “Today’s the big day,” he said.

“Yep.”

“So you’re really going to end it?”

“Yeah...”

And then he paused. I always hated when Kelly paused like that. “But you don’t have to. You know she’d be okay with trying the long distance thing.”

“I know, Kell.”

“I thought you two were doing great.”

“Yeah, Erin is great. And we’ve had a great time together. But I don’t want a long distance relationship.”

“I’ve had a lot of summer flings. And they can be cool. But when the right girl comes along, you’re dumb if you let her go. I know you’ve had this breakup planned from the beginning but you’re allowed to change your mind. Whatever you do, just try not to screw everything up. We all warned her, but I’d still rather not lose her as a friend.”

“Alright, Kell.”

I grabbed my keys and went to the parking lot. I drove home in the “Sube”, my ‘88 Subaru station wagon. I loved that car. I told everybody I loved that car. Even though it sucked, I loved that car. I had never told Erin I loved her. Maybe I should have.

When I got home I noticed the stale apartment smell and threw open the window. Joe was visiting his parents or off with his girlfriend or something. Sometimes I wondered if it was worth renting an apartment. With all the nights I spent at Erin’s and all the time I spent at work I wasn’t there very often. I jumped in the shower and it felt good. It was always nice to wash the beach off my body for the day. I stepped too close to the edge of the shower and felt the slime under my foot.
I really should have cleaned the shower at least once that summer but it would have required an effort. I wasn’t into effort. After my shower I made instant soup. 3 minutes 20 seconds in the microwave. Another effortless meal. The phone rang. It was Erin.

“Are we still on for tonight?” she asked. She had an awesome voice. Even when she talked about baseball I enjoyed the conversation. I hated baseball. We would talk for hours on end about the most random things, like whether Velveta or cheddar was a better cheese for nachos. That was one of the things I loved about Erin, or liked about Erin a lot.

“No, I think I need to stay home and floss tonight,” I said.

“Jerk. I’ll meet you at the studio at 7 o’clock.”

“I’ll be there.”

“You always are,” she said in that tone meant to provoke me.

“Could we not have this argument?”

“OK. Sorry.”

“Happy Birthday.”

“Thanks.”

“Twenty-two. Damn you’re getting old.”

“That’s me, the old maid.”

“I need to get back to work. I’ll see you at seven, okay?”

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.”

I hung up the phone quickly. I knew she liked to play this game where she wouldn’t hang up the phone until she heard me hang up. I couldn’t deal with that game right now. I sat on the balcony and ate my cup of soup alone. Alone. Then I went back to work. At work we prepared the scopes for the customers from that day. At 7 o’clock we were still working. At 7:05 Erin arrived. She had a great tan and her hair was blonde from the sun. Her refusal to wear make-up made her that much
more attractive. She was wearing the little black dress I loved, the one she wore the night we went to Atlantic City and she won $500. I couldn't help thinking about how I would love to have a woman who looked that good on my arm for the rest of my life.

“We’re almost done, I promise,” I said. She gave me a dirty look. Somehow she could make a dirty look sexy.

“If you want him to be done sooner you can help us scope up,” said Chris. He got an even dirtier look. This one wasn’t nearly as sexy, although she did start helping us.

“Happy Birthday Erin,” said Kelly. The room was filled with happy birthdays from everyone there.

“Thanks,” said Erin.

“I hope Mike is taking you someplace classy tonight. If he doesn’t, give him a kick in the balls,” said Kelly.

“Thanks Kelly,” I said.

“Will I be able to take care of your film?” Kelly asked me.

“Yeah, it’s all in order.”

“You can go then, I’ll get it ready.”

“Thanks Kelly,” said Erin with a smile.

“Thanks Kell. This means a lot to me,” I said.

“No problem. Erin, you take care of yourself. Don’t have too much fun in Michigan. And I’ll be looking for you at the Shamrock next summer. You know you’re my favorite waitress.”

“I’ll miss you Kelly. It’s been fun.” Erin hugged Kelly goodbye.

“I’ll miss you too. Take care of yourself,” he said.

We left the studio and walked to the end of the block to Alfe’s. When we entered Alfe’s, Frank Sinatra could be heard singing softly. They always played Frank at Alfe’s. That was one of the things I loved about that place. That and the food was
awesome. The lights were low and candles burned on the tables. There was just the right amount of nautical decorations to remind you that you were at the shore without creating a cheesy “the owner of this place must have helped hunt Jaws” feel. The waiter visited our table and brought us our drinks. Erin mocked me for staring at my reflection in the mirror.

“It’s not my fault. The mirror is just there. Besides, you have to admit I look good in this shirt.” I swear I wasn’t always that vain. Okay, I was always vain, but not that vain. She was quiet. The waiter came back and we ordered.

“I didn’t work today. I packed and took care of a few other things,” she said.

“I shot a pair of lesbians today. That was weird. I asked the one if there was a jealous boyfriend I had to worry about. She said, ‘Yeah, she’s standing right behind you.’”

“What did you do?”

“I just sort of laughed and finished the shoot.”

The conversation rolled by. We simply spoke to fill the void that otherwise might be occupied by a discussion of the impending doom of our relationship. Every relationship ends in one of three ways: you get married, you break up, or somebody dies. I guess I should have been happy no one was dying. By the time we finished dinner and I paid the bill it was a little past eight o’clock. She had offered to pay but I liked taking her out to dinner. I left a big tip. Every time I went out with Erin I left a big tip; one of the costs incurred when dating a waitress.

We went back to her place. For once, going back to her place didn’t have anything to do with sex. We had said those good-bYES the night before. I packed her stuff in my car while she changed.

“How is it you can move in two suitcases and a backpack but when I go back to school I’ll fill up my car at least twice?” I asked as we stood by the Sube.

“I shipped a lot of my stuff home already.”

She had also put a lot of it in storage until next summer.
I knew that already but I was hoping she would crack a joke about being a better packer, or smarter, or just having less stupid shit. No such luck. So much for lightening the mood.

“’member our first date?” she said. She put her arms around me and her head on my chest. I hated it when she would mangle words and use her little kid voice but I loved it when she cuddled up to me.

“Yes, I remember our first date,” I said.

“We went to Sunset Beach and watched the sun go down over the cement boat and we snuggled on the beach. Then you took me to Cape May and we bought those little peach candies and argued about whether the seashell shape or the ring ones were better. And we went to the free symphony performance. I had a really good time that night.”

“I know, so did I.”

I held her.

“Happy Birthday,” I said and pulled a box neatly wrapped in white paper from the Sube. The white paper was actually a bag from work that I had trimmed to exactly the right size to use as wrapping paper. I don’t know why I even wrapped it. She already knew it was a watch. As a matter of fact, she helped me pick it out. I didn’t want the responsibility of picking out the right watch. I didn’t want the responsibility. Erin unwrapped her gift.

“Look at the back,” I said.

“You got it engraved. Summer of Mike. 1999.”

“Consider it a preemptive spite for your next boyfriend.”

“You’re a jerk.”

“I know.” I was a jerk. I was about to send a perfectly good relationship down the toilet and I was already trying to sabotage her next relationship. We just stood there for a moment as the wind blew, as it only can at the shore. It was warm and cold at the same time. Her hair rippled in the wind. I looked at my watch without breaking
our embrace.

"We should get going, it's 8:40."

"I know."

I held her door as she got in the car. We drove to the bus station in silence. We arrived at the station and got ready for her departure. 8:50. Ten more awkward minutes were all that stood between me and the single life again. Three great months were coming to an end.

"My dad hated my brother and I watching TV all the time and he threatened to get one of these bus station TV's that takes quarters," I said.

"Really?" she asked.

"No, but it would make a good story."

I think she smiled. I thought it was a good sign. We hugged and I kissed her on the forehead. She didn't handle the kiss on the forehead well. I could feel the tears on my neck. I knew this was the moment, my moment. I could stop the pain. I could put forth the effort, take on the responsibility, and commit. I could take on a long distance relationship. I could propose. I could do a lot of things. I took a deep breath. I paused a moment. And I didn't do anything. I just held her. I am a jerk. Erin pulled away from me.

"Get going. You don't need to wait here with me."

She didn't really mean it. She wanted me to stay and watch her get on the bus, wave to her as it pulled away, and watch the bus disappear in the distance but I didn't. I saw my opening and took it. I gave her my best charming smile.

"Bye," I said.

"Bye."

And I walked away.
Sometimes they tell me you’re nitroglycerine;
dangerous, yes, unstable.
You animate my suspension.
Maybe if I let you sit still,
You’d settle.
I’ll settle
for someone else;
a glass of distilled water –
lukewarm, of course,
(no heat, no shivers)
a dilutant I can
dissolve in, to
suspend my animation.
Mark Peacock
Ribs

Matthew Terenna
recombination

Kristin Geist

i can’t blame the ants for needing my insides
for eating out my liver and taking the poisons out of my brain
yet now my smile forever lost to the innocent wind of their feet
that grazed my skin?

and the hollow of my ear full of forgotten joy and remembrance
of pain as their feces seeps out of my nose

felt not too long before red ants attacked my heart and had a
fulfilling breakfast

leaving me to bleed with anger but knowing I nourished their
hungry bellies makes me feel strong

yes the fire felt with every bite stung my eyes and left my hair
aflame

pain wrenched my stomach and a sea of anguish touched my
toes

stinging sensation ants’ teeth digging canals in my now red
burning skin to reach my soul

a soul so black with loss will feed these ants for eternity and
house their judging scarlet eyes

and yet now as the filling into my lonely life begins
knowing how empty my breast is
they are sorrowfully smiling because I will forget they ever hurt
me by welcoming their descendents into my veins.
86
Buried

Jen Heil

“Its 4 am and I’m naked” he says
Half-baked stoner grin
Eyes pools of trippy light
Where nakedness comes naturally
I envy him
Extra white against the pink of his lips
Teeth gleam
As he sucks orange life into his body
My own eyes glare green
I want to be that free
“Don’t you love this feeling? Sometimes, you just got to be free, dontcha think?”
I can’t think, so I just stare blankly back
Then I kiss him
Just so he shuts up
Or maybe so he doesn’t realize my ability for
Overwhelming impotence
Because my own naked carrion
Somehow refuses to use
The Freedom I’ve given
Posed prim and proper
Imprisoned I
Fight and flail
Against the scratch of angora
Kick and stretch
Against strict stiffness of new denim
No one even realizes my soft speech
Is a sweaty scream

I want out I want out I want out

I want
To be free of this mind
Let me leave these
Cloaks mittens mufflers turtlenecks and tank tops
Shirts and sweaters
I want
To fight repression
Let me hang these
Long short strap no strap lacy racy and plain
Underwear
From the trees
I want

To scare you all with my nakedness

Goddamn it you’re no help at all
Because what I want
Not even I can do
To peel back layers and lamentations
And find my naked mind
Closer to Nature

Natalie MacConnell
Going Home

Harry Michel

I hear the drums of my people
Pounding in my heart.
The voices of my family over the gaps of time,
It tears us apart.
I feel the blood of my fore fathers course through my veins,
As it falls from the past to make me who I am.
So as I wait on my knees,
My hands pressed against the never-ending skies
Eyes waiting patiently for their sign
I hear the sound of drums start to rise.
I see it begin,
The red rain they send.
The blood that holds secrets of great, great grandfathers and mothers.
Great uncles and cousins
The royal blood of kings, queens, and warriors
The red rain stains my skin. It stains my soul.
The patterns of red drops are familiar but I’ve forgotten
So they run across my body into a sign that symbolizes nothing
And seep down into my pores so these signs I may once again know.
So I may begin the understanding, for I feel they anticipate my coming.
I hear the hands starting to pound vigorously against the gazelle hied skin,
And I hear a chanting.
It’s of a language that I’ve long forgotten but I am remembering.
Come! Come!
The voices start running across the whistling wind,
Then the rhythm of the drums changes patterns and the people begin.
Come home! Come home!
My great grandmothers and fathers and their mothers and fathers
All in unison—Come home! Come home!
I hear it and I’m listening and I’m coming but the direction I begin
Makes me stop and question.
O great fathers where is it?
Its not here? Was I ever there?
What is it not here, where I am now stand? Come home! Come home!
Home grand mothers and fathers for a long time I have not known. Must travel over oceans? Look past the horizon?
If I go there will even belong?
Now I realize because of what you ask of me,
That for a long time I’ve been gone, gone from myself, from you, from where I belong
The drummers beating begin to slow down.
Louder than ever I hear them. Come home! Come home!
Well how far must I go to find it?
Is it something material, that’s made of stone and mortar, woods and nails?
Does it occupy space in my time?
Or will I stand in that place and not realize that I’m there?
Will I see it and when I do, will it be something I can feel and call it my home?
And if I have never known this place, can I call it or say that it is my home?
If I seek home, I know it may lead me on a journey that has no point.
Because I will start and there will be no ending because I have no concept of the meaning.
Home, will I ever be?
Is it something I even have to seek?
Because it may be already there, it, within me and I haven’t taken the time to see.
The Lie

Tom Howard

There's this place, if you're interested, that sits unassumingly enough in the lawn behind the art museum and just to the side of a converted nineteenth century church on this campus. Whatever used to be there, I fully don't care, because the only thing that remains is a circular concrete slab set into the ground. I've passed by this place for several years now without recognizing it as anything significant, but that's this campus. At my brother's alma mater up in Vermont, the main lawn in front of Commons drops off suddenly into a valley framed by the Green Mountains. They call it the End of the World. They set up benches there. They get drunk. If you talk to some Bennington College students, they might tell you between swigs of scotch how the local Indians of Vermont and New York would avoid the spot like the plague, and how strange weather patterns always develop directly over the End of the World. If you take that crap seriously, that is. Bennington students are freaky as hell.

So there's this place here on campus that's similar to that, in a way. They have the End of the World - we have the Center of the Universe. I could make up some story about Abe Lincoln took a piss there on his way to Gettysburg or something to legitimize such an august title, but I won't. Truth is a friend of mine was tripping her face off there one night and decided on it. This is the Center of the Universe: four years in Collegeville where most professors have more power over your meager existence than Moses could ever bring to bear, Red Sea and all. So it's very believable, lying there and staring at the clouds, that this is the hub of all reality, unfortunately. Then I remembered Barry.

You see this past summer I completed a psych internship at the New Jersey State Psychiatric Hospital at Greystone, about a fifteen-minute drive from where I grew up. Working with a
doctor there, I completed a case study on one of her sedate charges, an outpatient named Barry. He was only thirty but wholly blind due to advanced type-1 insulin-dependent diabetes. Released from Greystone several years before after being treated for acute depersonalization disorder; where a person feels detached and distant from his or her own experience, body, or self; he lived in an old folk's home.

Most days would be the usual routine of marking up my dog-eared Diagnostic Statistics Manual, writing notes in the margins and trying to look professional. One day though, right before I left, Barry said something that stuck to me. I was leaving for California in a few days for a girl I hadn't seen in three years. Her name was Kate. She was the type who insisted on ending every phone conversation with an 'I love you.' I think she truly meant it a few times. I thought I had too.

Barry and I were on the front porch of the home, shooting the breeze before I left. He was in one of those rocking chairs lonely old men like. He settled in and sort of rolled his head in my direction. I hate talking to blind people. It feels like they're uncontrollably staring at you from behind those dark glasses, as if they can see more than you ever will. Then he told me something.

'What's the saying? Seeing is believing?' He leaned forward and tapped his temple with a finger. 'Well I'm blind, and I don't believe, and I can tell you that behind everything you have ever believed in is a lie. It is the lie. You'll find out soon enough.'

And that was it. I caught my flight that Tuesday, finally doing what we had always talked about. Kate was strange like that. I don't think she would have ever done something like this on her own, something like flying across country for someone. She said she put all her hope in fate, because it was the only thing beyond addiction that was consistent in her life. Bull.

When she picked me up at LAX, at first I walked right past her. Her hair was short and dark, and she stood in a half-
We got my bags and made for the car. It’s funny what you seem to recall. On the sidewalk as we moved towards Kate’s car sat two girls. They could only have been seventeen or eighteen. As I passed by, the blonde one with the pretty smile said hello to me. I was going to respond, but instead I followed Kate and walked by without saying a word. I can still see the girl’s smile.

On the ride to her apartment, Barry was the farthest thing from my mind. We talked some. I was really happy to see Kate. I was visiting for a week, I said, and my plane left next Tuesday at noon. Looking out at the San Gabriel Mountains on the 10 Freeway east, I realized how far I’d gone. Like I knew where I was going.

LA is shaped like a big ashtray with a city in the middle, all spread out. It can shock you with its immense sprawl at first, but then you realize just how fake it all is. Out of work models walk down the street in West LA with portfolios in hand, just in case they get discovered, people so totally laid back they bore themselves. When you are tired of SoCal, you are tired of life. Totally. Rad. Shoot me. These people can really be the worst snobs. Natives of California have the most overdeveloped sense of pride of anyone except Texans, as if because you stand on a corner hocking maps to stars’ homes long enough you are somehow part of the Hollywood elite, by proxy. I didn’t see the big Hollywood sign, but I did I would’ve let loose and pissed on it.

Not all of California is bad though. Its natural beauty is unprecedented. We drove out to the Mojave Desert by Indio one time. In a canyon worn away by centuries of wind and rain a flash flood nearly overwhelmed us. We pushed Kate’s Jeep out of the mud and watched the storm melt into a rainbow. That was the good time, but something happened.

I had an ex-girlfriend once who told me I was ‘the most genuine person she had ever met’ in the same sentence she dumped me. Her name was Jocelyn Merselisse. We don’t talk anymore. She had a problem, which was this—she would always
second-guess what she felt. I never knew if she would be feeling
the same thing she did now in a month, or if she even remem-
bered feeling what she had the month before. She was a big
pain in my ass sometimes. I really loved her.

I have a problem. I’m too amorous. Some might label
this as conceited, but it’s very different from that really. It’s been
really damn annoying at times. Coming back from my trip, I
almost missed my connection flight out of Salt Lake City
because I stopped to talk with a girl working at a gift shop who
said she liked my hat. I can be a pain in the ass in my own way,
too. If I feel like it, I’ll fly across country for someone, but not
just anyone. Maybe for someone like Kate, or what I thought
was someone like Kate.

She had a routine. Every day Kate would smoke out
until she didn’t care anymore. She didn’t care who knew she
smoked out, either. There are some people who get a kick out
of being secretive, but Kate, Dusty, Neil, Rick and Miguel
would sit around the apartment until resin coated the ceilings.
After a while, I no longer cared about things, so I stopped.
Afterwards, Neil and Miguel would drive to In & Out burgers
to get a double cheeseburger deal. I suggest the Five-by-Five if
you ever go to an In & Out in California.

By the Thursday night I was there, Kate was becoming
more and more distant, with less to say every night. I came out
there to visit her, I said, and I wanted to spend some time with
her. By that Saturday, everyone was going to an all-night rave in
the desert. Kate didn’t want to pay ten bucks for the tickets, so
she and I were going to sneak in. Then the time came to leave,
as everyone was packing up.

‘Guys?’ Kate said, moving an ashtray on the coffee table.
‘I don’t think I’m gonna go.’

Rick looked up. ‘Why not? What’s up?’

Rick was Kate’s ex-boyfriend. He was a quiet guy,
around me anyway. I don’t quote know how he took me. I felt
bad for him, in a way. Without even looking at me, Kate
answered, 'I'm kinda tired. Besides, me and Smith were going to do something tonight.'

That was a surprise, but I was happy we'd actually at least have time to talk or something. Four days in a town and I hadn't been anywhere.

'Oh. Okay.' He said.

The others packed up some bags, packed up their glow sticks and toys and left the apartment. The first time I met this guy Anthony, he said he had just bought some crystal meth. A van had rolled up and the dude was selling. Anthony forgot where he left the methedrine baggie the same day. I shake my head everytime I think what they were into.

So now it was just Kate and I as they filtered out to their cars. She sat down and grabbed the remote for the TV. Hercules was on. I turned to her.

'So, let's go out and do something. Maybe get some coffee? I haven't really had a chance to talk with you much yet.'

She stared at the television. 'Listen, Smith, I'm really tired. I just want to watch TV and then go to sleep, okay?'

'I thought you said we were going out?'

No answer.

'Kate, I want to talk. I really want to talk with you.' I need an answer.

'Look,' she said with a sigh. 'I'm really too worn out. I'm going to bed.'

I sat in silence as she stood and walked to her bedroom, then turned and said with a pseudo-caring lilt in her voice.

'Good-night…'

To this day, I still haven't gotten my answer. The closest was a conversation I had with her a few months before I left to see her.

Kate mentioned that she was worried about what might happen if I came to visit her. She said she had a habit of pushing people close to her away. I dismissed it as low self-esteem at the time.

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I stayed up that entire night, and in the morning I took a walk. I decided to walk all the way to the mountains. After three hours of walking down West Arrow Highway and over a few streets, I made it to the intersection of Mountain Avenue and Foothill Boulevard. I walked into a sporting goods warehouse and bought myself a pair of blue Chuckies, then I began the long walk back, following my discarded cigarette butts like Hansel.

There are only so many words you can use to express yourself. A close friend of mine finds it amazing how much someone can do with just twenty-six letters and eight punctuation marks. I find it amazing how little some people can do with all of that. For the rest of my stay, Kate stopped talking to me. On the drive back to the airport, not even a word. I made a few playful, friendly comments that she smirked at, but that was all. When we drove up to the terminals, I asked her, ‘So are you going to park and say goodbye, or are you just going to drop me off?’

‘I’m just going to drop you off.’

I opened the door, picked up my bags, and threw down a letter I had written that night. ‘I wrote this for you. Read it.’

She said nothing in a half-smile.

The Black Widow spider of Southern California, *Lactrodectus hesperus*, makes no pretensions about its damn purpose in life. Its chaotic web, devoid of all pattern, has one purpose of ensnaring the unwary. The Widow is not overtly aggressive; it simply waits in its tangle of silk cobweb with deadly patience. The males often leaves. Males are not often seen because they are usually eaten by the female after mating. Female *Lactrodectus hesperae* can often be seen sporting a damn half-smile on their faces.

It really is funny what memories come back to you. It surprises me. Whether it’s a girl that smiles at you at an airport or visiting your mother in the hospital when you’re five and you only know that mom’s sick. The light coming in from the
window as your dad holds your hand brightens her tired face, happy to see her children. You only find out years later that she nearly died of breast cancer then, a hushed secret — a lie that protected you. Or the time when you were three and you stood outside of day-care next to your dad’s office with your five year old brother and seven year old sister guarding you, only knowing that something bad was going on. You were never told what happened, mom only cried. You found that out on your own; you sorted through the lies. The truth always comes out.

So there’s this place on campus that I go. I get drunk. I sit. I could tell you about it, but I won’t. Like the time I walked out there in the freezing rain and it felt like the damn Center of the Universe and I couldn’t cry, only shout, all contorted. I still think of her. I still miss her. ‘It’s funny. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.’ Truth is, anything else is a lie.
Bound for Happiness  
*Michael Pomante*

To stare out the window of a train;  
Steel metal beams keeping the energy away from all life.  
Small wooden depots housing the travelers from the weather,  
The foliage afraid to live, but ordered to stay alive.  
The clouds growing lighter as the destination approaches,  
Abandoned tracks with no home and no care.  
A small stream exiting only because of the rain.  
Concrete bridges supporting another world that blankets my own,  
The Iron Works factory thriving, but appearing most desolate.  
A children's park where no boys and girls can be spotted,  
Barb wire fences protecting them from us or maybe from them.  
The carcass of an automobile rotting quietly beneath the cloud covered sky,  
Empty streets, most people too afraid to traverse.  
Amazement as the scenery develops while the sunlight brightens,  
The buildings cry out for help, but no one cares to listen.  
Already, they are miles away.  
Rows of broken houses attempt to reach out their arms and grab you.  
Sunlight has completely won against the darkness.  
Only the ominous tunnels shade our eyes from the brightness for just one moment.  
The park smiles with green grass and healthy oak trees.
Paying Your Dues

Rich Neal

The end of the week was always welcomed with open arms. The weekend provides a break from the everyday toils of work and school starting with T.G.I.F. Friday means primarily one thing to most people, pay day. And Paul Paxson was no exception because on Fridays he got paid. However, Paul wasn't your typical 9-5 worker. His place of business was at Father Judge High School where he collected money from fellow students that had lost bets during the week.

Father Judge, home of the Crusaders, was an all-boy Catholic school that brought eleven different parishes of Northeast Philadelphia together under one roof. Most of the Crusaders came from the same background of row homes with no yards, just a patio and a parking spot for your hardworking middle class dad to park his car after work. Of course, Judge boys didn’t always get along in peace and harmony. To spend six and a half hours in the same building day after day while mixing different parishes, neighborhoods, and gangs resulted in an initial feeling out process. The feeling out process didn’t take very long when it came to Paul Paxson. In the midst of the 1500 white Catholic teenage boys, all dressed in light blue sweaters, Paul Paxson stood out. New students quickly learned about Paul, that he took bets, when you paid, and how he collected.

Paul Paxson was a big, tough, ugly son of a bitch who wasn’t too bright but knew how to get his job done. You see, he had a special knack for knowing how to look big, tough and ugly and say “Where’s my fuckin’ money?” He was quite good at it. Because if you put a losing bet in through Paul you made sure you paid come Friday. As far as I know his collecting rate was 100%. And why shouldn’t it be? Who in their right mind wouldn’t do everything possible to get Paul his money?

“Fuckin’ Steelers. Who loses to The Rams? Cost me 800 bucks.” This is what I heard from Jim Gallen as I sat next to 100
him at the table for fourth period lunch. It wasn’t uncommon to hear Gallen complaining about losing some money over the weekend but 800 dollars was a little steep, even for Jimmy “The Mush”. “The Mush” part came from the movie, *The Bronx Tale*. There was a character nicknamed “The Mush” because everything he touched turned to mush. This was similar to Gallen because all his bets were bad. No one wanted to hear that they had bet the same game as Jim because if you did you were jinxed and were going to lose. We were all good friends of Jim but this was seen as a fact. Jimmy was a jinx.

“Yo Gallen, did ya turn in your money for the Ten Week Raffle? You’re a pretty lucky guy. You’ll probably win.” Here was Tom Clemens, Gallen’s best friend, just getting to the table and the first thing he does is takes a cheap shot.

“What Clemens? What raffle?” As soon as the words left his mouth the whole table shook their heads not knowing whether to just laugh or to smack Jim for his stupidity. Only every day for the last week and a half had the school been reminding students to turn in the money for the annual drawing. “Shit! I was wondering what they were collecting over there.” Obviously, Gallen forgot. But he had other things on his mind, mainly not having Paul Paxson’s eight hundred dollars.

The whole table had a level of sympathy for Gallen because no one wanted to be in his shoes, having to look over their shoulder for Paul Paxson. Everyone felt a little sorry for him except Tom Clemens. I never understood that about Clemens. I can see making jokes about the situation and breaking balls but here was Clemens rooting against him saying, “screw Gallen, he’ll get what he deserves.” Clemens, who had his initials “TC” on a ring worn on his left hand, was the most stubborn person that I’ve ever met. No one ever called him “TC” but when he got riled up and tried to make his point, the “TC” was what you saw flying all around while he talked.

Heated arguments with Clemens were always high-
lighted by that “TC” getting jabbed in someone’s face. The kid never budged on what he felt was right no matter how off the wall his concepts were. His most famous saying in an argument was “That’s your opinion, you’re entitled to it. You’re wrong, but you’re entitled to it.” This quote meant an end to any previously two-sided discussion.

Gallen always took his fair share of abuse but this achievement received the most. Dave Collins, who just seemed to like breaking Jim’s balls, opened the insults. “You’re such friggin’ mush, man. Why don’t you just give Paul your paycheck every week.” Everyone else just degraded Gallen’s intelligence and luck for a couple minutes and then someone suggested that he should kill himself. This was to be expected, this type of ribbing occurred every week. However this time it didn’t seem to bother Gallen, which was odd. You couldn’t mess with Jim without him snapping.

“Rough week, huh Gallen?” I asked as he just stared ahead tuning everyone out. Even though he didn’t answer right away I knew he would. It was weird I hadn’t known Gallen as long as everyone else had but I thought Jim felt more comfortable talking to me. I think Jim only expected his friends to bust on him, never to take interest in him. I used to bet too and me and Jim would bullshit about the games. I think I was the only one not to forever make fun at his luck. He was probably impressed that I would listen to him say what happened in his bets without telling him he was just a born loser.

Gallen had lost a lot of bets in his life but never eight hundred dollars worth. A hundred dollars here, two hundred there, but nothing he couldn’t scrape together by Friday. By Friday, Gallen would have his pay from bussing tables to blow and could bum a couple bucks off someone that won that week and felt bad for Gallen. “You didn’t lay all 800 on the Pittsburgh game did you?”

“Nah. Couple games for a 100 or so. Comes to 960 with the juice.”

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“You got the money. Where’d ya get a thousand bucks?” Jim half chuckled, “I ain’t got it yet. I’m gonna talk to Paul ’bout it. I’m cool wit’ him.”

“Bullshit.” No way was Jim serious. He couldn’t believe that, he must be desperate. Paul Paxson isn’t the type of guy that you’re going to talk to about not having his money and he’s definitely not someone you’re “cool wit.” The only reasons people hang around Paul are because Paul lets them hang around him or they’re crazy. And the only reason Jim Gallen was allowed to say hi to Paul Paxson is because he gave him money almost every week. If Gallen quit betting cold turkey, Paxson would find someone else to say hi to. Gallen kept arguing that Paul would cut him a break if they talked but I told him to get another solution. We were interrupted when our table stood up to watch our favorite event of the day.

Grubbing for money was a cafeteria pastime at Father Judge. Mike Sonnie and Bill Hill were well-seasoned veterans. Everyday they would panhandle, or intimidate freshmen for some spare change. But the best part is when they would ask their buddy, Paxson for some change. Our table watched the pizza line as it began to fall apart as people were scrambling to get out of the way of the two bodies rumbling towards them. BANG! Mike Sonnie and Bill Hill’s bodies crashed into the wall diving for a precious quarter.

“Yo Gallen, who got it?” I asked even though I already knew the answer.

“Uh… Looks like Hill,” replied Gallen.

It was always Hill. When Sonnie and Hill would pester people for change, Paul would roll a quarter into the wall and watch them fight over it. It was crazy but so was Bill Hill. That’s the only reason I can guess why he always won. Sonnie was taller, weighed more but Hill was a maniac, a real loony tune. Although counselors believed he was gifted, the smartest in school, he didn’t give a shit.
Instead he catered to the reputation of being the crazy kid who used to shoot people in the face with a b.b. gun back in grade school. A real class act.

Paxson would stand over the two knuckleheads and give out a loud laugh. He got as big a kick out of it as we did. At this moment Gallen announced he was going to go tell him that he didn’t have the money. I guess he figured he’d catch Paul when it looked as if he was enjoying himself. As soon as he got up everyone started debating if Paxson would kill Gallen on the spot.

Clemens hoped that Paxson would beat the shit out of him right there. “You don’t do that shit. If Gallen’s gonna bet he should have the money to back it up. Whose fault is it? Paxson’s? Is it Paxson’s fault that Gallen’s an idiot? Fuck Gallen, he should pay.”

The whole table stared at him walking over to Paxson. No one ever questioned Gallen’s courage, just his brains. No sane person would tell Paxson that sort of news at least not without a few states or an ocean separating them. I think our table watched, maybe hoping and expecting Paxson to just snap Jim’s neck or rip his heart out. Paxson had seven or eight inches on Gallen and maybe a hundred or so pounds on him. Paxson looked down his nose at Jim as he pleaded his case. The discussion didn’t last long and he walked back to the table, intact. Collins couldn’t resist the temptation and blurted out, “What he say, ‘forget the whole thing?’ ”

Not even hearing Collins’s comment, Jim began rambling like a hostile witness, “I’m dead. I’m dead. He’s gonna kill me.”

“Good. You deserve it.”

“Fuck you, Clemens.” Gallen put his head down and started to laugh. He’d lost it. It was starting to set in that he was in trouble. “There’s no way I can get that money. I can’t ask my parents. None of you got that kind of cash. Once 2:30
rolls around, I’m done.”

I looked at Gallen; he couldn’t sit still. He had his head down, chewing on a pen cap and rubbing his eyes hard with the palms of his hands. I wouldn’t want to be inside his head, crazy thoughts rambling back and forth. When he sat up he looked around the table with a desperate look on his face. Nobody had any answers for him. We didn’t really think Paxson would kill Gallen but we all believed he’d beat the piss out him. Both Hill and Sonnie would probably help in the beating. And the bitch was he would still owe the money. He’d give Gallen a couple of more days to get the money before he’d beat him again. This situation was a win-win for all parties involved except “The Mush.”

“I’m gonna rob that lady over there,” Gallen said angrily. “I’m gonna go over there and just hit her in the fuckin’ head and grab that box.”

“Whoa Gallen! What lady?”

“The fuckin’ lady collecting that raffle money. There’s like forty bucks per student over there.” The lady had to be at least seventy years old with snow-white hair and a gray shawl over her shoulders. She was putting all the envelopes of tickets and cash into a box with files.

“You can’t do that. It don’t make any sense. With your luck you’ll get caught, expelled, arrested, kicked out of your house and Paxson will still kick the shit out of you. C’mon, Gallen, someone will hook you up with the money.”

“Who! Ain’t nobody gonna give me that kinda money. I wouldn’t give me that kinda money. I’m gonna do it.” Now Gallen was in a rage, he glared at me, “I fuckin’ go down, I go down. You’re not involved so don’t worry about it.”

“Dude, do what ya gotta do man. But you should get some kind of distraction going first.” Gallen wasn’t listening to me anymore. He stormed out of his seat and the bell rang dismissing class and sending the cafeteria towards the exits. As Gallen walked towards the lady he hesitated and got caught in
the bunch of people pushing to fit through the doors. I knew Gallen was desperate enough to do it but I didn’t want him to hit that old lady.

The pushing shifted back towards the inside as a crowd swelled around a fight that had broken out. People went flying into the table in front of the old woman as people started jumping into the fight. Disciplinarians came rushing down the hall pushing people aside. The disciplinarians appeared from the pile separating and gripping Bill Hill and Tom Clemens. Everyone was screaming and pushing still as Clemens and Hill were dragged upstairs. I looked down for the box of files; envelopes and papers were spilled onto the floor. The cafeteria was being lead outside and I saw no sign of Gallen.

That night I went to Clemens’s to see what had happened to him and see if he had heard from Gallen. When I knocked on his back door he screamed, “C’mon in.”

I walked in and heard Clemens laughing above a blaring stereo. There were cans of Schmidt’s all over the table and I saw Clemens bent over, laughing. When I looked at Clemens the first thing I noticed was his new black eye and fat lip; the first thing I noticed about Gallen was that there wasn’t a scratch on him. “Yo Clemens, I’m serious. Seriously Clemens.” Gallen was leaning over Clemens, holding a rolled up newspaper.

“I’m telling ya. Minnesota’s a lock.”
CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Algayer... Jeffrey Algayer is a junior computer science major. He enjoys throwing knives at furry little animals and eating Jell-O with his toes. His motto: Food is Good (except at Wismer).

Tisha Callery... Writing has always been a part of Tisha’s life—a means of survival. She writes from experience in hopes of ensuring her existence and identity in the world. Tisha would like to dedicate this story to her parents who have constantly striven to instill in her a sense of value and identity.

C. H. Edwards... does not exist. “Nations have great men only despite themselves—just like families. They make every effort not to have them. This means that a great man, in order to exist, must have a power of attack greater than the power of resistance developed by millions of individuals.”—Charles Baudelaire.

Sal Ferrarello... A Slack of All Trades, Sal plays the piano, guitar, and harmonica and has worked as a magician/juggler and a beach photographer. “Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.”—T.H. Huxley

Sue Fialkowski... Sue is a sophomore international relations/sociology major. Her passions include theater, literature, and politics. She hopes to devote her life to studying the inequality of society.

Daniel Gallagher... Daniel Gallagher is a junior English major feels strongly that the U.S. should annex Canada. Damn Canadians.

Kristin Geist... A senior Communication Studies and Theatre major and English minor. In her spare time Kristin talks... a lot.
And she thinks of herself to be short, yet mighty.

**Andrew Gerchak**...It’s not his fault anymore. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns.”—H.H. (V.N.)

**Jen Heil**...Jen is a junior CST major and English minor. This is her first submission to *The Lantern* and the first poem she has ever completed. She thanks her roommate for kicking her butt enough so that she actually finished something...

**Tom Howard**...ontological anarchist? rakish dilettante? mythical founder of the Tom Howard Fanclub [www.gti.net/scooter/fanclub/] or demagogic mugwump? connoisseur of rare and exquisite Byzantine erotica or innocent bystander in the whirlpool of time? You decide...

**benjamin a. jackendoff**...writer/filmmaker who pulls from the dark recesses of the subgenius.

**Joe Laskas**...A junior Chevy-driving psychology major who was kicked out of the NRA, Joe enjoys sittin’ on the porch throwing beer bottles at jerks.

**Tom Lipschultz**...junior English major, Japanese minor. Silly man with hair.

**Natalie MacConnell**...A musician, swimmer, U2 obsessor, mad programmer, Philly sports fan, cat lover, Anglophile, web mistress, avid concertgoer, wrestling fanatic, and lover of assorted obscure British bands.
Philip Malachowski...Philip is a sophomore English major. He is quoted: “Once when I was younger, I painted red dots all over my brother’s and my bodies and told my mom that we had the measles in order to avoid going to church ... Yeah, I’m just naturally slick like that.”

Harry Michel...Hailing from Florida, Fire occupies his intellect with football, writing, singing, and dancing. He would like to thank the people around him for being his inspiration.

Leah Miller...is a sophomore psychology major dramatically questing for truth, if she wasn’t easily distracted by shiny objects.

Rich Neal...A senior and ready to graduate, Rich... doesn’t know.

Susan Patton...A sophomore English major, Susan plays field hockey, lacrosse, writes for The Grizzly, and enjoys playing flute and guitar. She hopes to be “some sort of writer in the future” and pursue a career in broadcast journalism.

Mark Peacock...is a junior.

Michael Pomante...Glamour is the axis on which Michael’s world spins. He’ll counsel you, he’ll dress you, he’ll set you a’ flaming. Either way, this soon-to-be Madonna impersonator craves attention and affection and values great friendships with kind, generous ($), and STABLE people.

Genevieve Romeo...Genevieve randomly meows at inappropriate times. She is a sophomore English major. Her favorite book is “The Phantom Tollbooth” by Norton Juster. Please do not call her Joanevieve.
CONTRIBUTORS (continued)

Monica Stahl...Monica is a sophomore English major. She aspires to be a backup singer for the great Peter Gabriel.

Corey Taylor...Corey is a junior English major with minors in creative writing and sociology. When he's not busy with his horizontal search or making an ass of himself on a daily basis, Corey's probably reading. What a dork!

Matthew Terenna...He is with you in Rockland.

Padcha Tuntha-obsas...A song of liveliness in Thai classical play. She is currently a sophomore majoring in Philosophy who loves words, thoughts, music, and summer breeze. She belongs to a little home in the land of golden ax. Her piece, "I write poetry" needs to thank the visual poetry class of Spring '99 and Mozart.

oana "the goddess" nechita...a poem beyond words. oana has no real reason for spelling her name with all lowercase letters, other than it looks really cool. after winning the poetry prize twice, we made her ineligible by making her editor.
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