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Editor’s Note:  
The Lantern is glorious proof of the creative juices that flow through the veins of Ursinus College. Congratulations to Susannah Fisher, Chris Tereshko, and Rebecca Mersky. We are proud to have such talented displays of artistry in our pages. My sincere thanks to Charles Muñoz and Foster Winans for their selection of the prize winners. Special thanks to the executive board for their patience, the production wizards for their expertise and ingenuity, Jon Volkmer for his guidance, and all of the readers for their thoughtful input.  

Genevieve Romeo
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JUDGES' NOTES

Poetry Winner – “The Amish-Man”

Surely the Amish-man is a muse, bringing plaster, paint and poetry with him. The poem is a dance of ambiguity, witty, contradictory, mysterious - and the poet, who claims to be unable to “stand and watch” nevertheless delightfully does just that. The poem itself is proof of the poet’s ability to cope with whatever falls from the sky. Honorable mentions to “Oxymoron,” “Moving,” and “Running; Arcola.”

–Charles Muñoz is the author of Fragments of a Myth, a collection of poetry, and the novel Stowaway as well as being poetry editor of “Jewish Spectator” for five years and a former Poet Laureate of Bucks County.

Prose Winner – “My Father’s Will”

I chose “My Father’s Will” because the author shows promise as a story-teller, and the writing has some snap to it. This piece also has an unexpected shift that is at its heart: an abusive alcoholic parent finally quits drinking, and reveals himself to be hollow, showing that getting healthy does not necessarily mean getting better. I also want to commend the authors of “This is Not a Pipe,” “Elevator,” and “2% Lowfat.”

–Foster Winans is the author of eight novels and five works of nonfiction, a former columnist for The Wall Street Journal, founder and president of The Writers Room of Bucks County, a writers community in Doylestown, and publisher of a quarterly literary magazine, The Bucks County Writer.
Frets

Drew Petersen

Even on the unwound strings
Bend, hold, release and slide
Grinding tips, small vibrations
Dream soaking soft sensations
Acoustic fingers tickled brightly
Even on the wound low strings
Burn

Amy Scarantino

My mother and I used to drink hot tea together every night before bed. She always made it with loose leaves and a tiny metal tea ball. I was so young. I burned the back of my hand on the kettle once. Third degree Small, though. She held me as I cried. She held my tiny hand and rubbed the back of my head and the next night we drank tea again and the next year she was gone. I noticed today... the scar on my hand...hardly visible anymore.

Time heals so they say. Who are they and what do they know? I look at my hand and I can still feel the metal still hear her soothing voice and I can’t drink tea alone now because some scars never heal

Amy Scarantino
It's Not Easy Bein' Jim

Nicole Borocci
The Amish-man

Susannah Fisher

it all fell through the day the Amish-man came crashing down through my bedroom ceiling.
i lost it. i couldn’t stand to watch. but i stood there, watching, as he picked himself up from the plaster flakes that hid my bed.
slowly, slowly he straightened out. swept his straw hat off on his plain black pants, now lightly powdered. then he walked out and closed the door.
i ran. i ran from the house where Amish-men come through the ceilings bringing plaster, paint, and poetry with them.
i had just painted that room. the summer before. my sister was coming home again. a light sea green.
you just can’t stand in a house where Amish-men tumble through freshly-painted bedroom ceilings and watch. you just can’t.
Sunday morning. Early.
The chirping of birds reminds me of the biological necessity for sleep.
“Hey... I need to hit the sack, man,” Chuck announced, already past the point of drunkenness and venturing upon complete bodily failure.
“I hear ya,” I replied, surveying the damage.
Nine hours’ time, measured in countless empty beer cans added to the already overflowing waste can from the night before, signifies a reasonably productive weekend here—there were only seven of us and three girls.
Chuck and I rose from the comfort of the couch. Stumbling into the bathroom of our suite, we relieved the pain we had earlier been too unmotivated to release. Thank you, birds.
“Yo, did you hook up with that girl?” Adam called from the adjacent stall.
“Nah, she was definitely pissed when my cigarette burned a hole through the sleeve of her blouse. Twice.” Some girls are not as forgiving as the alcohol.
“That was a great game of pong, though, dude. That was my first double-overtime since sophomore year,” he boasted.
“Yeah, I know. Your shot was clutch.”
“I’m getting tired of it though... the beer pong every weekend,” Chuck confessed as he began to wash his hands.
“You heathen!” He laughed at my accusation. I joined him at the sink.
“It’ll be great when you turn twenty-one. We won’t have to do this all the time,” he said, motioning with his head towards the landscape of debauchery out in the common room.
“Yeah, with my luck I’ll be spending weekends in jail ‘cuz of some asshole pig that nails me on the drive home.” We both...
laughed and went to unlock our respective rooms.

"Goodnight, man," Chuck wished, turning back from the
solace of his dark bedroom.

"Until next time."

Age twenty-one. The true test of alcoholism.

It isn't an age when a man considers the future very often. Wantonness and lethargy thrive. Entire paychecks can be blown in a weekend at the local bar. The thrill of participating in such a communion of sinners never seems to wear off. Buying ladies drinks, the infinite games of pool, and the five dollar drafts add up to the point where drinking is a means to escape the unease of having so little money. Actually, a row of shots can help escape almost anything.

My father knows about escape. He never grew out of the bar scene. In fact, my parents met on a blind date in a bar. My mother never would have recognized him had it not been for his beaten-up camouflage Vietnam jacket. I think, as a bachelor, his favorite venue for doing anything, let alone meeting women, was the bar. He could drink to drown out his memories of the war. I imagine one would have to drink a lot to accomplish this. As a husband, he did.

I never witnessed his fall from grace, but I was the unfortunate recipient of its consequences. I can't remember how or when it started, but my first memories of childhood are those of a sore behind. It escalated from violent fits of anger after drinking to much worse. He'd go across the street with two six-packs of Bud to watch the game with the neighbor who could handle his alcohol better. He'd have too many glasses of wine at a friend's dinner party. He'd take the long way home from work, which conveniently passed the bar. Regardless of his method, he'd return home, beer on breath and volatile. He would throw things and curse repeatedly. He'd yell at my mother, loud enough that the neighbors called the police on multiple occasions. He never let me see him hit her, but it wasn't difficult to picture him doing
One day I became a target.

The father who had become my monster would chase me through the house, his heavy steps on the wooden floor shaking the family room and spilling the holiday-dinner china onto the floor. He always caught me eventually. I remember his weapons: the back of his hand, his belt, and the wooden spoon (old fashioned, but used on him when just a boy by my grandmother). He’d roll me over so that my stomach was on the floor and wail away, usually three, but never more than ten, times. His blows were always directed on my behind, nowhere else. This let him justify to himself that it wasn’t abuse.

One particularly horrible fight (if you could call the one-sided salvo a fight) took place outside my bedroom door at the top of the flight of stairs. When I had endured the barrage of backhands, I stood and proudly exclaimed that this time the beating had not hurt. Mistake. He pushed me. Falling into space, feet completely lifted from the ground, I was headed swiftly for the floor below. My father wasn’t about to have a child abuse or assault and battery case brought against him, though. He quickly “rescued” me from that moment of stasis before gravity kicks in. His burly hand wrapped around my wrist and dangled me above the stairs. In an attempt to squirm free of his grasp, I wriggled and kicked in the air. I’d rather have faced a headfirst collision with the floor than another slapping. The grip on my arm, which later bruised badly, probably hurt more than if I had landed flat on the carpet below. He eventually swung me onto the level ground at the head of the stairs. He pushed me against the wall with his forearm pressed tightly against my neck. He told me not to ever mock him again. Needless to say, I never commented on his efficiency in the future.

It was not the intensity of the beatings, but the unrelenting consistency of them that was scariest. The cycle continued, weekend after weekend, school night after school night. My confidence and grades suffered. I grew smarter and smarter

Chris Tereshko
stronger, though. It became harder and harder for him to get me onto my stomach. Sometimes I’d even lie down on my back before he even caught me because turning me over was the hardest part. The more I fought back, though, the more painful it became.

I could fight my father, but I could not fight back the tears his actions brought upon me. Immediately after every spanking, I’d run up to my room, slam the door shut and soak my pillow with despair. While alone, I could feel the same emptiness that my father carried with him every moment of his dreary life. He’d follow me up, also crying, about ten minutes later. He’d tell me that he simply wanted to be a good father and that he loved me. These bawling apologies afterwards were even more pathetic than his drunken outbursts. Somehow he felt that they made his behavior acceptable. I wasn’t as forgiving as the alcohol.

It went on for years until the day that I was finally big enough to fight back successfully. It was then that a scuffle was an injury risk to him as well. It was then that it wasn’t a power trip anymore. His means of releasing anger gone, he began to not even bother returning home from work. Other women were out of his reach, so he reluctantly crashed on a friend’s couch or spent some of his bar money on a motel room. This only lasted about a month until the unthinkable day came when he stopped drinking. Whether it was my mother’s threats to leave, a close call driving home from the pub, or a miraculous moment of catharsis, I will never know. After that day, though, he refused to touch a drop of alcohol.

His presence in my life had been solely that of bully and disciplinarian. After alcohol, it was absent. Silent dinners would end abruptly with his early exit for the A.A. meetings. Little League games went unattended. Advice had to be given by my mother. I spent the hours after school locked in my room, preferring the absence of company to the void of a family downstairs. Alone again, my loneliness echoed that of the shadowy man wandering around our house.

*Chris Tereshko*
Sober, my father was a shell of the man he had once been. He rarely opened his mouth other than to eat, which he did a great deal of, apparently to stop his cravings. He gained weight. He missed work. My father had lost his vigor for life. Silently sitting in front of the television every night and weekend led to depression. My mother, now the pants of the family, forced him to see a shrink against his wishes. He then had two meetings every night, neither of which he particularly wanted to attend. Ironically, his psychiatrist appointments—a means to keep him away from alcohol—soon led to a dependence on Prozac. The drug continues to distort his emotions, confidence and sociability, even ten years after quitting the bottle.

If there is a loser to be named in all of this, it is certainly my father. He barely appears in the photos that compose the album of my childhood. He never really got to see me grow up. He did begin to take a more active role in my life the moment he realized I had begun drinking, though. My respect for him was such a joke at that point that his warnings and precautionary talks actually distanced me from him further. To this day, it’s still difficult to hug him. We can talk and get along somewhat, but my father will always be the man with the belt. He regrets it every waking day.

Age twenty-one. The true test of alcoholism.
My father found a reason to put the bottle down.
Genetics or not, I’m still looking.

I awoke ten minutes after the cafeteria stopped serving dinner. The thick, sticky taste in my mouth was the least of the reminders of the night before. I remembered what Chuck had said about the monotony of our lifestyle—exhausting mountains of work five days a week, to be relieved only by forty-eight hours of getting sloshed. The thought unsettled me.

After heaving myself out of bed and managing to find my sandals, I stumbled to the bathroom. Chuck was there shaving.

“Good morning, sunshine,” he greeted, upon seeing my

Chris Tereshko
bloodshot eyes and weak movements.

"Yo," was all I could muster as I stepped into the first stall.

"I just woke up, too. Whatta ya wanna do about dinner?" he asked.

"I could use the good ol’ hangover helper, junior bacons," I answered.

"Good call." He was finishing up shaving when I approached the other sink to wash my hands and face. I studied myself in the mirror. I saw the face of a man I didn’t want to become.

"Ya know, Chuck, I was thinking about what you said last night. I’m getting tired of drinking like this every weekend, too," I confessed.

Chuck looked at me, grief-stricken. He cocked his head, as if to see if I was serious. His facade broke suddenly, and he blurted out, "Heathen!"
City Children are not muffled by the snow, but car headlights pass through them on cricketless nights. Whirlpooling in from the playground swirling once, twice, three times until magneted into the school, accented in neons and beads flavored with food and exhaust colored with little god crayons instead of colored pencils like the rest of us. They butterfly or rhinoceros their way through life till the neon ends or the beads end or the bookends, But for now they play deeply, loudly in the snow, and their colors imprint.
What are you looking at?

Ari Nepon
The first thing I saw when I put my bags down in my childhood bedroom for my first break from college was a black and silver treadmill. I threw down the bags and barreled down the steps to find my mother posing innocently next to the dining island in our kitchen.

“What is that thing doing in my room?” I bellowed.

“Well, Paula, you know you aren’t at a healthy weight. I thought maybe if you had a machine… well, I use one all the time at the gym,” she shrugged, causing a little heft in her slinky red halter-top. “You can’t afford to gain your freshman fifteen. This is a great opportunity for you to lose weight.”

“Mom, do I look like I gained weight? You have seen me for a grand total of four minutes, and now you want to throw me on a treadmill? Not to mention the fact that you bought this thing before you even saw me. I could have lost thirty pounds at school and you still would have had that thing.”

“Honestly, Paula. I know you better than that. You would never take the initiative. I bet you didn’t even leave your room except to eat and go to class. What’s college worth for someone like you? You look disgusting. All you do is lock yourself in your room. You’re miserable, and it’s all because you look like a pig. No one wants to get near you.”

My face had begun to turn red and my ears were filled with the sounds of rushing blood. I clamped my teeth together to stop the quivering in my face, but I could not stop the quivering in the rest of my body. My eyes filled with tears and I ran from the room.

Everything in my room had remained as it was when I was a little girl except for that monstrosity of exercise equipment. My books were lined up on their little bookshelf. I carefully removed my copy of Blubber by Judy Blume. I remember
reading this book in 4th grade. My mother had given it to me after some girls in my class started calling me the Blob and the Whale. My father said it was her own strange way of telling me that she loved me, but really, it just made me more upset. I was the smartest girl in my class. Why didn’t she look at that the way my daddy did? Every time I finished a book, my father would bring me a new one. The books he had given me filled the shelves. After I read them, we would go out to dinner and discuss the book, just the two of us. My father’s favorite book was *To Kill A Mockingbird*. One of my favorites was *The Once and Future King*. I used to pretend I was the beautiful, tragic Queen Guinevere.

Those dinners with my father were huge events. I wore one of the many frilly dresses that Mother made me wear to church and combed my curly blonde hair into a ponytail. Dad would arrive at 6:15 coming directly from work. We would go anywhere I wanted to have dinner. Usually I chose Friendly’s. We’d slide into the squeaking booths with their red plastic upholstery. I always ordered the same thing: a cup of chicken noodle soup, a large order of French fries, a grilled cheese sandwich, a chocolate milkshake and a Conehead sundae. After we placed our order, we would each pull out our copy of the book we read and would discuss it. Sometimes we would discuss why Adams used rabbits in his book *Watership Down*. Other days we would simply talk about a character, like Anne in *Anne of Green Gables*. After dessert, Dad would take me home if it were a school night. If it were a weekend, we would go to his apartment in Red Pines to watch movies.

My father’s apartment was full of books and pictures of Jared and me. There was a daybed in the living room for the weekends that I stayed with him. Jared almost never came to see our dad. Whenever I asked him why, he never had a real answer for me. It was most likely some seed that my mother planted in his head. After the divorce, Dad was my refuge. I couldn’t get enough of him. My mother turned into the tormentor who

*Laura Phillips*
seemed interested only in making me miserable.

*Blubber* was one of my mother’s many attempted wake-up calls about my weight. She, who spent hours on end reading romance novels in her blush-pink bedroom, had an impeccable body and believed that my weight problem was a crime against nature. An ex-ballet dancer, my mother’s lithe frame held 115 pounds. Even when pregnant, she never weighed more than 130 pounds and she carried herself with Grace Kelly-esque elegance. Her wedding pictures made her look like a princess. The early pictures of us as a family are almost nauseatingly perfect. Mother, with her hair in golden ringlets. Holding my baby brother Jared and wearing a beaded cocktail shirt from my dad’s Christmas party. Dad, smiling debonairly and wearing a sleek black suit. And me, a curious looking toddler with a mop of blond curls and large aquamarine eyes like my mother. My mother always loved taking pictures of the four of us. She was so proud of her marriage and the beautiful children it produced. But one year that pride faded; her husband left and her children began to look irritatingly imperfect. After the divorce I started to gain weight and Mother put the camera away for good. Every picture of me from second grade on was just a headshot. It was like my mother didn’t want to remember the rest of me.

After the divorce, Mother painted her ivory bedroom pink and threw out her old bedroom set. She set up a vanity table and covered its glass tabletop with bottles of makeup and little bottles of pills. Her wardrobe changed from conservative “mom” clothes to slinky, sexy clothes that made her look silly. Bedroom shelves that were cluttered with family photos were now full of romance novels with titles like *The Sheik’s Baby* and *Meet Me in Montana*. She got a job at a local Italian restaurant where she quickly became the Goldie Hawn of the waitressing world. Mother spent hours in her room each morning, choosing clothes, blow-drying and styling her hair, and applying layer after layer of makeup. When she finally emerged, she looked like a high school actress in stage makeup for her first big show.

*Laura Phillips*
Meet Me in Montana

My father and I became closer when he moved away. Our dinner book club developed soon after he left as a way to keep us tied together not only as family, but also as friends. He was my comfort whenever Mother “helped” me by buying exercise videos and books for me. The day she gave me *Blubber*, I shoved it deep into my schoolbag vowing to throw it off the school bus the next morning. Something made me want to read it, though. I read the entire book in one day. Parts of it even made me cry. In the end, I felt so sorry for myself that I just shoved it into the bookcase and never took it out again. The next day I began a copy of *The Great Gilly Hopkins* that my father had given to me.

Sliding the book back to its place on the bookshelf, I grimaced at the treadmill that stood like a watchman next to my bed. Why would she do this on my first trip back home? I thought. Why couldn’t she save it until Christmas or something? I unpacked a gray sweater and a hairbrush from my backpack and quickly fixed my hair. I walked downstairs to the kitchen and grabbed a bag of potato chips. In the alcove next to the kitchen, my mother was gulping down a handful of pills. She didn’t see me as I slipped out the door and ran to my car.

Once I got my aging Jetta on to the main road, I drove five miles to Peat’s Ford, the local lookout point. Trudging through moss and used condoms, I found the one spot on the ridge that allows you to see the entire town of Lime Grove at once. There it was, a thousand twinkling lights like the phosphorescence of the ocean. Whenever Mom and I came up here, she would snatch me up in her arms, and together we would scour the countryside looking for our house. Looking from church to school to supermarket, we’d find our house, stand a while and then go back to the little house with its lights on. I looked and looked for my house alone that night. After ten minutes, I gave up. This was the first time I hadn’t found it.

As I drove home, I felt as if I was driving through my own childhood. Lights burned too brightly at the corner Wawa

*Laura Phillips*
where I still buy cigarettes every morning. Carla, my fourth-grade friend turned drop-out, swept a Snickers wrapper and some cigarette butts off the sidewalk of the store as I drove by. The Superfresh and Acme stood like wrestlers on either side of the street, facing each other down with sale signs for cheap fruit. There were some punk fourteen-year-olds riding around on midget bikes. The kids that live across the street from me had ventured out onto the steaming blacktop to play with their new sidewalk chalk. Driving over their emerald houses, chartreuse people and watermelon-colored dinosaurs, I caught my first glimpse of my house. My brother Jared had left a bike on our walkway. A short distance away was his green bike helmet. Every light in our house was turned off, making it difficult to find my way in. Clumsily fumbling through a ring of keys, I finally turned the knob and lit the house with an emergency flashlight my father gave me.

The dining island in the kitchen was now covered in Good Housekeeping magazines, more potato chip bags, crumbs, and a copy of Meet Me in Montana. The countertops held stacks of dirty plates and two or three bottles of pills that had been prescribed to my mother. One of the bottles was her sleeping pills, so I felt safe in the belief that she must be asleep.

The clock now read 1:23 a.m. Judging from the dirty dishes, it looked as if tonight’s dinner was that yucky Beef-a-roni casserole that my mother insists on making and Jared insists on complaining about. I could just imagine his voice now. “Mother, I’m not eating that tonight,” he’d say calmly. Mother would blow her top, telling him the same sob story about starving children in China that her mother had told her. Jared would tell her to get him an envelope and he would mail it to them for her. She’d scream a little more, causing Jared to give up eventually and do his best Hannibal impersonation, using the casserole as the brain in the famous dinner scene.

As I thought, there was an abundance of Beef-a-roni casserole sitting ominously on a shelf collecting a layer of greasy Laura Phillips
Meat Me in Montana

scum on its surface. Next to it was a little plastic strawberry basket full of more prescription drugs and several bottles of nail polish. Replacing her bottle of OPI “I’m Really Not a Waitress” nail polish, I perused the other shelves. Half a can of Campbell’s chicken noodle soup was festering in a plastic tub on the third shelf. Cottage cheese and creamed corn were side by side immediately above that. Finally I found a container of stuffing that Mother made from a box and zapped it in the microwave.

1 minute 40 seconds. 1 minute 39 seconds. 1 minute 38 seconds. 1 minute 37 seconds. The microwave counted down the minutes like a time bomb. I re-examined the countertop prescription bottles, before intercepting the stuffing before the beep sounded. If my mom knew I was awake and eating there would be the “speeches” (yelling sessions) on inconsiderate behavior and my gluttonous habits. Not particularly keen on hearing either speech, I snatched the container from the microwave, burning my fingers on semi-melting plastic.

I set my meal on the table and began to scour the refrigerator for more of her bottles. Adding my discoveries to the other three bottles, I lined up the little bottles on the lace tablecloth of our dining room table next to my food. Between swallows and gulps, I read each label carefully before setting the bottle back in line with the others like a little toy soldier. She seemed to have a pill for everything. I tossed these pills in a paper bag, rinsed off my plate, destroying the evidence of my secret meal, and plodded down the hallway on my way to the bathroom.

On my way in, I tripped on the scale that my mother weighs herself on everyday. Once she made me stand on it and was appalled at how much I weighed. “This is why you’re a miserable person, Paula,” she hissed. “You weigh more than your brother and me combined.” The words echoed in my head as I lowered myself onto the toilet. All of these years she had hurt me: with her words, with her actions, with her “helpful little gifts.” Finally I had found the chink in the armor, the secret to my Laura Phillips
mother’s power, attractiveness, and confidence. It was finally my turn.

Quietly, I opened the door to my mother’s bedroom. The light to her connected bathroom was on and there was the sound of falling water and the scent of peach shower gel. Relieved, I quickly scooped the pills off the makeup table and into the paper bag. Slipping on a pair of clogs, I went for the door of my own bedroom. Next to the treadmill were my bags from college. I grabbed all the bags and hurried to the car. All of the bags were thrown into the trunk, which smelled like a mixture of sand and spilled oil after a full day parked in the heat.

The drive to the point was a quiet one. The children had all gone home. Carla stood with her head in her hands at the counter of the Wawa. Speeding down the main road, I was soon at my destination. The thousand little twinkles had started to die in the black mire of the September night. I reached into the trunk and grabbed the paper bag of pills, now speckled with grease marks. Looking out on Lime Grove, I found my house immediately. The lights there blazed in contrast to the darkness around it. One by one I unscrewed the caps and examined the contents of the bottles. Then I filled my hands with them and threw them like confetti onto the town below. The last pills done, I walked back to my car.

Turning around and going back home that night was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I wanted more than anything to run away: to my father’s house, to the woods, to school. Instead I repeated the journey home for the third time that day. Pulling up to the house, there was only one light on. Walking lightly up the stairs to my room, I noticed my door was slightly open. The treadmill was set to a running mode. Frantic, wearing a black and purple spandex leotard was my mother, oblivious to me, seemingly running for her life. Her bleached hair was dripping down her back, soaking her leotard. Without a word or indication that I had seen a thing, I turned away, and drove back to school.

Laura Phillips
Coasting West

Maura Strauman

rolling waves,
a paradox in blue
momentarily flying - then inverted undertow
The ocean floor greets me.
sweet blood dispersed in salt
a transient sting subsequently dissolved
My nerves dance under my skin
and laugh with me at the surface.
golden amber frames my perfect silhouette
while the neighboring star extinguishes into night
I watch for moonlight,
and anticipate repetition.
Pride is a Lawn Mower

Flynn Corson

I

Silver smoke blows gently over the fence. It occupies different parts of the yard at different moments, shifting slightly with the breeze, as if the weatherman was whimsically placing and replacing his smiling cloud only within my property. Smoke escapes the yard through the hole in the sky created by the rooftop and tree line. The copper roof, the peaks and the chimneys; the house is a diamond mounted in a band of oak, maple, and evergreen. I could see fire through cracks in the fence glowing in the back of my neighbor’s yard next to his woodpile where the shed used to be. I love the smell of burning leaves. His tractor that now lives in the garage was in the front of his house near the street. I could hear it faintly from where I was standing, and it seemed that the world was on a schedule. Trimming. Grooming. Combing.

A couple of bikes must be cleared from the garage before I can reach the monster. Stiffening my arms, forcing all my weight on the handlebars, I pivot on the back two wheels and wrestle it, rubber squeaking, into the driveway. Three thirty-inch blades are encased overlapping each other in steel. Varying sized wheels bound tight with belts spin above them when the blades are engaged. The animal is green. Why are all lawn mowers green? Is it the same reason all WaWa’s are shaped the same, inside and out? Is it the same reason all McDonalds are painted red and yellow? Does the color green make people want to cut the grass? It makes me think of money.

From head to toe the animal weighs close to 300 pounds. The front end is like a plow. A cold flat face of scuffed metal four feet wide and a foot tall. Two thickly treaded pivoting wheels are its bookends. They are like the wheels on the front of shopping carts times 50. They are dependable though, not the kind that

Flynn Corson
Pride is a Lawn Mower

pull you into the shelves, sending groceries rolling into the aisle. The back wheels are the rear legs of dinosaurs, but more graceful. Despite their elegance, few obstacles are safe.

Between them sits an eight-horse power Briggs and Stratton engine, dwarfing the mere four-horse power engine that drives your typical lawn mower. This motor is not the kind you grace your go-cart with. It growls, and spits burning gas and exhaust when it’s first started. It shakes angrily, as if it were seizing. You need to calm it down by sliding the choke down from the icon of the running rabbit to the crawling tortoise.

Above and behind the heart and mouth of the mower is its control panel. It is at the same level as your torso. Like the lawn mower’s dashboard it displays all the controls. The lever that lowers and engages the blades is nearest to my right hand. In alignment with it is another shorter lever. This controls the ground speed and determines whether you are dragged jogging, running, or sprinting behind the massive machine.

The handgrips are yellow. Their texture and stick long worn off. They now look like my dad’s hands; the way my hands are starting to look. I hope my hands look like my dad’s hands. His fingers are beefy and powerful. They are hardened with calluses like someone left them out through winter. His wedding ring is embedded in his finger. His flesh seems to have grown around the gold band, as the ring has become part of his hand. I remember when I was young I used to pry it off his hand in church. His ring seemed like it could fit around my waist.

You don’t ride this machine; you keep up with. They make a wheeled platform that can be attached to the back but, as I’ve been told before, “we don’t need bullshit like that.” It is steered with the break on each handle bar, slowing one tire to move the other side faster as it devours a path through the lawn.

I was thirteen the first time I harnessed the beast. Engines, gasoline, blades, noise, all at my disposal. It was like being knighted. My mom, petrified, watched as I took my first steps behind the lawn mower—one third its weight—and I walked.
away as my father stood arms crossed and grinning with his back
to our garage. I felt like *Easy Rider*, clinging to the tall handlebars
seemingly overhead, and soaring down the driveway. I could
hardly see over the top as I moved—three steps to my dad’s
one—frantically in control.

My neighbor always wears plaid flannel shirts and a pair of
jeans on Sunday. That’s his suit, and his yard is his office. The path
that follows his rider mower is tracks left by children playing tag.
Mine is a stampede of raging elephants crushing trees and villages
as they carve through the jungle. I can no longer hear him gliding
through his front lawn; the roar of my engine drowns his engine
out. But even though his mower is less masculine, he likes cutting
the grass as much as I do.

II

You have to be cautious, setting your line around the
circumference of the yard. The first two laps are the most
important. They set the pattern for the lines that follow,
ultimately determining the quality of your result. Hug the
driveway; make a nice clean path between and carefully around
lamp posts. If you hit one too directly the bulbs will pop, or the
glass lamps will break. Make sure you cut right to the base of the
fence, and under it when the mower will fit. Lower your head and
till through the softer lower limbs of the trees that frame the land.
“Needles don’t scratch that bad. They stick ya’ though. Close
your eyes so you don’t get poked.”

“Close my eyes and drive the beast!”

Once the second lap is complete you’re spiraling easily to
the center of a set pattern. Making your way from one side of the
hourglass to the other, overlapping tire tracks again and again.

Beneath the weeping willow tree where the driveway
meets the street, the blades are thin and soft, hair blanketing the
earth. There used to be a duck pond there, but I wouldn’t stop
walking into it when I was a baby. Harassing the geese and ducks
was too tempting, and my grandmother couldn’t keep up. I
remember the pond, not the pursuit. I think the soil there is

*Flynn Corson*
Pride is a Lawn Mower

healthier; the tree thanks it by tickling the ground with its willows.

My black lab is nine. This is his favorite part of the lawn. The grass under the weeping willow tree is cold in the shade; O’Neal takes advantage by rolling around in his preferred spot, groaning and stretching. He lies in the path of the mower, watching the road and the horses in the field on the other side, until I have to pull the breaks and latch them to stop. “C’mon O’!” I put two fingers in my mouth and whistle, irritated. But watching his old back legs struggle to pull himself up always makes me stroke him, and tell him he’s good. O’Neal follows me up the stairs even though he has trouble.

You have to mow around the crease that marks where the woods start; otherwise the tractor gets stuck. Even the monster gets stuck. From here you can see the clearing in the canopy of the forest where the tree house used to stand. I built that tree house with Pop-pop when I was 10, the spring after the Christmas when he gave me my first tool belt. He taught me how to pound nails and use power tools—to the dismay of his daughter. My mom had to tie the belt on because it couldn’t be made small enough to buckle.

The tree house was 15 feet off the ground. Two trees split near the trunk, and four pillars shot skyward creating a base for the citadel. Its frame was built of two-by-fours and plywood. Four hinged windows locked with a hook when swung shut. You could stand up inside it. It was carpeted and furnished with beanbag chairs. Mike, Kevin and I painted it twice a year. White in the late fall in preparation for winter, camouflage in celebration for the advent of spring. We wasted so much paint on each other. We never had enough to paint its underside. Covering the four sides was enough to conceal the fort inconspicuously from our enemies. I hated finding my sister’s Barbies in the tree house. We would dismember them when she didn’t heed the warning sign: “Keep Out!” We would singe the hair, and nail them to the trees in the woods. Boys have different techniques for the desecration.

Flynn Corson
My friends and I connected a zip line from the neck of a maple tree nearby, to the trunk of a pine closer to the ground, about 50 feet away. Of the three boys I was the youngest. I lost the game of rock-paper-scissors that determined the guinea pig that tested the zip line. I always lost at rock-paper-scissors. We used to jump off the roof for fun; we never seemed to get hurt when I was a kid.

One of the four trunks died, and our castle dangled dangerously 15 feet off the ground. Pulling the tree house down was like tearing my adolescence from the sky.

My dad and I built a bridge over the creek that runs through the woods. When I was younger, cutting the grass was my duty. Standing guard from the bridge I would spy through the trees so as to not get caught “smoking pot in the woods.” Lawn mower running, stopped discreetly behind the berm at the entrance of the forest, only arm’s length away in case I needed to act fast.

Once you round the corner in the back of the yard the pillaging grass fiend is faced with the trampoline. Bought for my little sister, it was meant to further encourage her five-year love affair with gymnastics. She was 11; I was 18. It was used mainly from the side of the pool as a higher, more exciting diving board. Even as an “adult” I had to wait for my mom to leave before we could drag it to the pool without being caught.

My brother and I still lie on the trampoline at night, blurred vision fixed on the stars. Wine-in-a-box and the backyard bring out the sentimental side as we cry like children lost in the mall. There are small holes burnt in its surface, and the springs are rusty. It creeks when you jump on it, like an old door.

When the monster is back in its cave your arms tingle, and your blood feels carbonated. Your hands smell like gas. I love how my hands smell when the grass is cut; I can’t keep them away from my face. The scent is familiar; it’s my mom’s perfume.

Flynn Corson
Pride is a Lawn Mower

and my dad’s aftershave. There is not a blade uncut. If a patch of grass is lucky enough to have escaped the wrath of my lawn mower I might incite a fit. The driveway is clear. Walking back up the driveway, the spinning blades atop the cement are enough to blow the clippings into the yard. They are lost. I have thrown salt at the ocean.

The smell of the burning leaves is faint now. You can hardly detect it through the fresh odor of the newly cut lawn. I stand grinning, arms crossed, almost conceited. Pride is a lawn mower. The grass is happy; I’m happy. How could I not be?

Flynn Corson
the head yanks to the right...

The stench of melting wax & smoldering grease
Singes the air.
The familiar scent perfumes
With retention
The glistening teeth comb
Through tresses of naps as
Sheering sheep’s wool.
(a futile attempt to comb away heritage)

The heat ceremoniously
Licks the grease from each slender slit.
The scorching iron – a crucible
To straighten kinks.
Hairs relaxed against scalp,
Grass...flood laden.
(a futile attempt to relax the norm)

On a cockeyed image
Ears bristle, frightened
Of - scarring.
The comb swoops down to devour
A birthright.
(a futile attempt to forget the roots)

straight...
Shriveled Dream

Rosabelle Diaz

Rosabelle Diaz
We were the genuine imitation
Almost made sense
But never worked
Oxymoron
Or same difference
I looked at you through plastic glasses
You tried to act naturally
I told you that Microsoft works
You surveyed me with military intelligence
It seemed to make sense at first
But when you think for a moment
So don’t think…
But one night we were found missing
We’re jumbo shrimp
Politically correct
Almost exactly
True love
Fleeting Reflection

Melanie Scriptunas

I see my face in her
Tarnished frame.

Our eyes, two blue dams,
Are pools of sentiment.

Nostrils inflate like fresh pulses
Parting thin skin. I watch the River
Rush over our face in blue deltas,
Veins splitting at the temples under
Artificial light, an endless

Circular stream. I am
Stamped with the signature of the sun,
Branded with ancient constellations.

At the far corners of my eyes,
There are places for crow’s feet.

I see my mother, taking flight.
I turn the mirror toward the wall.

Melanie Scriptunas
Demeter

Rebecca A. Mersky
Her name was Cara and people followed her.
In the cafeteria, guys made her napkin origami and girls sat in her lap. She never got up to get her own coffee. I had a drawing class with her last semester. No one ever disagreed with a word she said. Not even the professor. Every single thing she drew — including her random doodles — was delicate, intricate, and flawless. She wore long, flowing skirts that floated her above ground. Sometimes she put little butterfly clips in her soft brown hair that fluttered when she laughed. One time I watched the librarian stare at her as she searched through the periodicals. She looked up and smiled at him. I thought he was going to wet himself.
What killed me was that she didn’t even try.
Sometimes I took comfort in the fact that my boyfriend Todd was light years more attractive than hers. Then I listened to him talk about Nascar racing or how I should take up Foxy Boxing and forgot about that. But no matter how much I wondered about why I was with a guy like Todd, I was more curious about what Cara was doing with Peter McLaren. She could obviously have her pick out of all the guys, most of the girls, quite a few professors, and several of the statues on campus. And she picked Peter McLaren, who was nearly half a foot shorter than her and had three pimples permanently pasted across his forehead like some pus-filled constellation. He never sat with her at meals and walked around with his left hand eternally jammed into the back of his pants.
The fact that she had a loser boyfriend only seemed to make people lust after her even more. Not like she really needed any more help with that.
I sat on a bench and watched them part in front of the library. I couldn’t hear a word they said, but he stalked away looking like he was off to drown a puppy — using one hand, of course — and she stood there looking after him and shaking her
head. She turned around and saw me watching them. I promptly buried my nose back into my philosophy notes. The next thing I knew, she was sitting next to me on the bench.

“Men,” she said, scrunching up her nose. It was small and came to a roundish tip.

“Excuse me?”

“Men. Why do we bother, Alex? Why do we bother?”

I stared at her without answering. She remembered my name?

“I’m sorry. I guess I thought you remembered me. I’m Cara.”

Well of course I knew Cara. People who didn’t know Cara knew Cara.

“No, I know you. I mean, I remember. We had that class last semester.”

“Yes. I absolutely loved the drawing you did of all the fireflies. Such wonderful use of shadows.”

“I ... uh ... I ... thank you. Yours were great too,” I trailed off.

“So how is Todd?”

“Todd?” Now how did she even know Todd? “Fine, I guess. I don’t know. I’m not really ... I don’t really ... you know. He’s not...” I stammered.

“I understand.” She set her soft brown eyes on mine.

“It’s like ... he’s just ... there. Do you know what I mean?”

“Like a piece of rock sitting in your shoe.” She rubbed at her lower lip with her index finger. “Irritating your feet, waiting for you to dump it out. But you keep it in there because you have to stop walking if you want to remove your shoe.”

“Yes. Exactly. Exactly.” How did she do that? Just sum up everything I’d been thinking into one perfect image? She didn’t even know me. A mild breeze lifted her wavy hair and filled the afternoon with her light, flowery scent. Or maybe it was just all the trees blooming. Or the cafeteria might have been making cupcakes.

“They’re all the same, sweetie. Did Todd ask you to the Genevieve Romeo
formal?"

“No. He’s not going because he has a job interview in Boston that day.”

“Go anyway. You don’t need him.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Bah.”

“What about Peter?”

She scrunched her nose again and repeated: “Men.”

“What a jerk.”

“He is just not ready for a real relationship.”

“So are you going without him?”

“Absolutely, my dear. I will paint the town a thousand colors and dance all the dances and look stunning and make people take pictures of me. It will be wonderful. You should come.”

“I don’t think so.”

She pouted at me. She had the softest, pinkest lips I’d ever seen.

“Cara!” One of her friends walked over to our bench. She was wearing a light blue tank top that said “SPOILED ROTTEN” and white shorts three sizes too small. “How are you doing, hot stuff?” She gave Cara a kiss on the cheek.

“Trisha, sweetie! How are you?” Cara took Trisha’s hands in hers.

“All good. Are you coming to the bar tonight?”

“I’ll be there. But I don’t know how much money I have...”

“No worries. I got you. Do these shorts make my thighs look too big? I’m trying to get some ass tonight.” She turned her back to us and put her hands on her hips.

*It’s not the shorts,* I thought.

“Not at all. You look wonderful,” Cara said. “I would do you.”

“Thanks, babe! I’ve got to go write that goddamn paper. Seven?”

“Sure thing.”

*Genevieve Romeo*
Trisha kissed her other cheek and climbed the steps to the library. I stared after her, watching her thighs jiggle and grinning to myself for some reason.

“What were we talking about?” Cara asked.

Take that, Trisha. She may sit on your lap in the cafeteria, but I’m talking to her now. You may be a part of the little bar cult that worships her, but she’s sharing a bench with me now. And I don’t have to hang on to her every word as if it were filled with helium. She didn’t even think I knew her name.

“Men.”

There went the nose crunch again.

“It’s like,” I began, “they’re fun for a while but then I figure them out and ... then what? The only interesting ones are the assholes, and they’ve usually got their tongues jammed in random Abercrombie whores.”

“Tell me about it.” She rested her smooth cheek in her cupped hand. “I wish I were a lesbian.”

“Me too,” I answered quickly. Wait ... what did I just say? My brain and my mouth were obviously having a little communication problem.

“But women – they just don’t do it for me. I need a man. They are so fantastic. So difficult, but so fantastic. I need what a man has.” She turned and looked at me. “You know?”

“Absolutely.” I do? No, I don’t. Actually, mouth, brain would like to remind you that Alex is the last virgin on this campus. Just ask the dearly frustrated Todd.

“Delicious,” she sucked on the tip of her pinky, “but deadly.” She grinned around her finger. “Do you want to come with us to the bar tonight?”

“I’m only 19.”

“I could get you in. I know them all down there.”

“I’ve.... uhm ... got a lot to study here,” I gestured towards my notes. “Besides, I don’t know anybody else. I mean, honestly, I don’t even really know you.”

“This is true. I’ll be graduating in two weeks. I should

Genevieve Romeo
We listened to the church bells across the street chime five times. She picked up a leaf that had fallen to the ground and began to carve into it with her small white fingernails. I sat silently and watched the leaf gradually become covered with small roses and snowflakes. When she was finished, she handed it to me. "Hang it upside down if you want it to keep."

"Thanks. I do. I will. It's beautiful. Thanks."

"I used to make them for Peter, but he just leaves them in his pocket. They crumble into dust." She looked down at her fingers. I looked with her. The moist residue of shredded leaves glowed green from beneath her nails.

"So what are you wearing to the formal?"

She looked up. "My black dress. The black dress. My only dress. I wear it to everything. Frankly, I am sick of it."

"I would let you borrow one of mine, but you're probably about four sizes smaller than me. But I have some jewelry and stuff."

"Do you have any make-up?" she asked.

"Yeah. Tons."

"Would you lend me some?"

"Sure! Sure, yeah I'd love to!" Hey, mouth, way to sound eager for no reason.

"Come to my room tomorrow at six. I live across the street, room 103."

"Sure. Ok. I'll be there." Did you hear that, Trisha?

"Wonderful, Alex my dear. I have to go do some research now." She stood and smoothed her gauzy brown skirt around her small hips. "I shall see you there. It was good to finally meet you."

I said good-bye and watched her walk away. Her skirt billowed around her feet and the butterflies in her hair danced lazily. I waited until the library swallowed her, then walked home.

The next night at five fifty-seven I stood outside her room toting a bag filled with colored powders and creams. My fist hovered a few inches in front of the door. Why couldn't I knock? Genevieve Romeo
Come on, hands. Come on, let's go. Knocking isn't too hard. I took a deep breath without even knowing why and tapped lightly at the door. What would she think when saw how much make-up I actually owned? I mean, she never wore any make-up at all because she obviously didn't need to and here I was with a plastic shopping bag filled with seven thousand different kinds of eyeshadows and lipsticks and...

“Hello, Alex, sweetie.”

“Hi, Cara. Wow. You look ... really beautiful.”

She was wearing her black dress. It clung softly to every curve of her slender frame. There was a small slit on the right side. Her legs were bare. I wiped my palms on the back of my jeans.

“Thank you. And thank you for coming.”

“Wow. Your room is ... it’s really beautiful.”

Fans of dried flowers hung upside down on each wall. Long swatches of airy material billowed in the night breezes from the open window. There was a silver plate full of seashells on her dresser. A soft musky incense burned slowly in the corner. What a contrast to my own little cubicle, piled with papers and covered in Christmas lights.

“Really beautiful,” I said in a near whisper.

“Thank you.” She smiled, opened a drawer, and pulled out a small drawstring bag. “This is all the make-up I have.” She dumped the contents of the bag onto the dresser. There was a small pot of lip-gloss and a tube of mascara.

“Uhm ... I brought ... some of mine.” I numbly offered her the bag.

“Wonderful. You will put it on, won’t you?” She looked up at me. Even with heels on, she was still two inches shorter than me.

“Of course. Sure.” I opened the bag and began sorting through it.

“Could you give me cheekbones? I think I need cheekbones.”

“You have cheekbones.”

Genevieve Romeo
“Not like yours,” she said almost wistfully. “Are they your favorite part of your body?”

“Uhm ... I ... guess I never ... really thought about it.” I stopped rummaging.

“Every woman should have a favorite part of her body. I think my favorite part of my body is my breasts.”

_Good God, yes._ Wait. I didn’t think that. I turned back to the make-up bag and picked out several shades of blush.

“So what is yours?” Cara asked, rearranging her seashells.

“I ... I don’t know. Maybe my teeth.”

“I think you have the most beautiful ass.”

I blinked at her and felt a flush rise across my neck.

“Thanks.”

“I wish I had an ass like yours. Mine is too flat, I think.”

“I think we’ll try something in pink. Is that sounding good?”

“Alright.”

I found a brush and began to sweep light color onto her cheeks. Her skin was pale and smooth.

“Where did you learn to put on make-up?” she asked.

“Here and there. Watching those make-over specials on talk shows.”

“I have never worn anything but what was in that little bag. This is exciting for me.”

“I just hope I don’t mess you up too bad.” I closed the blush and surveyed my collection of eyeshadow. “I think silver should look great with your dress and complexion.” A black bra strap was sliding down her shoulder.

“You are in charge, sweetie.”

I held up different shades of grey and silver against her face, trying to gage what would work best. A stray lock of reddish hair fell from my ponytail. She twirled it around her finger gently.

“You have such gorgeous hair. I wish I could get mine as straight as yours. It’s so sexy that way.”

My face was too warm. She inched the strap back up.
beneath her sleeve.

“Did Peter ever call you?” I asked, voice uneven.

“No. That bastard.”

“Close your eyes,” I told her, and began to dust her lids with silver shadow. Our faces were inches apart. I finished applying it and turned back to the bag. “You can open them. Now for the lips.”

“Actually, I think I’d just like to wear my gloss. I really like the way it looks and tastes. It’s on the dresser.”

I opened the container of strawberry gloss. It was almost empty. Balm clung to the sides and bottom of the small pot. I handed it to her.

“No, you put it on me.” She closed her eyes and tilted her head up towards me. Her lips were curled into a smile as she offered them to me. They were as soft and pink as the first time I had noticed them yesterday. I ran my index finger around the inside of the tiny jar, gathering the shimmering gloss on my fingertip. I wondered if she could hear my heart beating or feel my jagged breaths on her smooth white neck. Slowly, gently, I rubbed my finger over her lips. The smell of strawberries filled the room. Her lips shone as she pursed them together to coat them evenly. Her eyes were still closed. Her head was still tilted up at me.

Kiss her, Alex. Do it. Are you crazy? You know you want to. No, I don’t. Then what is she doing to you? I’m not a lesbian. Who says you have to be? Kiss her. She’d freak out. No, she wouldn’t. She wants you, too. Kiss her.

I put the lid back on the jar and put it on the dresser. Her eyes were still closed. My mouth filled with cotton. Slowly, I reached my shaking, strawberry-scented fingers up to her cheeks. My heart danced across my chest. I closed my eyes and leaned my face closer.

The phone rang. I jumped backwards as if I’d touched an electric fence. She opened her eyes, smiled at me, and answered it. “Hello?”

I dug the heels of my hands into my eyes.

Genevieve Romeo
“No. Not yet ... No ... Oh really? Is that what you want? ... I suppose ... I suppose ... Alright ...” She twirled the cord around her willow fingers. “See you.” She hung up the phone and turned to me. “That was Peter. He’s coming to his senses, I think. He’ll be by in a few moments.” Cara turned and looked at herself in the mirror. “Oh, Alex, you have made me so beautiful! Thank you, my new friend!” She ran to me and hugged me. I barely felt her body inside my arms.

“You’re welcome.”

“It’s too bad you’re not coming tonight. Tell Todd he is an ass.”

“I will.”

“And thank you again.” She handed me my make-up bag.

“No problem.” I gave her a watery smile and gathered the rest of my make-up. My hands were shaking. “Have a great time tonight. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

And what’s that, exactly?

“I’ll be good, Alex sweetie. Take care.”

“Sure thing.”

I clutched my bag and walked out of her room, down the hall, and out the door. The air outside was damp and cool on my face. I went to the corner and stood there with quivering calves and beads of sweat standing cold on my temples. I slowly brought a strawberry-flavored finger to my lips and sucked on it until the carillon sang seven times. When I pulled it from my mouth, it was soft and wrinkled, and tasted like nothing.
Precious pink petals,
   Slender femininity emerging from within
       Mothering mud.
Your skin, glowing like that of a sour apple

Exposed by sunlight, sliding through your
Mysterious Patterns.
   Intricate in every detail like the
   Masterpieces of Mozart—
       Denied by naked eyes.
Lush fuchsia stained evening gowns adorn
   Your body like umbrellas in summer sand.
       Protecting the mouth from which you drink.
While harboring your Pollen Palace
   like the father of a virgin
And as your silk-weaving guests begin to live in your universe...you
   Die
       Weeping for rain.
Emerald leaves, like tears,
   Slip from your sky bound towers...
       To safety and
              Reincarnation.
Petal by petal, you prepare for slumber, undressing until
You are naked.
Moving

Alison Shaffer

Behind the white, aluminum fence
the children are gone, the dog is quiet,
and in the rain, on the driveway blacktop,
the still-dancing chalk people
are leaving, too.

Alison Shaffer
Celebration

Stephanie Perkins
Having made the one-hour-and-twenty-minute drive home in fifty-three minutes, I tore into the empty driveway at 7:21 p.m.

“Goddammit, Mom!” I darted out of the car, tripped over a dog toy on my way to the front entrance, managed to regain balance, and crashed through the door. The cat freaked as I burst in and strode across the kitchen to the refrigerator door with the hope of discovering a note, informing me that my mother “Just ran out to pick up something-or-other at the grocery store,” or that she “Slipped away to walk the dogs, be back soon,” with a sketch of a bumble-bee substituted for “be.” Finding no note, I leaned against the refrigerator and pressed my thumb and pointer finger into my eyeballs. In a minute, I grabbed the 2% low fat from the fridge, popped off the cap, and took a deep swig, a bit dribbling onto my Fruit-of-the-Loom T-shirt. I returned the container to the fridge, wiped my mouth (that is, most of my lower face from, and including, the nose down), and made a decent job of rubbing the milk into the fabric. Slouching down into the Lazy-Boy, I waited for my mother. Gatsby appeared from behind the television and leapt into my lap, sniffing the place where I had spilled the two-percent.

“Hey, old buddy,” I said, scooping him up and scratching his furry belly. “What the hell? She calls, says I have to come home straight away, I miss an exam, plus short-staff the diner, and get home—having no idea what the hell’s going on since, of course, she failed to tell me in her message—and she’s not fucking here.” Gatsby responded with a querulous meow as his eyelids slowly closed.

Three hours and twenty-six minutes passed.

By now Gatsby had exchanged me for a cozy spot in the bathroom, as I was occupied with pacing the living room,

Phil Malachowski
stopping every minute or so to peer out the window at the driveway, the road, the traffic light at the end of the road...

This was not a first for my mother. The first occurred eight years ago in 1992, four days prior to my twelfth birthday. My mother was late driving home from work to take me to a church youth-group meeting. I waited four hours, only to receive news that she passed out at the wheel after over-dosing on heart medication that her pharmacist prescribed incorrectly, and hit a tree going some forty miles-per-hour. All these years later, my mother was still taking medication to ease the pain in both of her legs, her right one in particular, which she literally held on to by a thread.

I kept up my watch till 11:17, when an ambulance wailed by the house, hurling emergency lights into my eyes. As soon as the sirens and lights vanished I curled up into the Lazy-Boy and shut my eyes. I had just begun the slow descent into sleep when I heard the car pull into the driveway, and before I managed to do more than sit up straight and assume an air of vigilance, my mother was tossing her purse and keys onto the counter and casually greeting me.

“What the hell’s going on, Mom?”

“Oh,” escaped my mother, as if she just remembered her message.

“Mom, your message! Jesus! Where were you?”

“I just went out for a while,” she replied, arms folded and eyes glazed, staring into space. “Guess I just needed to take a breather from the 2% low fat.” With that said, my mother limped into the bathroom and closed the door behind her. In a few minutes she came out, Gatsby on her heels, and disappeared into the hallway. A drawer screeched open and closed. My mother returned, tossing a fresh T-shirt on my lap and mumbling some Biblical proverb about “forsaking not the hardened heart” as she plopped herself into the sofa adjacent to my Lazy-Boy.

Expecting her to expand upon the topic, I watched her, picking at the skin around her fingernails and staring at Gatsby, situated

Phil Malachowski
on the carpet and staring back at my mother. Ten minutes passed silently. My mother picking her skin. Gatsby cleaning himself. Each staring at the other. I watched this for ten minutes, waiting for my mother to expand, but she simply kept on picking.

“Mom.”

Eyes still glued to Gatsby, my mother brushed the crumbs of skin from her sweater and jeans, and resumed picking.

“Mom.” I tossed the T-shirt at my mother. “Hey. Mom.” Her eyes narrowed on me as if peering through a downpour at a highway sign far away. I averted my gaze to my mother’s right leg, propped on a small pile of *Christian Light* magazines on the coffee table. “How do you feel?”

“What do you believe, Adrian?”

“I believe that your ankle looks a bit swollen... but you seem to walking better.”

My mother kept eyes trained on me.

“Oh, I see.” I touched my forehead. “I believe that I passed the last four hours trying to figure out why you would call with an urgent message to come home, and then decide to leave so as to not be here when I arrived. What else? Oh. I believe that I spent the last four hours fighting away images of Accident Number Two. I also believe that – ”

“We don’t speak anymore, Adrian.”

My shoulders slumped. “Why now, Mom? Why like this?”

“Well, we don’t. The last time was years ago.” The scrutiny in her gaze vanished; my mother now picked her skin as she spoke. “You blew up. Smashed an apple against the wall. Ran out and smashed a few car windows in your rampage. Hid away somewhere. I waited all night for you. Came back at four in the morning reeking of pot. You got pissed at God, Adrian. And you shut Him out, along with me.”

“What did you expect for a kid with demons?” I muttered.

My mother glanced up at me. I crossed my arms.

*Phil Malachowski*
“Christ, Mom. Always go for the Goddamned jugular, don’t you? I was twelve years old. You were three months out of the hospital. Alcoholic Dave was in his prime. Nana was six months dead. I was going through puberty. My head was fucked up. That simple. What do you want me to say?”

My mother brushed a new batch of crumbs from her lap, and said nothing.

“And, besides,” I said, “you blew up, too. It’s just not a topic that we can talk about. It’s that simple. The word - ”

“Name,” my mother interjected.

“The verbal utterance ‘God’ comes up, and that’s the end of all sensible communication,” I said, slapping my thighs.

My mother sat picking her fingers. “I know, Adrian. I know. But I want to talk about it. I want to try - ”

“Take this conversation for instance - ”

“Shut up, Adrian. I don’t know you anymore. You don’t know me.” My mother looked at me, arms folded, eyes straight ahead. “Come on. Why won’t you let me in?”

“Look, Mom. I’m not saying that I don’t want to let you in. All I’m saying is that we can’t talk religion. Neither of us can talk about it with a splinter of objectivity. Things get too personal, too heated. But,” I said, softening my voice, “that doesn’t mean that we can’t talk about other things if you want to—”

“What else is there, Adrian? ‘How’s the new nursing job?’ ‘Fine, how’re the English studies?’ ‘Fine, well, hey, I should get going, talk to you soon.’ ‘All right, talk later, bye.’ Really, Adrian…what do these things matter without God? What good is a car if you don’t have gas - ”

“This is exactly what I’m talking about,” I spouted.

“Objectivity. That simple.”

“Stop saying that. ‘Objectivity. That simple.’ You sound like a college student.”

“Be careful, Mom. You’re in danger of ‘forsaking the hardened heart’.”

Phil Malachowski
“Damn you, Adrian!” T-shirt strangled in fist, my mother struggled from the sofa and stood before the Lazy-Boy. “I’m trying to understand here. What do you believe? How do you get through your days? How can you not believe there’s something out there, some...” Her lips trembled, struggling to find the words. “Some...higher power, some...some greater, caring force? How can you be such a child? How can you ignore God? Because let me tell you, if I ignored Him...I would never have made it this far. I wouldn’t have.” My mother dropped the shirt on my lap, went to the kitchen table, sat down, stood up, walked to the refrigerator, withdrew the carton of 2% low fat, closed the door, raised the carton to her lips, lowered it, and held my gaze for a solid ten seconds.

“You have nothing to say, then?” My mother raised the carton like a baseball and threw it against the nearest wall. Milk exploded everywhere, splashing the flower-printed walls, the reflecting window, the humming fridge, the linoleum floor, and my mother. She used her sleeve to wipe her face, and then returned to the table, where she sat, her back turned to me.

I stood up, but could manage to do no more than watch silently, not knowing what to do, what to say. Even when she crumpled, folding onto the table, head burrowed in her arms, shoulders and back in convulsions—even then I could do no more than stand and watch.

“Damn you, Adrian. I love you,” my mother sobbed, “But look at yourself... standing there, staring at me like...like Satan’s imp.” A fit possessed her, and she broke off.

I could not budge. This was the kind of reaction I had to intense, emotional confrontations. I just turned off feeling. After all, I needed my ways of getting through the days. As for these ways, my rationale was this: since I had no mop with which to clean spilled milk, I would rely on spill-prevention methods. Unfortunately, they were only useful when they worked.

Thus I came to stand my distance, silently watching my mother crumble, listening to her rupture, anticipating her

*Phil Malachowski*
collapse. There was 2% low fat everywhere, but not a damned mop in sight.

My mother lifted her head and turned to me. “You know, Adrian,” she cried, “I don’t get you. I leave a message, maybe a bit tense, true, but nothing to sound the alarms, nothing to raise mortal apprehensions, and you fly home—which I can see you did and which God knows I appreciate—and you come flying home to save the day, but now that you’re here, and I’m having a nervous-Goddamm-breakdown before your very eyes, you just stand there like...like a snowman. I really don’t get you.”

Another fit possessed her, and she fell back on the table. After the disintegration gained momentum, the collapse enhanced its violence.

As I stood watching and listening to the ruinous outcries, some tiny spark inside of my heart flashed – briefly - and died...and then flashed again more brightly, more brilliantly....

My legs carried me from the Lazy-Boy to the table, into a chair, and the chair found its way next to my mother, and my arm found its way around her shoulders, and my lips found their way around the words, “It will be all right, it will be all right.” My mother cried harder than ever, and then stopped and looked into my face.

“I’m sorry, Adrian.” The tears, primed, remained unfired.

“I’m sorry, Adrian, I love you.”

All that I could say was: “It will be all right, it will be all right.”

“Adrian?” The trigger-finger trembled, squeezing.

“Adrian. I love you.”

“It will be all right. It will be all right, it will.”

“Adrian? Talk to me. Don’t do this.” When she saw that I was gone, the finger jumped. The gun fired; the tears rolled.

My mother jumped out of her chair, knocking it backwards, and fled, hobbling, out the back door to the patio. I watched her. An hour later I was still watching her, the memory clinging as if release would bid permanent adieu. But I was not

Phil Malachowski
ready to wish it away to God, or whatever greater force, whatever higher, bearded power my mother had in mind. Perhaps I wanted to. Perhaps I wanted to be ready, to wish it all away. Perhaps I even yearned for it. Perhaps...but no. Instead, it remained there, staining the walls and windows, the drapes and cupboards, the fridge and table, my mother and me.

I sat for a long while, till Gatsby trotted over and began licking up the two percent from the linoleum.

“Gatsby!” I snatched a Christian Light and flung it at him. “Get away from there!”

I rose from the Lazy-Boy, and, for whatever Goddamned reason, changed into the fresh T-shirt before going out to meet my mother on the patio.
I watched the woman walk down the street. I saw how the man at the door of the small corner market watched her. He first noticed her when she crossed to his side of the street, arms full of the day’s events. His eyes followed her as she, mimicking a runway model, swished towards him. I saw her glance his way. He saw it too. He straightened his back, and sucked in his “old man” belly. But she looked through him. Her walk changed. Where there once had been a swish a nervous, hurried stagger took over. They were now within touching distance as she passed him. He kept the tall, thin appearance he had adopted; he kept his lust filled gaze. She again glanced at him, “Fucking pig.” He allowed his stomach to return and retreated into his store to straighten the canned vegetables.

“Go upstairs and find a book.”
“You come with me, I need your help,” he pulled at his grandmother’s hand.
“No, you can do it.”
“But I want your help,” he pulled at her arm.
“You did it alone last time. Go find a book.”
“You come with me,” he pulled at her shirt.
“Fine. I’ll walk you up, but I’m not staying,” she pulled away.

Kathryn Chapman
There was a couple in Lord & Taylor on Sunday afternoon. The woman ran her fingertips across every fabric within her reach. The man stared blankly ahead of him. She addressed her husband as “darling”; he called her “sweetheart”. She lovingly grabbed his arm and pointed when she saw something she liked. After feeling a set of soft, gold, silk curtains, the woman realized just how much they needed them. Those curtains would look magnificent in the sunroom. The man agreed that they were “nice” curtains, but he was not nearly as taken with them as she. Her husband told the woman that they did not need curtains. She contested, that they did in fact need them, for the sunroom. The man had grown impatient. He turned to his wife and said in a stern, yet calm, tone “we do not need them. I have never heard anything so absurd as having curtains in a sunroom. You can really be dumb sometimes.” The woman looked at the silk. “You’re right. No need.” She turned away and they continued to walk through the store. They left that Sunday afternoon with socks and two pillows for the den.

“I sometimes write down conversations I hear.”
“Well I sometimes have conversations I write down before hand.”
“Conversations you have with me?”
“Some.”
“Important ones?”
“Only.”
“So you practice before you tell me? Why?”
“So I get it right.”
“I love you.”
“I’ve been practicing that.”

Her breath smelled of alcohol, her hair of cigarette smoke. She had fallen asleep in her clothes. I lay down with her; I put my head on her shoulder. She was warm and soft. It made my chills go away for a moment. I could hear the rain on the roof and the windows. I saw flashes of lightning through the closed blinds. Thunder had never sounded so grand.

Kathryn Chapman
Hazy, oppressive summer heat wraps around our bodies,
Gleaning glistening sweat from every pore to cool the heated flesh
Against the warm wind that dries our eyes and our sweat alike.
Slickly the road wavers like a mirage, populated by a hundred cars,
People unaware of the glory stolen by their air conditioners and radios.
The road is glorious. A mile of hill looms ahead, curved to hide the summit,
Gradual enough to tolerate, steep enough to torture under the blazing sun.
The road wanes into two lanes, no shoulder, grass all around,
And the ground suddenly drops beneath us, sending us sprinting to the bottom.
Exhilaration! A crumbling bridge over a river, a flock of geese in the water,
And only they know where the great stream ends. We cross carefully;
Unwilling to disturb the silence where no cars approach and no children play;
And challenge another hill to a battle of fortitude. The hill meets us, all unaware,
Although familiar with our presence, that we have yet to lose a campaign.
We break early from the fight today, distracted too easily from familiar tactics,
To explore a hitherto-unknown stretch of trail leading down toward the water.
The little tributary that once ran among long slabs of rock has dried up this season,
But we flit among the grooves of its former course, under uneven shadows of the trees
And small ivy-sheathed structures whose purpose can no longer be discerned.
We have found, all unsuspecting, a place long unmarred by use or development,
A place abandoned to the wild that gave it birth. There is peace here…
We cannot stay or slow our journey; even in the freedom it offers, there is obligation.
We turn back and, retracing our steps, find the road home.
It is not the road we came here by. No road remains unchanged, even in minutes.
The sun slips softly, slowly, inexorably into the treetops. The light fades.
In the shadows of the evening, we come back to where we started,
The recollection of escape etched into our memories.

Ali Bierly
Ceci n’est pas une pipe
or
This is not a pipe

John Ramsey

Slopping shoulders: traced lines of a sweater, darkgreen against an ivory glean. Break of continuity at her supple hips where stretched khakis raise eyebrows and hungered tongues wander with salvation. Salvation. Swish-swish perfect curves fixed. Bend: yes; please, her lithe body. Is it Platonic Form or Zuhanden, Dasein’s encountered concern? Concern to hold between calloused fingers.
—Paul Danube.

Calling. Pay attention.

—Hmm?
—Cute, huh? Just that. She’ll never give either of us the time of day.
—So. That’s enough.

Vision is poet’s ploy, distance of Beatrice: closeness mars. Sacrifice beauty to gain ruinous commonplace.


Readjust glasses, prelude to speech.
—How are you handling the Sasha situation?
—Fine, there’s no situation. Once a whore, always a whore. That damn fucking slut. It’s over.

Visible beauty held for over a year. Italian olive and warmth of spring. In the summer the green deepened tone. Summer’s ruse beneath beach’s sun. Snuggled light, moist lips against. Cotton dowries. My little lover does a midnight shift: her

John Ramsey
favorite, loves Bonham’s drums. Worried mind. Sharing what I thought was mine.
—Betrayal. That stupid bitch. I can never look at her again. She told me she loved me.

Again inter-silence against the clash of mess. The subtle soft voices of muses drowned under masculine tin can roars: scratchy and tired. Crooning laughter: a brawny joke. Feign jest; this shoe is my father, no my mother: it hath the worser sole. Lance had true humor, grasp of puns.

Upward motion; thrust of chair. Paul, rising.
—Skim milk.

Milk, cheese, eggs. Exceptions: necessities. Eggs once a week, or I have an upset stomach. Egg whites are healthier: proteins, no cholesterol. Hunger. Either emptiness of the stomach organ, hydrochloric acid levels rise causing synaptic response; or conditioned desire, stimuli of Wismser and noxious fumes, which we’re to salivate. No. Chardonnay: ha! here the food is depraved and decrepit. Incestuous wrinkled pea, genetically flawed. Faulty construction within an amino acid: a protein having the responsibility to procure fiber for the seed, this pea. When germinated in the wombpod the pea bloated, aqueous, stretches cellulose. Shrivels when cooked. Like skin under UV sun, summer cancer. Late 1800’s: modern science and social Darwinism. Denn dass der mensch sin ufsehen hat uf Gott und sin wort... dass er nach dem bildnus Gottes geschaffen ist. Auf Herr Zwingli: the Trench: Paul’s type of life.

Green pea, color of money. Another gene makes yellow—these are still green. $3,689,274,028.94: amount of the money wall. Bill Gates, two girls bought at the freshman auction—twenty-eight dollars—thirty-seven cars. ’35 Bentley. Roommate has the girl wall. Sick figures, starved loosed frames, deepset eyes over shadowed slits. Sensuous hips and silicon lips: false beauty. Altered. The beauty cult: lapmaidan of modern

John Ramsey
This is not a pipe

science. Huxley reproves.


Paul smiling, content sighs and sits. His thoughts churning, pull of sex, wandering. Silky and fatless broth: protein filled, mother’s nurture: Nate’s milk.

—Paul, do you have time for a religious question? Of man and God in general?

—Why not?

He asks religion of the forsaken, born into the loins of the shewolf.

—If man were created in God’s image, would he then be intrinsically drawn to Him?

Churning of mind. An answer to a German question, wit of words and concern for wordorigin. Word of God: logos and Kant. Das mythische Denken.

—The myth of thought, replied Paul now uninterested. A vague answer to a supercilious question. Ah, perhaps, if man looks up to God and His ēūāīō.


Moments passed, daunting. Head of straw turns uncertain

John Ramsey
to the befriended poet. Constant amazement in the modes of thought: he read *Celestine Prophecy*, guidelines and workbook too. Attempting to comfort, Nate began:

—Let us go then.


Shuffled feet, behind to side. Unsteady catching breath:

—Are you going out with us tonight?

Through half-deserted streets, the muttering retreats.

—Where at? Mit wem?

A restless night in a one-night cheap hotel.


—Perhaps, a lot of work. I might try to write tonight.

A goddess approaches.

O! splendid figurine, racey pillars of engraved ivory. Eyes evasive and unfathomable, a voice laden with golden vision. Lofty promises, her roseate lips, an auspicious reward.

—Hello, Blake, Nate subtly addressed. How are you?

—Pretty good boys. Torment of lips sculpted from carmine marble.

Paul dumbly stands; quiet, serene in worshipful presence. Nate, chiming, seeks reassurance. Questions to tighten Paul’s slack:

—What party you going to tonight?


Maybe. Intrinsic reality: dance seduction, drunken soirée.

*John Ramsey*

Her soft lucid hands, cold against his forehead. Ill after winter break. Her hand comforting and cool. An antithesis of steamed towels. Desire in remaining sick for idolatrous hands to sweetly aid. Did she out of care, simple humanistic duty: utilitarianism? or of wanton pleasure, to aid the inklings of yearning? No. Never the time of day. And even if Blake did she couldn't: vast fissure. I the truant, recluse. Plucked as if a virgin, deflowered and acquitted. The moment of my greatness flicker: the women come and go talking of Michelangelo. Wish I had seen her eyes: had she looked on me with lust? Or she on him. Beautifully sad. My death, with her touching breath. Sasha, my death. Lied and beaten, abused: misused. I should be dragged through the slime and the mud. Murderer: whore. Betrayed by kisses. And Christine to comfort, an angel skirting her own troubles. The truest friends, Reenie and Chris: neighbors. When my watered eyes, spear thrown, wept their arms fair and sincere comforted my wooly head. Tears washed, cradled narrowed: sobbing, sobbing. Lover befouled by clapping fervor. And now? a child, who knows not the difference between friendly eyes or courting gesture. Thrown thirllfull into beauty, armed by the grand imagery of a lusting poet. An outsider.

At the head of the stairwell, splitting, Danube flows past Nate, hurried rapidly. His room a haven: papyrus tombs of poets, the thin binding, binding dead artists: thoughts usurped from history's established altar: feed for hungry heads.
—We'll see. I mean, about going out, tonight.
—Sure, It'll be fun, good times. Girls too. Always girls, dancing. We're starting 'round nine.

Why he?
—Ok, stop by when you guys begin. I'll know then.

Turn handle; open. Zuhanden: ready-to-hand.

*John Ramsey*
—Sure, replied Nate.


Rimbaud. Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes: one day I will speak your latent births. How powerful and sensual. The oddity that is Paul; eccentric, yet when he writes he almost captures beauty. Read his Lyricals, amazing idylls. The pain of Sasha worsened him. More aloof, his intellectualism more acute in the last two weeks. It's apparent, the crush on Blake; too bad for him. Sadly he stood there, not making eye contact, eyes on me: worried look. Incomprehensive smartness, her words. Drained eyes, hardened when she didn't understand his poem. About her, coveted in poetical jargon: complexity of words. Drives him to a point of weirdness. How does one write? synapses defiantly, toying around in Broca's area. Do they speak the words for singsong. Of the wide world I stand alone, and think till love and fame to nothingness do sink. The mystery, a golden bough. Unique. A month of fall, out in the hall: rhyme. That's what Paul did, poetry for a year. Nights he would only write a stanza:

John Ramsey
This is not a pipe

O! Melpom’ne thy tenure is up
Tragic heralds this falling sup.
And where were thou on this velv’t hour?
Milking thy lip? or tending a flow’r?

Of autumn. Incomprehensible smartness: to the border of weirdness. When interested he talks creative: poet thoughts, created earths. An introvert blossoming. Says he wishes to be as Milton, to extrapolate the language. Swears by the code *un long dérèglement de tous les sens*. Bad French, almost Latinized; a prolong derangement of the senses. Why?


Standing, the worn president reached for a ragged and yellowedged snotgreen book, the *Celestine Prophecy*. Opening he began to read and wrapped himself in the metaphysical Mayan tales, scriptures of science and theology. Ethics and feats of reason. A frostie. The thought crept into his mind elusive and wanton. He left seeking for his rusty chariot, its squeak-squawked steering wheel recently lubed. Muffler dangling. Roaring beast. Incomprehensible.

Words of poets strewn in a malevolent maelstrom. The guide to the labyrinth. Who has the keys to the kingdom? not I. When will words flow serpentine and cunning? aft the body ravaged, the spirit stronger grows. Dream of Arden, faery feast.

latewoken mornings in slender arms. Clap, no: a knock.
Once: the wind, bodies whorled by.
Twice: result of life around people.
Thrice: illusions shattered. Deportment and composure.
Struggle of poet (opening door) from journalism and alcohol.
Wrecked.
—Ready to go? Nate poking over the procession of heads. A harem parade, he the eunuch. Temptation.

Sombereyed Paul answered affirmative, his worn leather saddles being tied.

(And who was there to compromise lofty ambition?)
Only the most coaxing serpents, priestesses of hooplooped dance, wracked hips, and faces decorated in painted surrealism. Slender elfish Jules, smiledimpled: gift of reassuring words. Reenie.

Blake: tyger, tyger burning bright!

Ambition fleeting, ruined. Seawracked, lost in the maelstrom of romping hips, reveled legs and ivory lust. The slow century of her moving, cheek sliding down.

All I might write—ruined ambition—becomes banal, trite and pretentious against whimsical touch and green death.

John Ramsey
Improv:ptu Fruit Assault

Shane Borer
Expectations

Jennifer Brink

Harmonize and wait for
The impermanence of

Frustration.

Rippling through the world's masses
Vaulted inhibitions released into
The quasars of the moonlit skies, ecliptic of most anything remembered

Unfenced are the emotions of one's spirit
Blossoms of possibility emerge glorious over the

Subdued.

There remains no time for approximations
No space for guesses
Only assured magnificence of hope.

Jennifer Brink
One Time Deal

Katie Lambert

Incomprehensible evaluations of what she had to go through that day—irked & stabbed at her for the rest of her time there. A canvas jacket holding her back, a place setting of only a plastic spoon & a paper plate. She might hurt someone. She wasn’t there for that, though. Didn’t they know? Didn’t they read her case? Didn’t she deserve to be able to put on eyeliner? To brush her teeth unsupervised? To write a letter to her mother without the nurse watching every single stroke of her flat-tipped pencil? Lollipops were not allowed & neither were Popsicles. If a sore throat came up, a quick spray was administered by the nurse, & the nurse only. Didn’t they know she wasn’t there for that? Didn’t they know it wasn’t inside of her? But that one day—Katie Lambert
the one day that changed it all
(some will say)
for the worst——
was what she will never have to come back to again.

Katie Lambert
Midnight Aliey’s Roam

Melanie Thambash
I always wondered how I would spend the last few years of my life if I knew that I was going to die sometime before my thirtieth birthday. A morbid thought, I know, but at times I have been obsessed by the pessimistic notion of dying before my time. I have always been somewhat of a hypochondriac, exaggerating the common cold into the bubonic plague. Maybe that is why I was never able to ignore the subject of my own premature mortality, always fearing that the next paper cut could end it all. In fact, if it is true that the mind is more powerful than the body, I would be willing to bet that my own lugubrious imagination has caused me to suffer from more ill health than any vile virus or base bacteria has.

I am also a bit of a “drama queen.” I never actually thought that I was going to die. Maybe exaggerating all of those symptoms helped to tug upon the heartstrings of family and friends from whom I was seeking sympathy. Or, maybe I had faith that my embellishments and my melancholic imagination provided me with some sort of oxymoronic destiny that proved to be in my favor. For instance, I used to hypothesize, if I always dread and assume that I will die an untimely death, then I will actually live forever. Let me illustrate. This is the same type of oxymoronic rationale that explains how an extremely active and healthy twenty-five year-old can drop dead on the basketball floor in the middle of attempting a foul shot. That dynamic youth in the prime of his life probably thought that he would live forever, and now he’s dead well before his time. In much the same way that he thought that he was invincible, I constantly presume that Jack the Ripper is lurking around every corner just waiting to pounce and steal my life away from me. Thus, if we apply the “oxymoronic theory” to my fears instead of the basketball player’s confidence, we could assume that I could live forever.

Michael Pomante
I was feeling sorry for myself the night that I met Rob at the club. I had been alone for almost six months; romantically vacant that is. I had experienced the occasional casual encounter, but one-night stands rarely left me feeling any sense of satisfaction. And whether my bed was full or not wasn’t the issue at hand, for my heart was empty. I was never satisfied with casual sex or non-monogamous dating. I was never any good at it. This always made me feel like an outsider to my community. While I sought love and monogamy, it seemed like all the other queens on the block were competing for the boy-slut-of-the-year award.

Nonetheless, Rob came into my life at the perfect time. I had healed just enough from my last long-term relationship to consider the notion of another, yet I had not been single so long that I turned into a jaded fag, constantly harping, “Where are all the good men when you need one?”

The “Devil’s Playground,” “Boston’s only all-night dungeon of sin for the fabulous and freakish 17-24 year-old crowd,” was better than ever that night. The Delectable-DJ-Diyanna spun my favorite tracks, and the bartender, who, might I add, asked for my number six times instead of the customary four, had perfected the art of making a superior Cosmopolitan. Most importantly, however, I managed to catch the attention of the most striking boy at the entire club. I had never seen him before. At least I didn’t think so.

I decided to leave the main dancing floor when the music changed from goth-industrial to British punk. All of the thirty year-old skinheads dressed in leather tops and plaid kilts took my place on the floor to violently slash their bodies from one corner of the room to the other to the hard-pounding beats of the Sex Pistols. I would be trampled on in such an environment. I refreshed my drink and followed the easy listening tunes of Michael Pomante
Madonna and Erasure to the 80s room. I made my rounds, hugging all the girls and casually planting a kiss upon the cheeks of the boys that I knew. I placed my drink on the corner of the bar, lit a cigarette and began to dance. The club always had a way of taking my mind away from whatever misery I had been focusing upon before I walked through its doors. I closed my eyes and allowed each beat to take me to a higher level. The bass was so intense that I could feel the woofers’ vibrations raising my diaphragm to each rhythmic thump. I wiped the sweat from my brow with the sleeve of my pinstriped suit jacket. My eyes opened and fixed upon a smile that seemed aimed in my direction. I instinctively nodded at what I had hoped was flirtatious behavior. I moved closer to him.

“What’s your name?” I screamed. The music was incredibly loud and I was somewhat intoxicated. Neither fact made the act of deciphering his answer any easier.

“Rob.”
“Rob?”
“Rob!”
“Rob?”
“Yes! What’s your name?”
“Matthew.”

Rob smiled again. He was a bit taller than I was and very thin. His face was intricate. His lips were precise and his jaw was angular. Each facial feature was shaped as if the sculptor, the artist who created this masterpiece, spent many sleepless nights careful to let no detail go unfinished. The only part of him that turned me off was his T-shirt that read “Boys Suck.” I wasn’t sure whether this was a sign of promiscuity or simply bad taste. He moved gracefully to the intense beats that now seemed to fade into the background. I stared at him until I realized that I was doing more staring than dancing and probably making a fool out of myself. We exchanged numbers that evening.

We were both casually dating other people when we met. I just stopped calling Bill. Well, actually I just stopped returning

Michael Pomante
his messages. To this day, I don’t know how Rob went about breaking up with his fling. Maybe they had one last night of ecstasy before Rob gave him the old heave-ho. I don’t know. I don’t care. In fact, I care not to know.

Rob was Buddhist. Although I studied paganism and the occult, I knew very little about Eastern philosophy and religion. This was okay. Rob loved to discuss the nuances of meditation, yoga, and the Buddhist Sutras. He loved more when I asked questions. Often laid back and sometimes falling into the category of sloth-like laziness, it always took a subject that greatly interested him to bring out his upbeat and playful personality. Starting off slow and relaxed, he would soon build to a frenzied outpouring of facts and excitement: “To man’s secular view, things appear to move in time and to be in their final character concrete. I am here, you are there: right and left; up, down; life and death.” His arms would thrash in each direction that he named. And when I nodded in either agreement or understanding, he would smile as would the professor to the student who finally understood the Pythagorean Theorem. He told me once, “Honey, not only have I never had a boyfriend that I could talk with like this or discuss intellectual stuff, but I’ve never had a boyfriend as beautiful as you.” The compliments were scarce, but when they did come, they were sincere.

Rob wasn’t much for giving presents. I suppose Buddhism influenced him away from the material. When our three-month anniversary rolled around (two months longer than any other relationship he had ever been in), I didn’t expect him to get me anything, but I assumed that he would in response to the many gifts he had received from me since we had met. I greeted him at the car with a bouquet of a dozen red roses. He kissed me, hugged me, and thanked me. Then, he pushed me aside and ran into building screaming, “Sorry, honey. I have to take a wicked piss. I drank a SHIT load of iced tea before I left.” I wasn’t too impressed with the beginning of our romantic anniversary. I

*Michael Pomante*
sauntered back into the building. Back in my room, I found a single piece of paper on my pillow:

This is a pitiful love poem for Matthew:
Filled w/clichés and I love you’s,
Because he deserves them

Aphrodite and Apollo conceived him –
His full lips, his warm breath;
Molded the contours of his body.

Sappho sang for him from her lyre in perfect stanza,
Forgetting the warm island and young girls
That once inspired her.

Catullus, once writing madly for Lesbia,
Now finds his pen scribbling stanzas for
The son of beauty and light.

And Hadrian, so overcome with grief from the loss of Antinuous,
Now finds comfort in the warm absorption
Of his eyes and the soft way he listens and consoles.

And now the Fates have brought him to me –
His full lips, his warm breath…
The soft contours of his body.

I alone now sing in perfect stanza
And write madly for and find comfort in
The son of beauty and light.

This is a pitiful love poem for Matthew.

I tried to remember what my life used to be like before Rob and I fell in love. Each day that went by, it was easier to forget (or ignore) the life that I trudged through before I met him, and each day that went by, it became harder to imagine my future without him.

Michael Pomante
It was ten o’clock at night. I had two hours left of work. Time wasn’t flying by fast enough. I heard every beat that the second hand made. The phones stopped ringing about an hour ago, and I tried unsuccessfully to keep myself busy. I couldn’t concentrate hard enough to actually read chapter five of my Behavioral Neuroscience textbook. On the other hand, solitaire on the computer was too monotonous to hold my interest. I spent the next half-hour looking online for a website that I hoped would include a horoscope that accurately described the day that I had just endured. I checked many websites, read many horoscopes, but accepted none of them. As I decided to give up my search, the phone rang.

“Thank you for calling Boston University’s Department of Academic Computing. This is Matthew, how can I help you?”

“Hi.”

“Hi, Honey! What a pleasant surprise. I miss you. I thought about you all day. How are you doing?” I hadn’t had much human contact that day.

“I’m okay. How are you?” Tonight he seemed more dejected than usual.

I ignored his question. “What’s wrong?”

“I just wanted to call and say hello. I’ll talk to you about it later tonight.”

“No you won’t. What’s wrong?” I hated suspense. I hated it more when it involved something important. My heart began to beat more rapidly. I didn’t know why.

“We’ll talk about it tonight.”

“That isn’t fair!”

“Come over after work,” he said. “I love you.” He hung up the phone.

I paced directly to my car after work without stopping back at the dorm to drop off my textbooks. I didn’t notice the traffic around me. I repeated his voice over and over in my head and consistently tried to talk myself out of the terrible thoughts racing through my mind. For a brief moment I had myself
convinced that my melodramatic imagination created a situation that was not real. But, I knew that this was not the case. The situation was real. I heard him correctly and I knew what he was going to say.

I wanted to turn the car around, but I realized that would have been an unsuccessful attempt to avoid the inevitable. Maybe I thought that never confronting the issue would make the issue disappear entirely. Maybe I didn’t want to see him. Or, maybe I didn’t want to hear him say it.

I pulled the car into his driveway and sat there with the engine turned off. I clenched my hands tightly around the steering wheel. “How the fuck could you do this to me?” Maybe I said it out loud. Maybe I said it to myself. But I asked that question for twenty minutes before I mustered up just enough strength to get out of the car.

I didn’t ring the doorbell.

He was lying on his bed reading some book about “Mind over Body.”

“Lay it on me,” I said.

He did. “I found a lump on my throat today.”

“And what does that mean?”

“I know for a fact that I’ve been sexually active with someone who has since tested positive for HIV.”

The first thing that I thought about was my mother. I immediately began to imagine what it would be like for her to lose her only child before her own passing. I used to remember watching the six o’clock news and feeling so sorry for those mothers who lost a child to a drive-by-shooting or a hit-and-run accident. They always seemed more sorrowful and more lost than anyone else mourning the death of a loved one. I always remember thinking that they looked defeated.

“Matt? Matthew?”

“I have AIDS.”

“Don’t say that! You don’t know that!”

“I have AIDS.”

Michael Pomante
“Jesus, Matt. I’m the one with the lump. Please!” I heard Rob cry for the first time in my life.

“What the fuck, Rob? You never cared about me. You never cared about me! You couldn’t have done this and actually cared about me.”

The quivering of his voice broke my heart. “Please don’t say that, Matt. Jesus. Please. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. It’s my own damn fault. It’s not like I can say that you made me do anything that I didn’t want to do.”

I suppose I meant to sound cold. “Answer me one question.”

“Anything. What?” He was sobbing uncontrollably. He had always seemed so confident and sure of himself.

I was actually calm. “Did you cheat? Did you fuck somebody behind my back? Is that how this happened?”

He stopped crying and for one brief moment, his apologetic eyes turned frigid. “Never and you fucking know that.”

I suppose I did.

“I can’t believe I have AIDS.”

“STOP! You don’t know that you are sick, Matt. Jesus, I don’t even know that I’m sick. We have to be patient.” He was being rational. I realized that he had time to think it through. Maybe he meditated before I showed up, calling on some Buddhist scripture to help him through the frustration and anger. No mantra would help to clear this up for me. Maybe I would be rational after I had time to think it through, I thought to myself.

I had a decision to make and I knew that I could not depend on reasoning to help me make it. I blamed him. I didn’t want to blame him, but I did. He should have protected me, I thought to myself. He is my boyfriend. It was his job to look out for me. I wanted to strangle him. I wanted to choke the life out of him like he was doing to me.

I blamed myself. You should have taken care of yourself, you fucking idiot. You are twenty-one years old. It’s nobody else’s responsibility. I started to cry. For the first time that Michael Pomante
evening, I started to cry. I was talking to myself. I forgot for a moment that Rob was in the room.

His head was downcast towards the maroon carpet. At first I thought he was staring at the cigarette burn on the rug. Then, I saw his body slowly start to shake. His sobs of sadness and guilt and fear startled me from my trance-like state of contemplation.

“I’m about to say something that I don’t understand. I’m about to tell you something that doesn’t make any sense to me. I can’t expect you to understand.” I was running through a maze. It was dark. I was racing against time. Maybe time was racing against me.

“Say whatever is on your mind. I’m so sorry, Matthew. I love you so much.” He hadn’t stopped crying. Between each word that he spoke, he gasped deeply for air. “You are the best thing that has ever happened to me. Please, God, don’t let me have hurt him.” It scared me when he stopped talking to me and started talking to God. He didn’t know who God was. “What did you want to say?”

It was my turn to be silent. I felt as though I could take all the time that I needed. Maybe I was running out of time as we spoke, but for a moment, I felt as though I had a lifetime to sort through my thoughts. Again, I thought about my mother. How would I tell her? I always remembered having a variety of ways to solve my problems in the past. I didn’t know how to remedy this situation. I only knew what I wanted to say to Robert. “I love you. No matter what, I will stay by your side. I don’t want to live without you and I don’t want to die without you, either.”

He began to cry a lot harder. I knew he understood what I had said. He had trouble catching his breath. For the rest of the evening, neither one of us mentioned any “what-ifs.” It was easier that way.

I wanted to be with him when he got the results of his
What Ifs

test, but I knew that I couldn’t be. I went to visit him three days before the doctor said he’d call with the results. I spent one night with him. I woke up at 6:30 a.m. in his arms. I managed to free myself without waking him. As he slept, I whispered in his ear, “I love you. We can make it through anything.” I wasn’t sure if I believed that myself. He didn’t budge. I got in the shower. I had to make it home before my parents left for vacation. I was supposed to go with them. I decided not to. I decided to stay home and watch the dog.

I cried in the shower. I heard the door of the bathroom open. Rob pulled the curtain to the shower aside. He was crying. He reached into the shower. He was fully clothed. He took me in his arms.

“The doctor called,” he uttered. “I’m negative.”

It took several seconds for what he said to register in my mind. All I could think about was the night he told me that he could be sick; the night he told me that we could be sick. I remember being discouraged before he called, looking for a horoscope to accurately describe my day. I remember looking at one particular horoscope: “Stay strong. Your trials will pass. Your future looks bright.” It didn’t make sense at the time.

Michael Pomante
Compulsory Education

Josh Rucci
Reconnection

Olatokunbo Laniya

She slowly sips her cup of coffee—lots of sugar, no cream—and cradles the oversized mug between black-leathered gloves. Swallowing the hot caramel liquid, she balances his faraway eyes on the rim of her blue-green mug—this is not working. She suspires, places her cup upon the cheap, chipped linoleum table and tries again. She slides the faded yellow vase that holds artificial chrysanthemums, the salt and pepper shakers and the dessert menu from the center of the table—so much obstructs their view of each other. Looking directly into his butterscotch candy eyes, she takes off her gloves, neatly arranging her hands on the table, right over left and raw emotions on top of that. And waits for him to see her.

He emerges from his tempestuous mental storm and as he looks through the unclean window that frames her, he expects to see a raging winter blizzard reflective of his own inner turmoil. Yet he is greeted by a calm, patient sun attempting to peek through obdurate, unyielding clouds. And he identifies passers-by, hardly distinguishable under layer upon layer of protective coats and clothing, their tiny contracted faces barely discernable through knitted scarves and hats. He watches as they battle against wind, stoplights and one another to reach their destinations. Quiet struggle, and he realizes that it is not unlike himself. To reveal what is tender, vulnerable, and sacred to the harsh, cruel handling of a jaded and anopsis world. To place such a love as this in the care of two tragically mortal beings. Now I sound like her, these poetic words are not mine. After all these years, her language is still in my head. The realization startles him, and he steps back from it, from her, as he continues to examine around her atmosphere, absorbing everything but the center.

"It's been a long time," he attempts, gingerly treading along the periphery of her Self, and she looks up to glance an Olatokunbo Laniya
expression in his eyes reminiscent of understanding. He blinks and talks to his sweet potato pie.

“What?” she asks.

“It's dry,” The pie, she wonders, or us. No, never us. Even when we were apart, the symphysial liquidity of love was ever present. We were always connected. It's just the difficulty of...fulfilling past prophecies through the miracle of our tomorrow. She wants to tell him that, but it sounds too incorporeal, ethereal and he prides himself on his firm grip on reality. She is the idealist, or more accurately, an idealistic realist. She believes in snippets of perfection within the frayed fabric of a fallen world. She believes in otherworldly spirits like mermaids and Justice, in the interconnection of souls. That is why she found him again—because he keeps turning up in her present reality, in the disheveled pile of her everyday and she knows it means something. Everything holds meaning. So they met. But have yet to reconnect.

She wonders why this is so difficult, almost falling into the fallacy that if their connection were true, real and genuine, this would be easy. But she has already learned through multiple mistakes and misappropriations that life's glories demand labor, bleeding joy. She has learned much over the years they have been apart and in many aspects, she is a different person from the woman he said goodbye to three years ago. Life’s trials have made this new woman wiser and more sober. She realizes that she cannot do it all, that she needs others to hold her and his love is at the center of this need. So she tries harder; perhaps middling words are insufficient to show him her soul, to convey her remorse for the past. And she flails wildly within herself, trying to discover other alternatives. Perchance a song, or interpretive dance, something with music. He is a musician, he'd appreciate that. Or a presentation, with overhead projector and charts, leading him to the precise location of my heart, to discover and identify its contents. Or...

“How have you been holding up in this weather?” he

Olatokunbo Laniya
Reconnection

asks, concern furrowed on his dark brows.

He's talking about the weather. But it is good, because he recalls that she, a tropical being, is not inured to the hyperborean cold of a Chicago winter. She had always told him that she would leave in search of warmer climate. And finally she did. But she is back. She motions to her warm wool coat folded neatly beside her. "This helps," she answers. He looks disappointed that she has not offered more. It's not enuf. She ventures further.

"You know, I find the cold to be misomousoi in nature, for it impedes my creative flow. The nine divine are hindered to impart breath of life when all of existence is wrapped in a gelid blanket of lethargy. I've only been back in Chicago's winter weather for a month and all I want to do is sleep," she confesses. This makes him smile—such a pretty smile—and she is pleased to satisfy him.

Without realizing it, she opens her hands, palms up, vulnerable. And the markings on her palms run out of her fingertips, prickling needles that trace his thoughts, patterned on his smooth forehead.

Her mention of the nine muses lead his thoughts to a semi-academic, semi-creative essay on love, art and race she wrote four years ago. He was the paper's thesis and she titled it, "The Hues of My Muse." It was published in a literary journal. Just a few months after that, the winter of the next year, she was chosen as supervising editor in her publishing company's expansion overseas. To South Africa. And although he wanted to come with her, although he wanted to marry her, she went alone. Without her muse. She ravaged his heart and left it unprotected against the severe winter cold. And though it is still a bit tender and mending, he knows that she will forever be his beloved. I love you and I know that you love me, but you hurt me before and I can't survive being hurt by you again. But he swallows the words and instead clears his throat, unsure of whether or not to venture out to the unknown. Hesitant, he steps onto the invisible

Olatokunbo Laniya
ground between them, to discover her open palms, and reads therein the startling story of him and her. Slowly, he exposes his own palms to understand the sequel and their combined creation flows out of him to reach her. *Muse.* *Manifestation of my internal complications. Intensity of my perplexity. You confuse me, abuse me, amuse and diffuse me. I am floating somewhere around you, trying to enter your soul.* *Muse.* He wants to tell her that, to speak her poetic words back to her.

“Muse... Am I still?” he asks.

She wants to scream, yes, oh yes. She wants to bleed blood red tears, to offer sacrifice for the wrong she committed against him. She wants to tell him that she loves him, has always loved him so deeply that she had been afraid of that love—but no longer. She parts her lips, to give him a dissertation on her soul and his central role in her sense of identity and artistic completion. But taking another path, she offers him her open palm. His vulnerability welcomes her own. He looks into her, she smiles, connection.

Olatokunbo Laniya
We slept

*Harry Michel*

Woke to eyes that wept
Tears of disappeared breaths
That wrestled with the heat
Of life
As it passed and swept tomorrow
Under a mask of sorrow
Sunrise danced in the distance
Realizing that the morning
Could not handle what came without warning
The sunrays that were the children
Of eyes stuck in the remission of the moment
Left for a minute
Got lost in the moment of silence
The earth roared from an act of violence
The ashes made their way through time and space
Covered the smiles on faces
That were stuck minutes and hours before
In suspended animation
The impossible became possible
The cityscapes were raped
Mothers, fathers, daughters, brothers
Were striped by a danger that had no face
When it struck at time when we THOUGHT
We were safe
Defaced by the cowardice of a yesterday
That was ignorant of today
But we can’t loose face?
Or can we?
We’re hurt
Our futures somewhere in that dirt
Under stone and mortar
*Harry Michel*
Corridors collapsed with lives
That weren't past their borders
Fell victims to executive orders
Waste the lives that did this to the red white and blue
But all we do is pile more ashes on the colors
The grenade waiting to explode in our face
Heaven closing its doors
In the passing of days
We want blood it doesn’t matter
Who's the face or what we face
They must repent for that... they
We must repent for that day
We are God
Our divine judgment shouldn't somehow be misplaced
We slept that night forgetting to pray
Woke up in the morning
Everything was out of place

Harry Michel
Corbin bought his ’96 Plymouth Sundance used for a hundred dollars. It was in excellent condition, with a smoothly running engine and less than 50,000 miles on it. The catch was that a seventeen-year-old kid had blasted his brains out in the back seat, and the car needed extensive interior work. But still, a hundred dollars was a hundred dollars, and Corbin liked doing things differently.

He bought the car, got it reupholstered, and filled it with things – a pine tree air freshener, a dog who nodded his head at stop lights, the obligatory ice scraper. His notebooks and army jacket and Dylan CDs were scattered all over the floor and back seat. He never let it go below a quarter of a tank and got a Kenwood CD head unit installed.

“This car has bad karma,” Claire said.

“Now why would you say a thing like that?” Corbin asked.

“Corbin.” Claire looked over at him until he took his eyes off the road and regarded her briefly over the top of his sunglasses.

“There was a boy’s blood all over the inside of this car.”

“So?” Corbin’s voice shrugged rather than his shoulders.

“The car had nothing to do with that.”

Claire shook her head. “I don’t know. I wouldn’t feel comfortable driving this thing. I almost don’t feel right riding in it.” She took out a tube of lip gloss and applied it. The smell of berries filled the car.

She shook her head again. “Bad karma.”

“So why don’t you walk?” Corbin replied.

* 

Claire especially liked the color red and wore it often. She liked to watch thunderstorms, drank diet soda, and found REM mix tapes beautiful. Her older brother was in AA and her mother Raquel Pidal
prayed a rosary for him every night. Claire ignored them both. Instead, she shopped for chunky sandals and painted the row of delicate seashells she passed off as toenails weekly. Her tall, thin frame looked best in long skirts, and she wore silver jewelry, never gold. She underlined passages in novels that moved her, secretly enjoyed PBS, and opened an I.R.A. She refused to have a boyfriend.

Independent, strong-willed Claire, looking but never touching. She thought of people as priceless pieces of china to be admired from a distance, hands crossed at the wrists behind her back. She never told Corbin any of these things about herself. He pretty much figured them out on his own.

*Corbin and Claire took a psychology class together and discovered that their test grades improved when they studied together. They did not have a common circle of friends nor did they share any interests. They saw each other in class, if Corbin showed up, and when they studied for tests. This arrangement suited them both fine.

He slid into the seat next to her one Wednesday twenty minutes into class.

“So... I’m in the mood to take you out to dinner tonight,” he said, taking out a pen and applying it to the word “RETARD” that someone had carved into the arm of his seat.

“You want to take me out?” Claire asked, with a slight mocking lilt in her voice. She did not look up from her notes.

“Yup,” he replied, inking in the “R” with concentration.

“Why?” She finally looked at him.

“I dunno,” he said, shrugging. “Why the hell not?” Claire rolled her eyes at him. Corbin smiled back at her broadly.


“We’re going Dutch.”

“How charming,” she snorted. He left class ten minutes early.

* Raquel Pidal
Corbin made reservations at Chez Nicole, where he often took his dates to impress them with his drink ordering skills and knowledge of the French cuisine on the menu. Claire imagined him bantering about philosophy and 19th century Russian literature and the minutiae of foreign politics. From what he’d told her, he rarely went on second dates because he found women boring. She was unimpressed and skeptical.

She wore a little red dress. He showed up ten minutes late.

“Never one for being on time.” He smiled apologetically as she hesitated to step into the car. The passenger seat was covered in papers and notebooks.

“Sorry,” he said, sweeping the mess onto the backseat floor.

“Sometimes it gets a little messy in here.”

She folded herself into the car. “You missed one,” she said, picking up a battered-looking marble notebook.

He grabbed it forcefully and shoved it under his seat.

“What was that about?”

“What’s in that notebook? Is it something you don’t want me to see or what?”

“It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“Sorry,” she mumbled, and they were silent for the rest of the ride.

She ordered a Long Island iced tea, and he asked for his martini dry, extra olive. While they waited for their drinks, they sat and smiled blankly at each other. She noticed that he was wearing Airwalk sneakers with his dress shirt and slacks.

They continued their staring game.

“So,” she said finally, breaking the unpleasant silence. “Tell me something interesting about yourself. Something I don’t know.” She tried to sound encouraging.

He leaned back slightly and looked up at the ceiling, seemingly in thought. Suddenly his eyes snapped back to attention, startling her.

“When I was younger,” he started, “I used to catch fireflies...
in the summer. I'd put them in those plastic half gallon milk bottles and poke a little air hole in the lid with a pencil. When I had thirty or forty of them, I'd sit in my room with my bottle of fireflies and turn the lights out and watch them.” The drinks arrived, and Corbin paused, nodding briefly at the waiter before continuing.

“So I’d sit in my room with my firefly lamp,” he went on, twirling his toothpick of speared olives around in his gin.

“Lamp?”

“The bottle of fireflies.”

“Oh, right.” She fell silent, nursing her drink.

“I’d sit there in the dark and watch these fireflies, flying up and down in the bottle and flashing their greenish-yellow light. I’d watch them till my mother yelled at me to go to bed. So I’d put them under my bed, the fireflies, so their light wouldn’t keep me awake. And the next morning when I’d wake up, they’d all be dead.” He leaned back and let go of his olive-slaying toothpick. “I never understood why they always had to die. So I’d go outside and dump their tiny dead bodies on the back porch, and they always fell with a little swish.” He shook his head. “Poor fireflies.”

She stared at him for a moment, not knowing what to say.

“That’s so dumb,” she blurted. “Why didn’t you just let them go at the end of the night, instead of letting them die?”

He suddenly grabbed the stem of his glass and downed half his drink. Putting the toothpick in his mouth, he pulled off both olives with his teeth and spoke as he chewed.

“Your hair isn’t naturally that nice auburn color, is it?” he asked. “Because your roots are showing.”

“God, you’re one charming son of a bitch, aren’t you,” she snapped. “Is this how you treat all your dates?”

He smiled smugly at her. “Just the lucky ones.”

“What, do you want me to leave?”

“How will you get home then?”

“I’ll call for a taxi.” Her eyes dared him to push her to it.

“Fine,” he said, leaning back in his seat. “Go home and

Raquel Pidal
touch up your roots.”
She stood up. “Fine. I’m leaving.”
Corbin watched her stalk towards the payphone, smiling
and sucking on his olive-flavored toothpick.

*  
“Let me make things up to you,” he said. She thought it
over and finally agreed.
“Second chance, but not a third,” she warned him.
He took her to a local diner late at night. Claire felt at ease
and sat back in their booth. Corbin wore his Airwalks with jeans
and a T-shirt.
“I’m buying,” Corbin asserted. Claire raised her eyebrows
in mock surprise but said nothing.

They ordered fries and coffee – decaf for Claire – and sat
smoking in amicable silence for a few minutes. He finished his
cigarette before her, and started twisting his napkin into tight
points. Claire took a final drag and said, “That’s usually a sign that
you’re nervous.”
“No.” He continued twisting. “I’m just bored.”
“Glad to know I’m such stimulating company,” Claire
retorted, crushing out her cigarette.
“No, not bored with you, Claire,” he assured her. “Just life
in general.”

“Why’s that?” Claire asked, pushing her empty cup
towards the edge of the table to signal a refill.
He leaned back. “Eh. I dunno. Nothing there, really.”
Claire was dismayed. “There’s a lot to life. There’s plenty.”
“Oh?” he asked, draining his cup and moving it next to
hers. “Like what?”
“Like…” She was at a loss. “Like life in general.”
He gave her a wry smile. “Isn’t that what I just said I was
bored with?”
Claire looked flustered. “Goddammit, I don’t know.”
“That’s the whole problem.”
“What is?”

Raquel Pidal
“God.”
“What about him?” The waitress brought them their fries and refilled their coffee cups. Claire mumbled her thanks and automatically reached for the ketchup. Corbin took the salt. They switched.
“So what about God?” Claire repeated as she stirred Sweet n’ Low into her mug.
He lit his cigarette and blew the first mouthful of smoke towards the nicotine-stained ceiling. “Simple,” he said, matter-of-factly. “I don’t believe in God.”
She put down a half-eaten fry. “Why not?”
He laughed dryly. “Claire.” He reached his hands out to her and shrugged slightly. “I’m an atheist.”
“Really. I had no idea. And what made you….decide to be an atheist?” She lit a cigarette and scowled at him.
“I didn’t *decide* anything. It just happened.”
“How?”
“Does it matter?”
“Yes.”
He sighed. “Well, I was doing some reading. For philosophy class, you know. And some of the stuff—it just really made sense, you know?”
Claire shrugged. “Philosophy drives me crazy.”
“It drives me crazy, too, but in a good way.”
Claire said nothing and drew patterns in her ketchup with a soggy French fry. “So there’s no God.”
“No,” he said, tapping his cigarette against the rim of the ashtray. “There’s something better.”
“Which is…?” Claire’s eyes dared him to make a wrong response.
“Bob Dylan.”
She laughed dryly, and he gazed at her in amusement. “Are you serious?” she asked.
“Yes,” he said, and from his tone Claire could tell that for once he wasn’t pretending to be serious, but actually was.

Raquel Pidal
She started toying with the salt shaker. “What the hell is so great about Bob Dylan?” She poured out a small pile of salt and started making swirls in it.

He looked at her. “Haven’t you ever heard any Bob Dylan?”

She shook her head, feeling slightly embarrassed. “No, except for that ‘Everybody must get stoned’ song.”

He looked insulted. “That’s not real Dylan. That’s nowhere close. I’m going to lend you some of my Dylan CD’s and I want you to listen to them. Promise me you’ll really listen to them.”

“I will,” she said indignantly. “What do you think I’m gonna do, use them as coasters?”

“Just consider yourself lucky. I’m not generous with my Dylan CD’s.”

She traced a “C” in the salt. “I’ll be careful with them.”

They were silent for a moment. Corbin reached for a cigarette, seemingly lost in thought. Claire was about to bring up a new topic when he spoke.

“Bob Dylan is like a religion. You’d think I’m kidding, but I’m really not.”

She shifted in her seat and crossed her right knee over her left. “Well, a lot of big musicians have that kind of effect on people. I mean, look at the Beatles, Elvis Presley…”

Corbin shook his head furiously. “No. This is nowhere near that. That was just fan adoration. This – Dylan” - he lifted his hands aimlessly – “it doesn’t even come close to that. It’s a religion. It’s a way of life.”

Claire raised an eyebrow. “That’s slightly disturbing.”

“So is believing in something you can’t prove exists.”

Claire thought about this, and not thinking of a valid argument quickly enough, she succumbed and nodded helplessly.

“It’s a way of life,” he said again, leaning back. “People study it, people live it. It’s Dylanology.”

“Dylanology?” she coughed. “You’re not serious.”

“There are students of this,” he told her. “I wasn’t kidding

Raquel Pidal
when I said Dylan is life for some people.” He stubbed out his cigarette and leaned forward. “There was some bastard sick enough to collect Dylan's cigarette butts because he figured we could use the DNA to clone him.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Oh, ugh, people are disgusting nowadays.”

“The point is,” Corbin pressed on, “that there’s this whole sort of community, this whole lifestyle going on, that you had no idea existed.” He shifted and looked right at her. “You had no idea.”

“No,” she admitted. “I did not know there were this many disturbed people out there.” She smiled at him.

They were silent as Corbin paid the bill. Claire kept looking at him with a strange smile on her lips.

“What?” he finally demanded on their way to the car.

“Why do you keep giving me those looks?”

She shook her head. “Bob Dylan.”

He unlocked her door and held it open as she climbed in. He took his time walking around to his side and starting the car. She was still smiling when he glanced at her. “Don’t give me that look,” he cautioned her.

“What?” she asked innocently.

“You’re mocking my beliefs.”

“I’m doing nothing of the sort.” She leaned back in her seat and kept smiling.

He revved the engine. “Since I don’t believe in salvation, I have to believe in something. So I believe in Bob Dylan.”

Claire noticed a new addition to Corbin’s car.

“What’s this?” she asked, tapping her nail against the tarnished bronze bell hanging from his rearview mirror. “And doesn’t it get annoying, ringing all the time?”

“No, it doesn’t,” he replied, maneuvering through some traffic. “It’s there to remind me.”

“Remind you of what?” He remained silent, so she
A Bell Called Emily

inspected it more closely. A thin strip of masking tape across its surface read “Emily.”

“Emily?” she asked in confusion. “What’s that about?”

“I have this ideal girl in my head, named Emily,” he explained. “So I keep that bell there to remind me to always be on the lookout for that girl. And since I haven’t found her yet, I guess the bell is like a reminder. To keep looking. Until I find her, I’ll just have to settle for the bell.”

“What’s she like?” Claire wanted to know.

“Well, I guess it’s my twisted definition of what everyone else considers a soul mate.”

“How’s it twisted?”

“Well, I could see my life being like the song ‘Tangled Up in Blue.’ Always wandering, always having that one girl that sticks out in my mind.”

“I don’t know that song,” she said apologetically.

“Well, the singer, see, he’s with this girl but her folks don’t like it. So they split up, and they struggle a lot in life, but they keep meeting up. They know they should be together, but they just can’t be. Life just won’t let them. And there’s this one part that describes it perfectly.” Corbin leaned his head back and sang in a raspy voice:

“All the while I was alone the past was close behind,
I seen a lot of women but she never escaped my mind.”

A little chill ran up Claire’s spine. “I didn’t know you could sing.”

A tiny smile crossed Corbin’s lips as he continued. “Well, not really, but I like singing Dylan. I guess that part of the song best describes what I want in a girl because that’s how I just always envisioned my perfect girl as being. The one that never escapes my mind, the one that I always want to come back to no matter what. And I named her Emily.”

Claire was silent for a moment.

“Emily?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Emily.”

Raquel Pidal
He gave her the tattered marble notebook and a copy of Dylan’s *Blonde on Blonde*.

She inspected the cover more closely. “Isn’t this the notebook you didn’t want me to see that night we went to — “

“Well, I changed my mind.”

“Why? What is this?”

“It’s just my writing. It’s just what I do.”

“What made you change your mind?”

“I don’t know. I just want you to read it, that’s all. You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“No, no, I’d like to. I guess I’m just not sure why you changed your mind, that’s all.” She turned the book over in her hands gently, as the binding was loose.

“Make sure you listen to this CD while you read my notebook. Promise?”

She glanced at writing on the first page. *You’re beautiful, just not on the inside.* “Yes,” she said. “I promise.”

She sat in her room with the CD on and read the notebook from cover to cover. There were drawings rich with intricate scrollwork, poems that moved by themselves over the paper, thoughts on life as clear and satisfying as spring water. Yet all throughout, there was a pervasive but understated sadness, gentle, smiling, and resigned. Claire felt as if she was looking through a window and waiting. By the time she was done reading, she had listened to the CD three times and had tears in her eyes and a stinging in her throat and ears. She had never read anything so beautiful.

“Oh my God,” she said, staring at her candlelit reflection in the mirror. “I love Corbin.” She touched her throat, shocked that she had been able to vocalize what she had been denying to herself for so long.

“I love Corbin,” she repeated. “Fuck.”

“I read your notebook,” she said to him after class. “It was

Raquel Pidal
Corbin shrugged. “Like I said, it’s just what I do.”
“It seemed so sad, though... everything just seemed very sad. Why?”
“I guess I’m just a sad person,” he smiled.
She handed it to him, but he pushed it back towards her.
“Keep it,” he said. “It’s finished anyway.”
Claire was confused. “But it’s your work. You have some fantastic stuff in here. Don’t you want to keep it? I’m sure you could publish some of it or something.”
He shook his head. “Claire, I don’t write to get it published or use it later or anything. I just write to get things out of me and onto paper. I write to understand myself. Sometimes you don’t know things about yourself until you get them out of you. That’s what they’re for. They’re my therapy. My soul-cleansers.”
Claire was silent for a moment. “Well, it’s amazing. I’d like to read more of it, if you’ll let me.”
He smiled again. “I’d like that, too.”
The next morning Claire found a manila envelope on her front porch with her name on it. She smiled as she opened it and found another battered marble notebook inside.

* 
Corbin’s sister called Claire two days later. Corbin had left the engine of his car running in the closed garage. There was no note, no apparent warning signs. There was only a row of neatly labeled boxes in his room, and one had Claire’s name on it.
By then she had listened to 3 more Dylan albums – *Desire*, *Blood on the Tracks*, *Highway 61* – and craved more. She paged through the two notebooks he’d given her every night before she went to bed, feeding her dreams with his beautiful words. She guessed at what was in her box. More notebooks. More Dylan CD’s. Maybe a letter. Maybe not. Exhausted and numb with shock, she went over to his house the next day to pick up the box and pay her condolences.

*Raquel Pidal*
His sister was tiny and tired-looking. “The funeral is this weekend,” she said flatly. “Here’s what he left for you.”

Claire was uncertain what to do or say. “Thank you,” she said, taking the box in her arms. “Corbin was… really special…..” She trailed off.

The girl stared at her blankly. Claire waited a minute. When the girl still hadn’t said anything, she mumbled something about going to the funeral and left.

She turned and looked back at the door when she reached her car. Corbin’s sister was still standing in the doorway.

Claire drove until the house was out of her sight and pulled the car over. Peering into the box and expecting a stack of notebooks and CD’s, her brow involuntarily knitted.

A folded piece of paper. An olive-green square of cloth – Corbin’s army coat. She took out the paper and examined it. There were two lines in his neat, small handwriting:

Oh sister, was I not a brother to you
And one deserving of affection?


Months later, in the winter, Claire was running late for school and could not find her coat. Throwing piles of clothes around her room, she spotted Corbin’s box in the corner. The army jacket was still inside, folded and untouched. She took it out and put it on. The sleeves reached halfway down her hands and the hemline fell to mid-thigh. She liked it.

Standing in the bitter cold, waiting for the bus, Claire stuck her hands into the big pockets to keep her fingers warm. Her right hand closed around something small and round. She pulled it out, uncurled her fingers, and gasped.

“Oh my God,” she whispered, tears forming in her eyes. “Oh my God.”

It was Emily.

Raquel Pidal
At the far end of the golden rice field, the sun sets. Horizon turns the watercolor blue of An-Chan petals and magenta of Lady of Eve. One thin girl rests her back on a haystack, piled up against the dimming sun. It shadows onto her fine body, smoothly blends her straight-cut hair to earth, her eyes up to clean stars of an infant night, onto her yellow skin of mosquito bites and down to her bare feet that run three kilometers to school. She wears perfume of dew, of sweat that mingles the soil and natural fertilizer nourishing her family’s field then reads donated textbooks when time allows. Her dress, a blossom of stained hand-woven skirt, willed down to her from her ancestors as the village tradition. Her father hiding in his hat walks up to her, rejoicing an instant cure of poverty over a letter read to him by the postman. In her ears, his voice echoes as if from a trapped valley...the field is sold...it will be replaced by a golf course...for the rich... The rest of the message is told and heard in tears over their last steps at the golden rice field.
My Own Giselle

Amanda Ripley

Picture a place where your soul unravels everything.
Pristine skies reflect the ocean and form the display for a sketchbook menagerie.
Nothing is beyond the reach of dreams, or a child’s hands.
Quick lips whisper in your ear: “Isn’t it beautiful?”

Blue eyes sparkle with the perfection of this place.
Porcelain feet dance in the golden mirror of childhood.
Young elbows and ankles, so busy dancing, dreaming, and living that they don’t notice a small scratch on the glass.
When asking about it, the response: “It builds character.”
So the dancing continues through the changing sky.

The golden mirror is tarnished.
Soft hands come to bring back its shine.
Warped, breakable puzzle pieces fly out, shards turning to crystalline dust on the jagged rocks.
Barefoot soles tread mechanically on, leaving a traceable trail of crimson calligraphy.
The heavens alter to match dusky eyes; the ocean ripples as liquid salt runs down weakened skin.
All that’s left is a bent, twisted, outcast frame with no way to be rebuilt.

Tell me, isn’t it beautiful?

Amanda Ripley
August 4th, the first day of their merger meeting. Margaret looked at her watch as she waited for the elevator to come. The meeting hadn’t gone well so far, and she was already half an hour into her lunch break. She got bored and stared at the lighted button, then at the numbers above the door. Ding. The doors slid open, and she thought about waiting for the one next to it, but decided she was in a hurry and could squeeze in. She did. Down one floor, down another - she looked at her watch again and watched the numbers above the door. Down, down, no stop, some other lazy person in a hurry. And there was Fred. The elevator spilled half of its contents, and he slid in. Fred? She looked at her watch; she thought he always took an earlier lunch. Sure enough, he slid over to her now. They nodded at each other, and she looked ahead at the panel again.

“How you doing?” he asked.

“Fine, you?” She wasn’t going to be impolite.

“I’ve been better.” Great, now he was going to complain about his wife and teenagers again. Two more floors to go, but would she be able to get away from him when they got out was the question. She began to think about excuses to turn the opposite direction from him as soon as they stepped out.

“Susan left during the night and got back at three this morning, drunk as a skunk. I had to take the kids to work. She’s in bed again.”

Margaret nodded. It wasn’t that she didn’t feel sympathy for the guy; she just didn’t feel like it was her place to tell him to leave the tramp and save the kids. She worried that his confidence in her would lead to something else, and a suggestion of that sort was like a green light. “Maybe Susan’s just going through a mid-life crisis right now. I’m sure she’ll come out of it. You need to show her you’re there for her.” She secretly hoped...
he saw her bad advice for what it was.

The doors slid open, finally. She hurried out of the elevator and looked back to give Fred her prepared excuse, but didn’t see him. She was afraid he’d sneak up behind her, but what could she do then? She hurried on to lunch.

August 4th, the first day of their merger meeting.
Margaret looked at her watch as she waited for the elevator to come. The meeting hadn’t gone well so far, and she was already half an hour into her lunch break, understandably tired. She got bored and stared at the lighted button, then at the numbers above the door. Ding. The doors slid open, and she thought about waiting for the one next to it, but decided she was in a hurry and could squeeze in. She did. Down one floor, down another - she looked at her watch again and watched the numbers above the door. Down, down, no stop, some other lazy person in a hurry. And there was Fred. The elevator spilled half of its contents, and he slid in. Fred? She looked at her watch; she thought he always took an earlier lunch. Sure enough, he slid over to her now. They nodded at each other, and she looked ahead at the panel again.

“So, how you doing?” he asked.
“It’s been hectic.” She was too tired to deal with Fred today.

“Isn’t it always?” She was waiting for him to complain about his wife and teenagers again. She wasn’t sure if she could take it today. She felt like she was about ready to snap at any moment.

Then it hit her: he wasn’t saying anything. Another floor down.

She couldn’t bear the silence, though, couldn’t bear the idea of stepping out of the elevator having only been snappy with him. “How’s Susan?”

“Same old.” That was it, no elaboration? He must be really depressed.

The doors slid open. The two of them exited the
Shaina Schmeltzle
elevator, but he just nodded at her. “See ya,” she said in confusion and walked on to lunch.

August 4th, the first day of their merger meeting.
Margaret looked at her watch as she waited for the elevator to come. The meeting hadn’t gone well so far, and she was already half an hour into her lunch break. Darn it, though, she deserved a break. She got bored and stared at the lighted button, then at the numbers above the door. Ding. The doors slid open, and she decided to wait for the one next to it. She was in a hurry, but she had a tight feeling in her chest and didn’t feel like she could deal with any more pressure.

The next one wasn’t long in coming. Completely empty. Apparently her timing had been perfect. It was smooth sailing all the way down; she smiled as she thought about her luck. Then, two floors from the bottom, it stopped. And there was Fred. Fred? She thought he always took an earlier lunch. They nodded at each other, and she looked ahead at the panel again. The doors closed as she saw people streaming out of the other elevator.

“So, how you doing?” he asked.
“It’s been hectic.” She was too tired to deal with Fred today.

“Isn’t it always?” He would complain about his wife and teenagers soon. She felt sorry for the guy, really, but he could be a pain.

Then it hit her: he wasn’t saying anything. Another floor down.
She couldn’t bear the silence, though, couldn’t bear the idea of stepping out of the elevator having only been snappy with him. “How’s Susan?”

“Same old.” That was it, no elaboration? He must be really depressed.

The doors slid open. The two of them exited the elevator, but he just nodded at her. She turned away, but then

Shaina Schmeltzle
The Elevator

turned back. “Wait, Fred?” He turned back to look at her. “You’re going to lunch, aren’t you?”
“Yeah.” He was coming back now.
“Why don’t we go together? You seem kind of down, maybe we could talk or something.”
“Yeah, that might be nice,” he said.

August 4th, the first day of their merger meeting. Margaret looked at her watch as she waited for the elevator to come. The meeting hadn’t gone well so far, and she was already half an hour into her lunch break. She had an uptight feeling that told her things weren’t going well at all for the company. She got bored and stared at the lighted button, then at the numbers above the door. Ding. The doors slid open, and she decided to wait for the one next to it. She was in a hurry, but she had a tight feeling in her chest and didn’t feel like she could deal with any more pressure.

The next one wasn’t long in coming. Completely empty. Apparently her timing had been perfect. It was smooth sailing all the way down. She smiled as she thought about her luck. Then, two floors from the bottom, it stopped. And there was Fred.

Fred? She thought he always took an earlier lunch. They nodded at each other, and he looked ahead at the panel. She couldn’t bear the silence.

“So, how you doing?” she asked.
“It’s been hectic.”
She wondered how things had been going with his wife Susan. He had it rough; she prayed for him.

“Isn’t it always?” She wanted to leave the conversation open for him. He needed to talk.

He wasn’t saying anything. Another floor down.

“How’s Susan?” she asked after a while. Sometimes she worried that he would feel like she was butting into his private life too much, but she was concerned, especially for the kids. She tried to give him decent advice without seeming to come on to

Shaina Schmeltzle
him; she had a daughter of her own. She knew it had to be hard.

“Same old.” Same old must have meant she’d been
drinking again. He must be really depressed.

The doors slid open. The two of them exited the
elevator, but he just nodded at her. She turned away, but then
turned back. “Wait, Fred?” He turned back to look at her.
“You’re going to lunch, aren’t you?”

“Yeah.” He just stood there, and didn’t move towards her.

“Why don’t we go together? You seem kind of down,
maybe we could talk or something.”

“Sorry,” he said. “It’s just too hectic right now. Maybe I’ll
catch up with you later. See ya round.”

August 4th, the first day of their merger meeting.
Margaret looked at her watch as she waited for the elevator to
come. The meeting hadn’t gone well at first, but after about six
that night, everybody had realized that if they didn’t cooperate,
they’d be there for days. Then things had suddenly made a turn
for the better. She had had to stay later to finish up some other
work, though. She got bored and stared at the lighted button,
then at the numbers above the door. Ding. Then the doors slid
open to reveal blank walls. Not only had she missed lunch, but
she had missed dinner. She hoped her daughter wouldn’t be too
unhappy with her. She hadn’t gotten a chance to call. She’d do it
from her car. She was in a hurry now, and just wanted to get
home finally.

It was smooth sailing all the way down, which wasn’t a
surprise, since it was nine o’clock at night. Then, two floors from
the bottom, it stopped. And there was Fred. Fred? What was he
doing here so late at night?

“How you doing?” he asked. She felt the hairs on the
back of her neck bristle. All she really knew about the guy was
from his complaints about his wife and teenagers.

“It’s been hectic.”

“Isn’t it always?”

Shaina Schmeltzle
The Elevator

She glanced nervously at the floor numbers. One more floor to go. He wasn’t saying anything.

“How’s Susan?” she asked.

“She’s just fine.”

She looked at her watch. The elevator lurched, and she almost lost her balance. Instinctively, she looked at his face. No sign of surprise. She could feel her heart pounding.

“You know, we’ve never had a really good conversation,” he said suddenly.

“Fred, this isn’t the time, and my daughter’s expecting me. She’ll be worried.”

“You called and told her you were coming home then?”

“Yes, I did.”

“No, you didn’t.”

She had a sick feeling in her stomach.

“Jennifer isn’t expecting you, she’s already gone beddy-bye.”

“Fred, what are you –” He came towards her now and ran his hand through her hair. She closed her eyes and swallowed hard, trying to stop the frightened tears that were running down her cheeks. “I tucked her in myself,” he whispered close to her ear.

Shaina Schmeltzle
Contributors

Ali Bierly ... just ran past you. She wants to know why sakura are pink.
Shane Borer ... plans on living forever. So far, so good
Nicole Borocci ... known for loving cones, Seinfeld, and The Price is Right. Favorite Quote: "I taste a liquor never brewed."—Emily Dickinson
Jennifer Brink ... conspires with ESB that “Robert Smith may be old, and Robert Smith may be ugly, but Robert Smith is still cooler than you.”
Kathryn Chapman ... can leap tall buildings in several bounds, provided she has a powerful pogo stick.
Flynn Corson ... slept in the slanty fountain outside Reimert.
Whitney Daniels ... Jeremiah 29:11
Rosabelle Diaz ... ...
susannah fisher ... freshman, majoring in english. afraid of scary movies and capital letters.
Amanda Helwig ... Biology Major, Art Minor, plays with jumping hermaphroditic clonal fish...really! :)
Katie Lambert ... loves penguins but is terrified to ever come in contact with one face-to-face. They can grow to be the size of a man, you know.
Olatokunbo Laniya ... is a feminist stalker
Phil Malachowski ... “I believe that for his escape he took advantage of the migration of a flock of wild birds.” (from “Le Petit Prince”)
Rebecca Mersky ... “Do not save your best perfume.” - Unknown
Harry Michel ... “the lover of beauty must become the lover of truth.”
Leah Miller ... wants to know if you’ve seen her shoes anywhere lately.
Sarah Napolitan ... “Rinse, Lather, Repeat.” Such satisfaction brought in only three easy steps?? What an age we live in.
Ari Nepon ... is currently building a super computer that will do your laundry and make s’mores. Just be patient.
Stephanie Perkins ... Brown M&Ms dont have as much artificial coloring because chocolate is already brown.
Andrew “Jacob” Petersen ... is a gemini...that’s damn right! Drew also is confident that he will not be overshot again. He is usually seen throwing oats into animals’ faces so that they agree on sacrifice.YES! YES!

Contributors
Laura Phillips ... owns a cactus farm and first bred the amazing exploding cactus. You’ve never seen an exploding cactus? Man, you’re missing out.

Raquel B. Pidal ... can’t feel her legs

Michael Anthony Pomanté ... a senior psychology and english double major truly, madly, and deeply in love with monsato.

John Ramsey ... is puzzled by the ancient philosophical question: Why for art thou monkeys flying?

Amanda Ripley ... plans to conquer the universe with an army of pandas. “Is that Doug? Is that a bottle? Great.”

Genevieve Romeo ... will one day translate an episode of Iron Chef into Latin. And on that same day, John Keats will bring her gallons and gallons of Yonkers water. Nevermore, nevermore and that’s it.

Joshua Rucci ... Oh! look at me, I’m making people happy. I’m the magical man, from Happy Land, in a gum drop house on Lollipop Lane......... Oh! BY THE WAY! I WAS BEING SARCASTIC!

Amy Scarantino ... frolics with Manatees and Team Limbic System. She also likes gelato.

Shaina Schmeltzel ... Twinkies, Twinkies ... golden cake and a cream filling – just like life!

Melanie Scriptunas ... discovered that water and dirt make mud. Hot damn.

Allison Shaffer ... is at a loss for words. “Inside you there’s an artist you don’t know about. He’s not interested in how things look different in moonlight.” - Rumi

Maura Strauman ... is a senior triple major in Biology, Spanish, and Halloween. She adores Pearl Jam, Karate and playing her Clarinet at “ludicrous speed.” Her favorite color is blue-green like the Crayola crayon.

Chris Tereshko ... can be sprinkled on pretzels and icy roads.

Melanie Thambash ... is fascinated with four word contractions and royal wizards.

Padcha Tuntha-obas ... makes boxes, defends poetry and says goodbye to Ursinus, her American home, with sincerest thanks.

Jen Walton ... Math major by day...Mystery woman by night.

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