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In Memory of Dr. Bobby Fong
1950-2014

Photo courtesy of Ursinus Communications

Oscar Wilde Scholar
Defender of the Liberal Arts
President of Ursinus College

"We must wield words well. For words embody our engagement with life. In particular, writing is not only a means of expressing what we know; the process of composition is arduous because it is a means of discovering what we think."

-Dr. Bobby Fong
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Mara Koren
Lauren Geiger
Lisa Abraham
Sydney Godbey
Michele Snead
Quinn Gilman-Forlini
Blaise Laramée
## CONTENTS

### Prose Prize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORA STERNLOF</td>
<td>The Retreat</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part of Eve’s Discussion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Poetry Prize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLAISE LARAMEE</td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypotheticals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Baby Hippo</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Creager Prize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOPHIA GAMBER</td>
<td>Sertraline and Cheerios</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Margins</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARA TRAVIS</td>
<td>Anatomy of Me</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXWELL BICKING</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ode to Mathematics</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILY DUFFY</td>
<td>Garden Path</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMANDA SIERZEGA</td>
<td>10n Power = Our Maybe Domains</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLIN TAKITA</td>
<td>Hillside</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISABELLA ESSER MUNERA</td>
<td>Baltimore//Analogues</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work is a Religion</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Bridal Shower</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIAN COX</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNIE RUS</td>
<td>Revisionist History</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold Front</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMINIC KNOWLES</td>
<td>Lung (for D. Avitabile)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLANA WARNER</td>
<td>Tether</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hold Still</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIAN THOMAS</td>
<td>Reverb</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Visual Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Artwork</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMANDA SIERZEGA</td>
<td>The Seagulls of 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Street</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUINN GILMAN-FORLINI</td>
<td>No Man’s Land</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDREW TRAN</td>
<td>Summer Flowers</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEVIN MOORE</td>
<td>Float</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARY HOLMCRANS</td>
<td>Dana Reads</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANGER COOPER</td>
<td>A Barcelona Moment</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLAISE LARAMEE</td>
<td>Business Meeting</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL HEIMBAUGH</td>
<td>Posted</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SARAH GOW An Almost English Major and his Daughter 81
CLOCKS 82

ALYSE BREWER In the Kitchen on a Sunday Afternoon 88

MARA KOREN Amy 89

BRIANA MULLAN Nine 96

ALBERT HAHN Customary Thoughts 101

AUBREY ATKINSON Showers 103

ELIANA KATZ Te Encuentro 104

JOSH HOFFMAN Literary Analysis 106

CAYLON FOWLKES The Diamond on My Face 114

DANA KLUCHINSKI Catherine 115

LAUREN GEIGER Hunsberger Woods, 11:42 on a School Night 117

MICHELE SNEAD Cabbage 118

ANDREW TRAN After Class 119

ERICA GORENBERG For Chell 120

HENRY WILSHIRE To Whom It May Concern 122

EMILY SHUE Contra 131

Shards 132

RAE HODENFIELD Smoke and Roses 133

MADISON BRADLEY Polaroid 136

KRISTEN COSTELLO Spring’s Debut 141

BRIAN LEIPOLD The Deadline 142

QUINN GILMAN-FORLINI A Previous Life 145

LAUREN MARANO Wet Canvas 147

MARY LOBO Obsessions and Compulsions 150

ARTHUR ROBINSON For Xandra 153

Contributors 155

Postscript Volkmer’s 50th 159

Cover Art Prize
MARY LOBO Champagne

House paint on canvas
Did you know you can buy $3 sample sizes of house paint at Home Depot? The entire paint chip color selection is available. Champagne was the first painting I completed in this medium. I love working with simple color schemes and solid, dark lines. I like to think that the woman in the picture would appreciate the simplicity. I imagine she’s at this party, away from the chaos, and quietly taking in her plain surroundings with a nice glass of champagne. ML
PROSE PRIZE

“The Retreat” by Nora Sternlof

Selected by Vince Leskusky, ’91

A distinctly human trait is our search for meaning and fulfillment. Macy, the narrator of the “Retreat” finds herself at a religious retreat pitching God’s saving love as the answer. Perhaps inspired, Macy takes a leap of faith for a love that she sees as a two-way salvation, prompting a personal retreat. The author’s idiosyncratic details of Catholicism, the sensory unifier of hot dogs and understated profound comments – such as “there is so little he needs to do” – recall Updike’s tortured Rabbit as he marvels how God couldn’t lift a drain stop. In this story it is the Judas kiss which never happens that creates the betrayal.

VINCE LESKUSKY ’91 is a fly fisherman and hot pepper fanatic who taught Jon the proper enunciation of Yuengling. Vince also teaches Gifted Humanities and AP Lit at Upper Perkiomen High School, where he coaches wrestling and football.
Prose Prize Winner

NORA STERNLOF

The Retreat

The basement of Our Father’s House looks like the aftermath of a cultural revolution, or a preparation for the apocalypse, and it smells like ketchup. It is carpeted in musty 70s-era orange, wallpapered in faded green, and crowded with a loose squadron of religious statues. The statues are plaster and plastic, of Jesus and saints, and it’s hard to tell one saint from another. There’s one dressed in green, who I feel comfortable calling St. Patrick, one with a shepherd’s crook and a look of dismay, say St. Joseph, one with a bird on his shoulder for Francis of Assisi-- but most of them could be anyone holy, and there is no order to their arrangement. It is as though the proprietors of the retreat center anticipate some kind of onslaught intended to wipe out Catholicism entirely, that has already wiped out the icons and art and relics of Rome and Paris and the great cathedrals, and so brought into their shelter all the signifiers they could find to huddle together, where no one would ever find them and melt them down into water bottles and window blinds. And there’s the ketchup, too sweet and already slightly stale.

“Macy, doesn’t that one Jesus look like the guy from Scrubs?” Chelsea asks me.

“What?” I say. “Do you smell ketchup?”

“Yeah, we’re probably having hot dogs later. Typical. You know, from Scrubs-- the angry doctor? That Jesus looks like the guy who played him.”

I look at the statue. Jesus has a reddish beard and a pop-eyed expression, shading past prayerful and into pissed. “Guess he got religion,” I say, more softly than I ordinarily would. I am, after all, on a retreat intended to prepare me for my Confirmation, the sacrament that reaffirms my connection to the Catholic Church as an adult. I’ve told my parents that I consider the process ceremonial, and I haven’t prayed on my own since my aunt’s funeral two years ago, but all the same I don’t want to be overheard by my Confirmation teacher, a gentle, elderly man who is prone to quoting St. Therese of Lisieux and being discouraged by teenagers. I worry about him.
“Religion and a whole lot of plastic surgery.” Chelsea uses her normal voice, which is slightly hoarse, and loud. We both laugh.

“That would make sense,” Ian says. “They spring from the same, like, general impulse.” He is taking in our surroundings with wide eyes, although his eyes are always wide. Wide and pale green, and I always imagine that too much light must enter them, and hurt him a little.

“Right,” says Chelsea without looking at him.

Ian is my friend, not Chelsea’s. She finds him tiresome, I think. Me, I’ve suffered with Ian. We’re in the same Algebra Two class at St. Michael’s High School, and we both take the bus there most mornings. I drink coffee to get through these things, but Ian prefers not to be chemically dependent on any substance and so cultivates a sense of perspective instead. Chelsea leads a different life, over at Millford County. She and I go far back, to playing soccer in the same lime green uniforms as little kids, but we haven’t spent as much time together since we began at different schools.

“Did you guys pick your Confirmation names yet?” I ask. For Confirmation we have to adopt the name of a saint.

Chelsea adjusts her black-rimmed glasses. “I’m going with Mary. It’s my grandma’s name anyway—she’ll be flattered. She always wanted a grandkid named after her.”

“That’s thoughtful of you,” I say. Everyone’s middle name is Mary, if it’s not Marie. Chelsea deserves more distinction.

“Maybe it’ll make her stop bitching me out about my posture. What about you?”

“Hildegard,” I say.

“Jesus,” she says. I glance to one of the statues. “Be glad the name doesn’t actually mean anything. Imagine if you had to write that out on stuff. Or have someone say it at your wedding.”

“I think that’s kind of freeing,” Ian says. “You can pick a name that’s meaningful without having to whittle it down.”

I told Ian about Hildegard, one morning on the bus. She lived in the Middle Ages, and wrote choral music and letters to popes, and saw visions. She was a rebel, so much so that it took centuries for the Church to acknowledge her as a saint. Chelsea’s right, the name doesn’t mean anything after they say it once at Confirmation, but I thought about it a while anyway. I think it could be good for me to have the name of a rebel, and a visionary. Ian agrees.
“You know, you’re so right,” Chelsea says. “What did you decide on? Something long? Someone no one’s ever heard of, so you can explain it to as many people as possible?”

I’m about to defend Ian (who in fact is taking the name of Francis, which isn’t long or obscure but is relevant to Ian’s environmentalist concerns) when my Confirmation teacher, whose name is Mr. Delroy, clears his throat several times like a series of apologies and gestures as though hailing a cab that has already passed him by.

“Let’s all sit down now,” he says, in a quavering voice, “and listen to our main speaker for today. He is going to be speaking on the importance of working for God. I want you all to pay very close attention.”

Towards the front of the basement are several curved rows of folding chairs, facing a podium. I am startled to see a short, rotund man with glasses and an upsweep of brown hair already behind the podium. I never saw him come in. I move into the back row, and Chelsea follows me, and Ian after. Sometimes I like to look at Ian’s profile, when he is focusing on something else. There is something very distinct about his face. But I don’t want to have to look across Chelsea, who might notice and misunderstand.

The man in glasses stares out at us, or rather slightly above our heads, until we are all silent. He begins without preamble. “I am here today to tell you that, today, you are not what you are intended to be.” He pauses for a moment, letting the effect settle. “Whatever you may think that you are, whatever you may think that you have accomplished, whatever love you may think you have earned, you are not the person that your God has made you to be. Now some of you, you may rebel against this. But others of you know that I speak the truth. You know that you have spent your lives too selfish, too timid, or too scared to accomplish all that you can accomplish.”

I am attentive. I still have an impulse towards reverence towards things I don’t quite understand, because of church I guess and also because my parents took me to a lot of symphonies when I was little. I think about accomplishments, about how I only do my reading for history every other class, and how I am stuck on JV basketball. It’s occurred to me recently that very few people at school know my name. I’m thinking about dying my hair red.

“Now I cannot tell any of you your stories,” the short man is saying. “Because I do not know your stories, which are right now between you and God. But, with the Lord by my side, I can tell you
mine.” He nods several times before he begins to speak again. Until the age of thirteen, he lived a sinful life. He drove his father to the belt and his mother to tears, and his grandmother, a godly woman who lived with them, to prayer, ceaseless prayer. He broke every window in his school, bullied kids younger than him, bought drugs from kids older than him. “And at that young age,” he adds, “I was already partaking in sins of the flesh. The girl thought I loved her, but I didn’t. I lied to that girl, and I used her, again and again.”

“No one wanted to know that,” Chelsea sing-songs, in what she thinks is a whisper. I smile at her, but tightly because I think she should shut up.

It is odd, how speakers like him will tell you things like that. I suppose they want to prove that they were far gone, far down the road, more like sinners in old country songs than anyone that I’ve ever known. As far as I can tell, God only wants the desperate cases. I do all kinds of bad things, or at least there are all kinds of good things I never get around to, but it is hard to imagine God correcting these omissions by striking me down in the road or sending lightning over my head. I’m just supposed to muddle through, unless maybe this man, somehow, is the lightning.

“Now that year, when I was thirteen, my grandmother died. My parents wept, and I stood with that girl I told you about, and pretended to be sad, although inside I felt nothing. But as we were crowded around her deathbed, as we looked upon this woman who had lived for ninety years— for ninety years— as close to without sin as anyone but the Holy Virgin Mary, she lifted her head. She sat up in bed, and my grandmother spoke to us. My grandmother came back to life.”

I am very still.

“She came back to life, and she turned to my girlfriend and she said, ‘Do not be with this boy any longer. This boy does not love you. This boy has a bad heart.’”

I feel that a middle school relationship cannot be enough to warrant coming back to life. Resurrection surely should not be doing the same job as a bad date at a mall. I want to make this joke aloud, to Chelsea, or even to Ian. I am kneading my hands together, because this man’s face is uplifted and his voice is full of conviction.

“And then— she died again. But a few moments later, she was alive again. My grandmother died, and returned to life, seven times. The holy number seven. Seven times she arose, and she spoke to us, all through the night. She told my mother that she must remember that the Bible commands us to joy even in our times of sorrow. She told my
father to return to the grave of his father, my grandfather. And the last
time she spoke to me, and told me that I had lead a sinful life, but that
she hoped and trusted that God would reach inside me, and give back
to me the grace that I had tried so hard to throw away. Then at last, as
morning broke, she rested. And from that day forth, my life was
changed.”

He nods, once, twice, slowly and with complete conviction. I
try to picture him as a child, and can only see him shrunken, a
homunculus in glasses, shaking a stick at a tree or preaching to a pet
dog. I try to gauge the faces of my classmates. I want proof that we
have all noticed that this man, who speaks calmly and resonantly, is
insane. I look over to Ian and see that his hands are formed into a
steeple over the bridge of his nose.

“From that day forward I went forth into the world as a holy
man. I now knew-- I now believed-- in the power of Jesus, and the
power of the Lord. Now at first my friends laughed at me. They did
not like this person that I had become. They could laugh, but I knew
that they were not scornful but afraid, of who I was, and of who- of
who they might become. And so I did not get angry, and I did not bend
to their taunts. And as I went forth in holiness, I found that they
followed me. They saw my new kindness, they saw my new faith, and
they saw the new light in me. And so they too were changed.”

I can’t help but think that I’ve never changed anyone, in a
lasting way. I think of someone walking through light, the way it
filters into the schools of my high school through the high yellow
windows, sifts over the linoleum. I imagine people circling me,
smiling. Ian smiling, everyone serene. The man informs us that he
continued through college in this vein of holiness, before beginning to
do charity work in Africa. That is what he has been occupied with for
the past ten years. He tells us about a recent event, in which he
encountered a man with an enormous tumor on the side of his neck.

“Now, friends, I saw that man, and I knew that I could heal him
and bring peace to him. So I put my hands around this tumor, and I
said, ‘LORD’”-- He shouts this, and I jump-- “’Lord, let me heal this
man.’ And yet, nothing happened. So I cried out again, and again, I
was denied. And I wondered, why was the Lord doing this to me?”

Maybe he should have been wondering what God was doing to
the man with the tumor, I think. I consider Africa, where I’ll never be.

“And then I realized, as clear as the day, that I was failing in
faith. I did not truly believe that I could do this thing. I was yoked
down by my knowledge of suffering, by my perception of what was
possible, by my belief in the fallibility of my own body. And so a third
time, I called out to the Lord, and between my hands I could feel that
man's tumor shrink. And from that day forth he was healed, and I was
healed."

He concludes by telling us that, inspired by his faith, he now
wishes to raise a man from the dead, as Jesus did for Lazarus. He is
confident that he can do this, if he keeps in mind the awesome power
of God. He reminds us that while we may think failure to believe in
ourselves is humility, it is actually the worst sort of arrogance, because
what it truly means is that we think we know more than God. He
thanks us for coming here today, offers a blessing for our
Confirmation, and reminds us to visit his website.

"Wait," I say, turning to Chelsea. "What was his name?"

She looks at me and shrugs. "I'm not sure he ever said it. Now
how are we supposed to look him up?" She shakes her head in
exaggerated dismay. "Damn."

"That was really weird." I hear how loud and shaky my voice
is. It is the voice I used to use at dinner after I heard my parents
fighting or accidentally watched Law and Order: SVU. It is a voice
that happens when I want someone to tell me that the world is still in
order, and I have not heard it from myself in some time.

"Yeah, he was creepy. I wasn’t even paying attention, half the
time."

"No, but it was weird. More than just the ordinary weirdness.
What was all that stuff about his grandmother coming back to life?"

She shrugs. "Well, Jesus managed it. What was he saying
about a tumor?"

She turns to Ian, speaking loudly. "Hey, Ian? I'm sure you have
something on this."

Ian looks startled. "What?"

"What did you think about all that?" I ask.

He nods. "Strange," he says. "But maybe meaningful. I don't
know. He certainly had conviction. He might have been inspired."

"What does that mean?" I am shriller than I intend to be.

"I don't know," Ian says. "I'm not sure yet. I don't think all
that about the African man can be true. It wouldn't be particularly fair.
To have to wait for a white man who worked with God. That seems
troubling."

"He couldn't have just been lying, could he?"

Chelsea shrugs again. "Why not?"
Mr. Delroy claps his hands. "All right, everyone, let’s move outside. Time for lunch." Chelsea nudges me. "Come on. Let’s get those hot dogs." She walks toward the door. My string bag is tangled around the leg of my chair, and I have to kneel down to free it. Ian waits for me. "Are you all right?" he asks quietly. "You look kind of shaken."

"I don’t know," I say. It was strange."

"Marcy?" Mr. Delroy calls. He’s been calling me that since the first class, and I’ve never had the heart to correct him. "Would you and your friend mind getting the lemonade out of the kitchen? Just around the corner there."

"Sure," I say. He smiles and slips out the door. I look at Ian. "Where?"

"In back, I think," he says. He puts his hand on my shoulder to direct me, which surprises me. He doesn’t usually do that sort of thing. "I guess you’re supposed to be afraid," he says. "According to him. That means you’re seeing the possibility of change."

"Doesn’t that seem messed up, though? If you’re afraid— that just means it’s working. Like isn’t that how a cult would want you to think?" We reach the kitchen.

"Maybe. But I think fear accompanies most significant endeavors. After you." He gestures.

The kitchen is tiny, with a table on one side and a counter with a stove and sink under a set of cabinets on the other. On the counter is a glass thing with hot dogs slowly turning on tines that emit a faint whir. The smell of the ketchup is stronger than ever—as though it has been slowly dried over decades into every crevice of the wall and counter—and it mingles with the boiled scent of the hot dogs. It is a smell so strong that I raise my voice to speak.

"I don’t see any lemonade."

"It should be here somewhere," Ian says.

I am worried for Ian. I am worried that he will never say anything other than that the lemonade should be where it has been said to be, or that crazed men who talk like prophets are interesting, or that math teachers who refuse to curve and put harder questions on tests than they do on homework are probably suffering from a secret sorrow. I am worried that if left alone, he will never take any kind of action. He might be unhappy forever, or get lost in Alaska and starve to death, or try to live with bears.

"What?" he asks. "Why are you staring at me?"
None of these things can happen. The smell is so strong I feel like we are in our own atmosphere. Ian is leaned against the stove, head cocked to one side. He looks concerned, or maybe just curious, like I am a science experiment with an unexpected result, or like I am the hot dog machine and have begun to malfunction. The whirring is growing louder, I swear it is, and I am close to Ian because the kitchen is too small for me to be anything else.

“We should check the cabinets,” I say, and step forward at the same time that he says, “Macy,” and steps toward me, and I put my hand out to keep us from colliding, let it rest on his shoulder. On his collarbone, really, where I have never had reason to touch anyone before.

I think about kisses in old movies, the woman with her shoulders stiff and her head tipped back, the man clutching her above the elbows and leaning down to her. It looks so gradual, and full of effort. We wouldn’t have to do that. I will just look at Ian’s eyes and eventually it will be inevitable. I will keep Ian sane and he will make me happy, because sometimes I think that I am only happy with him. If he kisses me I can say that I love the music he listens to, but only when I’m with him because other times it seems wan and false. I will tell him all this after he kisses me.

“Macy,” he says. “Are you okay?”

Maybe I should close my eyes. Close my eyes like a prayer. There is so little he has to do. This is what we are intended to be.

“Macy,” Ian says. “I think you should go get some air. You kind of look like you’re going to faint. I think it’s the smell.”

I step back. I let my hand drop.

“I can get the lemonade,” he says. “Really, you should just go ahead. Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I say, very quietly. The hot dog machine is still whirring. “Of course.”

“Then you should—”

“I heard you,” I say. I have to hunch my shoulders and turn sideways to get past him, to edge out of the kitchen, to hurry back into the wide orange space of the basement.

The saints, who stilled water and freed birds and bled milk, are looking at me. Their plastic expressions are unmoved. I wonder about the people who lived around their miracles, the blessed, the healed, everyone who just happened to be in the market that day and saw the saints carve a bright moment into space and time. I wonder what they thought, those people who were never made into statues. Those people
of flesh and blood. They could have been thinking about anything. About fish. About philosophy. They could have walked away. The saints look at me like an army.

Beyond the saints is the door. If I can just get past them I can go outside, into the spring light of early afternoon. It will be pale, and bright, and cling to the grass and the leaves. It will look as though anything might catch on fire.
Part of Eve’s discussion was academic. “He’ll be angry,” she said, “but then again, is not righteous wrath the function of unmet expectation, when things don’t go as you planned? It’s the prerequisite for pissiness, that you think your capicola sub will still be in the fridge when you find out your roommate ate it. God didn’t just get the ball rolling, he wrote the play on the whiteboard cosmos in Sharpie hieroglyph, fused the players out of rib and docility after which he tossed up a loaded tip. We’re working off his blueprints, this is all his party and shebang, he spent that insomniac week like the crafter of a Claymation epic molding and muttering just so, just so, just so. how could God be angry?”

And the snake said “Eve, you don’t understand the first thing about creation. It’s OK, that’s why I’m here. Choke down that apple and I’ll introduce you to the best artists, the up-and-comers. You can watch them spit in the eye of their great self-portraits, smash their calliope organs into so many smithereens, and kick down people in the street, just cause they heard the poor bastards quote back to them their own epistolary second novels.”

Eve told him, “Snake there won’t be any up-and-coming, anymore. It’s a Fall, don’t you remember? It’s all downhill from here, it’s all
Postlapsarian, this is as high
As it gets, this particular garden that goes heavy
On the cherry apple trees and the topiary
Animals. We'll be
In free fall, once I take this bite.”

And the snake said “Eve,
You don’t know gravity yet but soon
Some sap named Isaac will meet
Another enlightened apple and help
You understand that what goes up
Must come down. Later on Burnham and Root
Will amble along out of Chicago smokehouse fire and introduce
The foundations for buildings that climb
Back up into the sky, asking a little help
Of Elisha Otis the elevator father.

About then, you’ll understand
That once you’ve finished falling it’s all about reaching
Right back up, in immortal cloudbound
Hustle. And workers will fall from the girders and titans
Of industry in tall hats will step
On them and everyone to say
That they’re the king of the hill, right before
The mountain slides into the ground. Oh it’s unholy,
The striving, but you can’t say
It isn’t fun.”

And Eve said, “I bet someone, someday, will say
Exactly that.”

And the snake said, “Come on, babe, trust me. I moonlight
As an omniscient narrator.”
POETRY PRIZE

"Buchanan" by Blaise Laramee

Selected by Robert Whitehead '10

The first appeal of this poem is levity. There is something inherently unserious about the 15th President of the United States sipping a drink with a paper umbrella, or being snubbed by Truman for a birthday party invitation. But there is much more at work here than humor—Buchanan is an icon of "solitude," jeered at by men with "gold pocket watches dripping down their thighs." And he inhabits an environment rendered, at turns, beautifully—a river like "a silver knife through a muddy cake," an "art museum glowing softly, like marzipan"—and with true pathos. What seems at first to be charmingly funny proves also to be emotionally resonant, a confident lyric treatment of what it means to be an outsider. And don't we all "know exactly/ how he feels, sometimes"?

ROBERT WHITEHEAD '10 received his MFA in Writing from Washington University in St. Louis in 2013, and has been a fellow at the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets, Ashbery Home School, and The Rensing Center. His work has appeared or is forthcoming from Assaracus, Gulf Coast, Vinyl, LIES/ISLES, Verse Daily and elsewhere. He has been nominated for Best New Poets 2014, and was the recipient of the Iris N. Spencer Award in Undergraduate Poetry from West Chester University, the Alfred L. Creager Prize in Creative Writing from Ursinus College, and the Norma Lowry Memorial Award from Washington University in St. Louis. He is currently the Program Manager of the Psychotherapy Center for Gender and Sexuality at the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy and the Publishing Assistant for Guernica Magazine. He lives in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.
In the heat of June I discovered that Buchanan was the only president from Pennsylvania. I don’t know why this struck me so; I imagined him in different states of solitude: sipping a brown iced-tea from a tall see-through glass with a little paper umbrella protruding from the top like a sweet mushroom; standing on a giant map of the continental U.S. chalked on playground asphalt by children, while scratching one leg pensively with the other.

A crowd of portly men in double-breasted suits, gold pocket watches dripping down their thighs, jeers at him from Virginia and Ohio. James Madison insults his mother, and McKinley flips him the bird. Sometimes, Buchanan has Woodrow Wilson (the only president from New Jersey) over to his house for tea and strawberry scones, and when neither of them, in a feat of contrived maliciousness, is invited to the birthday parties of George Washington and Harry Truman, they go for a walk down the middle of the Delaware, scuffing the cartographic line that divides the river into Camden and Philadelphia, like a silver knife through a muddy cake.

I don’t know why this struck me so: how Buchanan must tuck himself into bed every night, listening to Pittsburgh hum in the kitchen, making sure the nightlight of Harrisburg is on in his blue-tiled bathroom, and watching the flicker of Ulysses S. Grant’s television from across the street; the sound of a bottle being thrown on the floor.

I don’t know why, but it did, and I’d like to tell Buchanan now, as I walk my bike along the bank of the glittering Schuylkill, the pillars of the art museum glowing softly, like marzipan, and the smoldering fire of Centralia burning somewhere
west of here with slow determination, that I know exactly
how he feels, sometimes; that we in the Keystone appreciate him
very much, and that he's welcome to join me for a ride
through Fairmount Park anytime he likes; perhaps
on the back of a white-tailed deer, the state animal, or,
if that proves too troublesome, on my sister's light blue Schwinn,
which stands ready in the kitchen and has, as far as I know,
only two speeds.
Go to a library. Look around you at the bookcases. Pick a bookshelf, a row of bookshelves. A room of bookshelves. Think about how many words are enclosed in the books in that room. You can't. It's impossible for your brain to conceive of a number this large. Any attempt to do so dissolves along an asymptote, moving always closer and closer to infinity. The nearest you can get to imagining this number leads you inevitably back to a singular whole: thousands of trees become a forest, millions of grains of sand become a beach, billions of stars become a sky so dark and so deep it loses all depth, and becomes instead the hemispheric ceiling and walls of a world in which someone is running their hands along, across the surface, looking for the light switch so they can curl up in a chair, drink a glass of clear water, and read until they fall asleep.

I am waiting in joyful anticipation for that time in the far future when the entire globe is one sprawling city, for the coming engineers to lay the asphalt for Equator Avenue, which will circle the planet at its thickest point, like a tape measure around the stomach of a fat man, and for the Antarctic suburbs, and the shopping mall toeing the contours, the future mall cop will tell us, of the once unpaved wilderness of France.

The older I get, the harder it is for me to believe in coincidences. It is a quiet and glorious streak of anti-cynicism, like the aurora borealis in slow motion, or a symphony slowed to last a thousand years; but it is also breathless and headstrong in its momentous decision, like the making of the Grand Canyon compressed on film and sped up, so that the entire event, the insidious and persistent carving and the determined wooing of minerals and negative space, is seen in only a few minutes, in a great and beautiful rush.

What if there was a city, somewhere, made up only of bookstores? Downtown would be bookstores and the financial district would be
bookstores; bookstores would line the highway, the factories would be
filled with books, and every tiny alley you’d turn down would end
with a little tucked-away bookstore. Every neighborhood and borough
would be bookstores, and you’d wander among them for days and get
lost but you wouldn’t mind because all the roads would be named after
authors, or genres, and you’d follow Kipling Street and Sci-Fi Avenue
and Thoreau Boulevard until you’d gotten right up to the edge of the
city, to where the book stores became fewer and fewer, until all you’d
see would be, now and then, a tollbooth lined with photo albums, or a
barn filled with atlases and old dusty maps.

hypothetical v.
Imagine that, one day, the sun failed to set. People came home from
work, briefcases locked with little reliable clasps, expecting the sky to
get darker, as it always did, but it didn't. The bats came
out of their caves, blinked, and flapped back in again, confused.
Across the city went up a joyous cry from thousands of children who
realized they didn't have to go to bed yet, and a groan like that from
ten twelve-ton locomotives when the parents realized it, too. There
was, for a moment, bombastic and gleeful chaos, as the children threw
pillows at lamps and yelled, and parents gasped threats, and ice cream
trucks whizzed around corners looking for stragglers, and hot dog
vendors banged their metal tongs on their little aluminum counters,
sounding like a million Christmas ornaments falling to the pavement
and cracking open, and dogs everywhere, Dalmatian and terrier and
mastiff, began to howl, low and long and steady, and then there was
complete and impenetrable silence. The fireflies flew gently around
the edges of the grass, but no one, hard as they looked, could see them.

hypothetical vi.
Tall people confuse me. They raise so many questions within my
spirit. How did they get so tall? What do they plan to do with their
tallness? Will they keep getting taller, growing and growing until they
overstep New Jersey tollbooths in a single bound? Will they walk
beside two-story buildings, running their hands along the rain gutter,
shaking down all the leaves trapped there onto helpless passerby? Will
they trick Swedish tourists into thinking that their enormous legs are
actually stilts?
hypothetical vii.
I want to see the United States before I die, really see it. Sometimes I feel like I don’t know the place where I am, like a mouse that lives in a ten-story skyscraper but stays in a broom closet in the foyer, wearing a tiny black blindfold. I want to walk through cities and write poetry about them as I leave: Boston, New York, Austin, San Francisco, Baltimore, Houston, Seattle, Detroit, Portland, Phoenix, Chicago. I want to compose sonnets on the rusty glory of rain gutters, to dangle villanelles from the fire escapes like flags.

hypothetical viii.
Have you ever stood at the apex of a turning road and felt the cars rushing headlong toward you, and imagined for a second the headlights continuing straight on instead of bending away with the street? Have you ever jumped from a building, only to have the ground and orange brick facade and Venetian balcony and wrought iron railing fall with you, keeping pace, so that you are always a hand’s length from the collision, eternally suspended?

hypothetical ix.
Imagine someone who has never seen a bicycle coming across bicycle tracks; they’d never know it came from something so hard and skeletal, never be able to envision the protruding handlebars and spinning gears. To them it would seem like the paths left by two snakes through loose sand, both running along and over and under each other continuously, inexplicably.

hypothetical x.
Do you ever wonder how long it took to paint the Ben Franklin Bridge blue? How many men in hard hats must have swung over the side from grappling hooks, or shimmied down the steel cables like pirates, paintbrushes clenched in their teeth?

hypothetical xi.
Imagine if I lived in a house made entirely of books. Whenever I’d start a new book, I would just reach out and take it from the wall and slip an old one carefully in its place. Eventually I’d read all the books, and I’d leave that house and build a new one of unread books, and in the mornings I’d look out my book window with its book sill and book curtain and see a line of empty book houses and be able to measure with my eyes the knowledge I’d consumed and the words I’d lived in.
hypothetical xii.
When a good, strong, blustery wind begins to come up, with a pack of rain nipping at its trousers from behind, I like to fancy my house a ship on the high seas, back when there were only seven. The windows become hatches, the chimney a mast, and the trees beside it great, dark waves, their leafy crests tossing in the breeze...

hypothetical xiii.
Whenever I become fed up with computers and cellphones and iPads and the diarrhea of digital information available today, I imagine what it must've been like to live in Europe during the 1450s; to share a decade with that progressive Gutenberg and the explosive advent of movable type, that antique supernova of words and ideas. And I think of all the gray-beards pulling their chins and muttering, scribes in lines snaking around the block, holding out bowls to the medieval soup kitchen; hollow-cheeked illuminators doodling magnificent G's and P's and W's on napkins as they wait.

hypothetical xiv.
It is a delicious feeling to be reading a book in which it has just begun to rain, and to look out the window and find that for you, also, it has begun to rain, as if you were the center of some mysterious and impishly grand conspiracy, the middle cog around which a hidden plot is unfolding, the happy victim of a secret group of aesthetes and literary weathermen, who hold in one hand meteorological charts, graphs showing the movement and consistency of clouds, maps of storm systems and layers of sunshine, and in the other grasp a copy of Paradise Lost by the spine; to find the droplets running down the gray pane of the glass like the round, singular characters of some indecipherable, perhaps asemic alphabet, falling downwards diagonally as if on the smooth surface of a tilted page. But reading, in the summer, a book set in winter, one in which trees stand in frigid and ranked forests like so many resolved Axis troops on the edge of Russia, their branches and bayonets mustachioed with icicles; in which ponds reflect back the sky like huge mirrors of lead, and where snow brings a new, cleaner, and colder geometry to the planes and contours of a place - reading such a book in the summer is like opening a tiny fridge onto your face, or dousing July in a bucket of ice water, or cupping an eternal snowflake in the small of your hand.
The Baby Hippo

I have not found something so perfectly symbolic, so flawlessly representative of an abstract, as the baby hippo is of death.

Just look at it and you will see what I mean, run your hand over its smooth, moist skin, poke its soft underbelly with an index finger.

Nothing personifies the eventual demise of everyone on this planet quite like this rotund mammal. Nothing spells mortality like its tiny, round hooves.

Forget the classic skeleton, hooded and cloaked, a scythe clutched in one bony hand, testing the air with its hefty weight like a retired batter.

Forget the giant hourglass full of sand, Yorick’s skull on Hamlet’s outstretched palm, the gallows at the edge of the courtyard.

All of these pale before the baby hippo. None of them can measure up to its baleful eyes, its ridiculously shiny head, its little squiggle of a tail.

It should be carved on every gravestone in the country, monogrammed on the napkins at the funeral home to remind us of its inevitable approach.

It will meet us all someday, when we least expect it. We will turn to find it strapped into the passenger seat, or standing there, one stumpy foot on the bandsaw, a paw at the base of the ladder.

It will crawl into bed with us in the middle of the night, nuzzle a cold nose into our hand, pull all the sheets from under us until we are utterly naked and alone, the curtains drawn, the nightlight blinking out for the very last time.
CREAGER PRIZE

“Sertraline and Cheerios” by Sophia Gamber

Selected by Bill Connolly ’88

This sadly beautiful poem portrays the heartache and joy found in families touched by diseases like depression and mental illness. Although the narrator looks back honestly at the pain and sorrow, love and understanding remain at the heart of the remembrance and of this poem.

BILL CONNOLLY ’88 is a lifelong educator who has published articles, essays, and poems in local and national publications. He has taught English, journalism, and creative writing, and everything he learned about evaluating creative writing he learned from the ever-wise Jon Volkmer. His poems appeared in The Lantern years ago, back when it resembled a program from a middle school play and when Jon’s hair was jet black. In his senior year, one of his poems almost won the prize, and an almost from H. Lloyd Jones (his wonderfully fierce writing professor and Lantern judge that year) was a huge win. He dedicates his stint as judge to the memory of Dr. Louis A. “Jim” DeCatur, his beloved advisor and one of the kindest, smartest, funniest men to ever walk the Ursinus campus.
Tonight I see my father’s shadow dancing in the rain.
A slow, steady quivering of hips
like the way he sometimes danced with my mother
in the kitchen
after a midnight of dirty dishes,
when they’d fold their dishwater palms
against one another’s
and let the radio announcer croon to them
the quiet love songs
of foreign wars, small sick children,
and stock markets.

I look out the window and see their ghosts outside in the street
as the autumn rain brings down tired and wilted leaves.

“What is God?” I’d asked my mother,
when I was six and in the backseat of her Subaru,
driving to school in the fall.
In the rearview mirror I could see the leaves changing,
the rain on the window,
the way exhaustion wore my mother’s body
like a blanket,
thick with wrinkles, threadbare around the edges.
“I don’t know, baby,” she’d said, and we drove in silence
until stopping at a red light, when she said
in her thick-throat voice,
to no one in particular,
“I think maybe God
is just the way we love each other.”

So now, looking back, I think I must have met God
one night in the upstairs bathroom.
My father’s hand on my mother’s back,
rubbing slowly up and down with a broad palm
    as she huddled over the toilet,
    her tired and wilted body rejecting
    the new anti-depressant the doctor prescribed.
God and I stood in the doorway, where no one else could see.

And when the car crashed and she called my father
and I was late for school,
    the leaves still fell so tenderly over the slick pavement
and the radio announcer whispered
through the highway's carnage
those quiet love songs
    of weather reports, a drug store holdup,
    upcoming elections.

Ours had always been a God of such small things,
of little love tokens bestowed heavily or haphazardly:
    autumn kisses, dishwater dances, or
tiny blue pills tucked away
    in corners
    where I wasn't supposed to look.
These were the many small and imperfect ways
that we loved one another,
    microscopic like the dust and dirt
    that collected at my parents' shuffling feet
on the kitchen floor
    and clung to my socks in the mornings
while I sat at the table eating Cheerios and watching
    as dishes collected in the sink
    and my father made coffee,
performing once more the tender, sleepy choreography
of a ten-year routine.

And upstairs,
my mother dressed for work,
wrapping her tired and wilted body
in a sertraline coating

    so no one else would see.
Margins

Six plastic buttons fasten together
the hems of her blue collared shirt.
For each one there is a promise
of unbuttoned, undone,
divulged.

But we do not live like
the women in the newspaper stories.
We live in the white spaces, in the margins.
Never in the lines:
it gives us more freedom this way.
We are all unabashed sun-bitten shoulders
and eyes and lips and legs.
So easily we are opened, unbuttoned, undone.
It is nothing.

It could happen to her, never to us.
We float in the middle distance of being,
like watermarks and coffee stains
we crinkle and smear the typeface and the newsprint.
We fall loose upon the floor,
curl around the foot of the table,
lend our bodies to the air.
We come undone.
Organelles
the slashes and curves, penstrokes that form

Cells
twenty-six different letters linked together become

Tissues
words stacked like bricks, lined up neatly in

Organs
sentences like slinkies bend and twist because they are alive,
part of

Organ Systems
paragraphs that work together, altogether proving

Organism
me, a valid argument, an

Individual
girl of words.
if i could feel the touch of your skin, layers of phospholipid phosphorescence sending scents (senses split like infinitives) layers like pages, i could read and parse thru the depths into the valleys of your citric acid and sugar.

you are cold, untouched untampered by herds of hungry who gnash their teeth (piano keys hit air from broken strings)

Ten times today i searched the wooden crates where you sit, curving dermis like Schrödinger—you are not now what you once were; You are hard.

You are soft like a matrix of silicon valleys and ridges (where you grew, the Supermarket in California sticks you in aisles of cells)

And when i peel you back, enter into your skin with every extremity i feel you dripping, feel your atoms in mine uncovering electromagnetic semicolons thru navel and spine
you
send energy, inspiration
into the dominoes of my neurons
semicircling round
deep into my mouth
as I yell *more,*
into the fragmented pieces of
ecstasy that once held you together.
Ode to Mathematics

Mathematics was in the eyes of the Pythagoreans, whose hearts dried from Archimedean sands.
She was with Euclid, chalking on skin circles and perpendiculars, from five axioms and praxis energies, stardust on his slate.
She carried Diophantus, adding polyrythmic and approximate lie algebras (geometry fades with the sunset).
She tricked the Vedics, sent their puzzles (Sanskrit sketches) through the mouth of oblivion.
She abandoned Galileo, and, favoring Kepler, lay with him every blue summer night.
She told Fermat $a^n+b^n \neq c^n$, $n>2$, but left his wideopen mouth silent and empty.
She was Newton’s only lover, drawing on the small of his back with her index finger “Alethea, Alethea”.
She plagued Perelman in the crescents of St. Petersburg, his beard folding like the Ricci flow.
She frowns at me, my voice growing cold and dark, words trailing, infinitesimal, while Cantor sits at the boundary, laughing like a fallen king.
"I’m taking these pills and they make me feel great!" she said, eggplant bruises splayed on her neck, tracing the mouth of her coffee mug. She took a breath and continued (she always had this habit of talking until she ran out of breath and she would have to pause, taking in air in a way that almost sounded like gasping).

"I’m also seeing someone, a counselor, you know, someone to talk to, someone who makes me feel good."

He remembered when he made her feel good, that was before he made her feel terrible, before helping her made him feel like worn, prickly rope was wrapped around his wrists and ankles, before he had to sever.

The last time, or was it the first time? Her forearms pressed against the sink with such force he was certain it would snap off. Looking at her own reflection, panicking, asking him if she was beautiful or no... did he think she was beautiful? Did he think she was as beautiful as the first time he saw her, or had it faded? He could never keep up with that line of questioning, was she beautiful? The more she asked the less he thought about it, like how seeing someone else’s garden is much different from the routine watering of your own. The flowers were just flowers, and they needed attention. Lots of attention. It didn’t matter how beautiful, they just needed to be taken care of.

The first time she tried to commit suicide was on a Tuesday afternoon. She texted him: "I just took twelve sleeping pills." And then, eight minutes later: "I’m scared." He saw them both together, and drove to her apartment from work. A 30 minute drive in 15 minutes. He took her to the hospital, and held her hand for hours until she was lucid again. The first thing she said to him when she came to was fuck you, I wanted to die. She stayed over at the hospital that night, convinced the staff that she didn’t want nor need to be admitted to the psych ward. He picked her up the next day, took her to his place and made a Spanish omelette. They ate it, and drank red wine out of coffee mugs—silence weighing the airspace between them. They had quiet sex and fell asleep with two feet of space between them.

The second time had been a phone call. Weeping, hysterical she told him she was in the bathtub and her wrists were bleeding. She said, please, please come help. He felt like a caged animal was clawing...
madly from inside his ribcage. He muted this sensation as he got in his car, because two wild animals can’t help each other.

Not long after, he began to paint again. Years had passed since he’d held a brush, poised. Canvas between him and the nude woman on a stool, sheet wrapped loosely around her waist. Grad school seemed like a lifetime ago. He started with blocks of color, and moved on to sunsets. From sunsets he moved to still life. A bowl of fruit, and then he became fascinated with mundane scenes around his apartment: toothpaste with the cap missing, a jar of Nutella, clothespins. He would stay up all night and emerge at sunrise, fingers stained with blues, reds, greens and blacks. He’d smoke a cigarette on his balcony overlooking the street and think that Paradise was something very close to this.

She became gradually muted. A color faded by time. A sonata played on repeat so frequently it began to sound like white noise. She existed only in the abstract. Eventually, when he tried to picture her face all he could see was blurry shapes. Blurry shapes the color of flesh. She was nothing. She didn’t exist.

A friend of his set him up with some shared gallery space. A little workshop tucked in the corner of two streets, a little below ground level. He painted there. People walking by on the way to the grocery store would stop and watch sometimes. He started opening the door. He taped a little handwritten sign that read: “Welcome, come in!” and people began to oblige. He sold his first canvas to a German couple: an 8 x 11 oil of a toothbrush on a bathroom sink. The man said he loved the feeling of solitude it evoked. The woman joked that they would hang it in their bathroom.

He began to paint bigger canvases. He loved the challenge that they presented. The sweeping way he had to move the brush to cover all the empty spaces. The physical effort exerted, it was truly full body as opposed to small minute tedium. He started painting balloons: single balloons swimming in light blue sky. He had known a girl back in grade school who had a fear of balloons outdoors. She said she couldn’t stand knowing that at any moment they could be taken by the wind, up up up until they were a spec of nothing. He always thought this was irrational. You can always tie a balloon to your wrist, as his mother always did to him at the State Fair. Blue globes of helium with the words “Stanley’s Auto Parts” printed in white.

He painted one canvas that was almost taller than he was. It was almost all sky, but when you stood close you could see a tiny balloon with an impossibly thin ribbon trailing below it. An old
woman purchased this one, after looking at it for a long time with her palm on her chest.

The friend who had set him up with the gallery space also had friends who liked to organize gallery shows. He was invited to take part in a show with another artist, a woman who painted messy gardens. However, she made a fuss at the last minute, saying that she wanted a private show. They arranged that he would show his work on Wednesday and Thursday, and she on Friday and Saturday. The first day, Wednesday, he sold not a single painting. He watched patiently as people filed in and out, asking polite questions and avoiding prolonged eye contact. On Thursday, it appeared that things would play out the same way. And then, a young man with rimless glasses and a messenger bag came in and purchased two of his large canvases, it happened so fast it seemed almost impulsive. And then, more people came in and started buying paintings. By the time Thursday was over, not a single canvas was left. He felt a little sad. Now he would have to paint more.

Over drinks the next week his friend told him that the garden woman hadn’t sold a single canvas. He’d shrugged.

“You know, dude, I told her, it’s better to show with another artist. And judging by your wild, quite frankly unprecedented success, she might have benefitted from some of that spillover, you feel me?”

“Feel you.”

Over the next couple weeks he felt a mad rush to produce more canvases, more quickly. This was quickly becoming his livelihood. He spent his days in the workshop, sometimes with wine in his hand. He returned to smaller canvases for a spell, simply because they were quicker. He moved from rogue balloons to kites. Something about the way they were tethered satisfied him deeply. Everything from classic diamond shapes to the more structurally complex rectangles and birds he’d always envied during his family’s summers on Cape Cod. He painted a massive piece filled with all sorts of kites, floating harmoniously, secured by invisible hands just below the bottom of the canvas. It took him over two weeks, sitting every day in the workshop, glasses perched on his nose, bottle of red wine at his feet. It appeared romantic, but to him it was the most pragmatic thing he could possibly be doing.

On a hazy Tuesday afternoon he was bent over the bottom of his easel. He heard someone walk in and he bristled. Usually he had no problem painting while people perused his workshop, but some people
gave off a vibe, an energy that perturbed him, that interrupted his flow. He sat up.

“Hi.”

She’d cut her hair. It was pinned back neatly with a clip, revealing modest pearl studs. Her sundress was light blue. Her eyes painted with matching catlike stripes of liquid liner. She was pristine, her appearance marred only by some violent looking hickeys on her neck. He’d wondered what this would be like, had imagined her finding his studio, coming in and punching holes through his canvases, sobbing about how he had abandoned her when she needed him the most. But that had never happened. She’d faded to a pinprick, and then nothing, and now here she was. It almost seemed like a dream or a puppet show.

“This is a really nice place.” She said, walking slowly around the perimeter of the room. Her heels clicked like a metronome on the wooden floor.

“Thank you.” He said, brow furrowed, trying to grasp the fact that she was present, in this place, in this moment.

“Do you want to grab coffee?” she asked, suddenly, wheeling around to face him.

He startled, pushed his glasses to the top of his head, and rubbed his eyes. She was still there, looking at him expectantly.

“Sure, yeah... uh one second let me just clean up here.”

“Alright, I’ll smoke outside while you do that.”

She had never smoked, this was a new thing, he thought as he gathered his brushes from beneath the partially finished canvas. He washed them in the basin sink, watching the blues, the greens, the reds, and the blacks blend together. He washed his hands too. He left the studio, locking the door behind him as she was crushing the cigarette beneath her heel. She smiled faintly, and said good timing.
Evelyn Maria Passos

Education
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Disasternauticism
Periphery University
Distinguished Honors in Stillness

Experience

Leadership
Inside glass case (1998-present): Live wire manipulation. Killing bird inside chest. Mitigating knee jerk addictions. Breathing through clouds. Counting to 1...2...3...4...

Skills
Fortifying double-paned glass countenance; dissolving into sand. Clenching hands in small fists: leaving crescent indentations in places you used to read.

Achievements
Echo chamber feedback loop
Semblance of façade
Unendingly moving to a place which is relentlessly the same.
There is a man taking a nap in a park in Florida. At any given moment, he is the center of the universe. At all moments, he is the center of his own.

You are in D.C. on concrete and your chromosomes do not shake (with long ing) They are not dIspLeAsEd. You are in your domain

Did you know galaxies grow and glow above us? Or do street lights and taxi horns hinder your perception? “Out of sight; out of mind” because you are in your domain

in training, taking tests, writing politics papers predicting and reflecting upon our nation’s greatest blunders because heaven forbid if history repeated itself here or in another universe; however many there are wherever.

And I am elsewhere on grass, in training writing to you one million million light years away to say:

“Our galaxy is not a disk-like circle, like a gear from the jeep you loved and I think you sold. Did you feel one million million light years away? Where gravity shuns oxygen until your chromosomes shake after you put on the EMERGENCY break one more time for old times’ sake.”
The universe is a raindrop in the street, 
now on the soul
    of your shoe.
It is on your chest, 
in your hands, and hair.

We are one million million light years away

    We are in our domains.
There is that place to which we all go, as children, to huddle up like trolls over our precious golden troves and watch as the passersby tread confidently, unknowingly past us, kicking dirt and marching shadow soldiers across our rosy, weathered cheeks. Not without a certain amount of pleasure, we watch them move along, watch them leave, not bothering to glance over their shoulders. But, why would they? They don’t know that we’re there.

I grew up in a militaristic household. My father was raised in a similar environment, with his father having actually been a soldier, even though you’d never guess it. Fittingly, my father decided it was appropriate to bestow on my siblings and me the same displeasures he had enjoyed as a child. I guess it was an “if I had to deal with it, so do you” kind of mentality, but I’m not quite sure. Nevertheless, the house ran like a well-maintained foreign car. Though, often – more often than not – it ran more like a Ford: Fix or Repair Daily. Unfortunately, mechanics can only repair braking systems, not breaking hearts or bedroom doors. I never minded too much, or really even noticed. I was told that the hole kicked out of the bottom of their door was the result of some furniture repositioning. It could have been, so I never knew. I can thank Dad for that. It must have been his connection to the military, or maybe his job in politics, but my father was always good at covering things up. He would throw on the heavy blankets to snuff out the fires. He would throw blankets on us, too, big and dark, and we’d crawl around like little bugs under the dirt, looking for safety, while the big monster outside would wrap us up and snuggle us to death.

My father would pick up my two siblings and me from school and drive us home. He would make us start our homework during the drive so we didn’t waste any time. It was a quiet drive then; he always had a headache. Once we were home, the three of us would unload from the car and pile inside the house. My dad would follow and start cooking dinner. Aside from this, the day-to-day hasn’t stuck with me much; I was young and I felt safe. Home was that place of security, that clichéd safe-haven from the scary things in the world outside.
"Leave your attitude on the porch," my father would say. "Whatever is bothering you outside stays outside. Don’t bring it in here." Maybe that’s why my mother wasn’t allowed back in.

Things weren’t always good inside, though, no matter how hard my father tried. Some fires couldn’t be extinguished; some had to burn out on their own. Some never went out. So maybe I don’t remember the day-to-day because it wasn’t worth remembering, or maybe I was forced to forget it. I read in a Huffington Post article from 2012 that I can intentionally lose memories. I don’t know if I lost them purposely or if they just hurt too bad to hold on to. Regardless, they’re gone.

I remember them, though, sometimes. I remember them while I lay in bed, looking up at the ceiling that seems a little too far away. I remember the old house, the house before the addition was finished. I remember my room. It was a place that never really left me, because I never really left it. It was my cave, my treasure trove, my secret place where people could walk by without noticing me.

My sister, Kelsey, took us upstairs one day. We sat on the ground, playing with our toys. My brother Carter and I rolled trucks and cars across the musty carpet while my sister sat on her bed watching us and listening. I was pudgy then; pudgy being the only way to describe the five year old face that looked like it still had the previous night’s dinner stuffed in its cheeks. I waddled over and sat on my bed across from hers and looked at my sister closely, innocently. She didn’t notice.

As I understand, days such as the one that Kelsey took us upstairs weren’t uncommon. I don’t remember them all; I was maybe six or seven. I have heard the stories since then, and though I had never heard the voices drift upward into the room, I have since been able to piece things together. They still argue, and I hear them clearly.

My sister had shared a room with me until she was in sixth grade, when society dictated that she should be left alone. The three of us, Carter, Kelsey and I, slept no more than five feet apart until she got her own room downstairs, moving my father to the old, green recliner in the living room for a few years. Carter and I shared a room and a bed for long after that. My father wasn’t negligent or ignorant to our spatial needs. These were simply our means then. It was a small house, no more than 900 square feet between the unfinished basement, the first floor, and our attic-turned-bedroom upstairs. The attic was the only room big enough to fit the three of us, so we slept there. I didn’t mind. The attic was half playroom, half bedroom, and half dreams.
The ceiling was sloped on either side, starting about a foot from the ground and coming to a point at about six feet in the middle. My father would fill the whole space when he came up to say goodnight. It was quiet there at night, and I enjoyed the quiet. He would sing to us softly until we slept and the day melted away.

According to Merriam-Webster, magic is “a power that allows people to do impossible things by saying special words or performing special actions.” The author J.R.R. Tolkien filled his novels with poetry and ballads, paying homage to their magical qualities in the world of elves, dwarves and trolls. Carter and I would listen to Tolkien’s audio books in the car with my father on the way home from school sometimes. The adventures continued inside on some of the quiet days; my dad had hooked us on – bred into us, really – the game Dungeons and Dragons. Carter was always the hobbit. Hobbits, endearingly called halflings, were childlike and small. I was the elf, svelte and wise. I was never a very good elf. We would play all night, sometimes, often fighting, more often laughing, always dreaming. My dad always played the magician.

It was easy to dream in the attic. The steps that led up to it from the first floor were steep and narrow, like a winding mountain pass. At the top was a cave, dark and deep. I would set up army men on the mountainside and shoot them down with rubber band cannons. I would crawl up, propelling myself with my hands and feet like an animal. Sometimes my father would chase me up the steps and pretend to catch me. Sometimes the fighting downstairs would chase me up even faster.

A few years after my sister moved downstairs, my brother and I followed, relocating our shared bedroom into the newly finished addition. I slept there for some years, staring at the upper bunk from underneath. It was harder to dream there. Between the threat of a collapse and the growing pressures of adolescence, my mind wandered less and less. I became focused on schoolwork and girls, and I forgot the mountainside. I forgot until my father and stepmother had a baby, and we needed more space for the new addition to the family.

I took up my belongings and cleared them from the room in the addition. I hauled them up the stairs and loaded them into the attic. It was dark. The light had long since burnt out and the wires had been disconnected. It took me a long time to set up my new, old room. I placed my desk where Kelsey used to have her bed, over my birthparents’ old room. They hadn’t slept there together for almost 10 years, but that didn’t mean the sounds didn’t haunt me. Their voices
still travelled up the stairwell and through the gaps in the floorboards, bounced off the sloped ceiling and floated closely above my head as I lay in bed, awake. I had changed and the room hadn’t.

But my father didn’t come up anymore. I filled the room, my head touching the ceiling, when I would walk to bed at night.

I had a strange sense of autonomy in those months that I slept in the attic alone. In those few months, I dedicated myself to my books, spent my time buried in schoolwork, learned what it meant to argue and what it meant to resolve. I was accepted to college. I wrote my own poems, sang myself songs and drew myself pictures of life and love and the future. Once, I defined my childhood in the attic, surrounded by my siblings, hiding from the monsters that lurked all around us. Alone, I defined my own self in that space. In the same bed that I had slept in and shared for all those years, I buried myself deeply into the darkness of the blankets and muffled the sound of the world outside. Beneath the blankets I schemed and watched as the world, cruel and cold, walked past, while I dreamt of a quiet future.
I think of you back in Baltimore flying over Arizona. Arizona is hued in red and checkered; the seams are fissures, weasely furry green between the grid sprouts without rhyme or reason, I feel dust on my shoulders like a breath.

It could be the desert, it could be Kentucky.

We drove through the hills outside your city, falling down around us like drapes over women’s curved bodies and like a zipper sailing through the horizon we were golden, we were quiet, you didn’t say much but asked me if this is what Switzerland looked like.

I said yes, like Berg Am Irchel or the countryside around Quebec. All the cows were flags and they twitched and chewed and flickered as we passed. They’re all the same, wide sinless eyes like black sea pearls.

The plane plunges into white and for a moment I’m blinded to everything but my existence, the worn navy blue leather of the seats.

I forgot Phoenix has a coastline, it cuts across the window like a geometric interruption, a blue triangle slowly eclipsed by my brother’s sleeping head. In the furious sunlight shadows move over his cheekbones, his eyelids slide into crescents, neither of us sleep with them closed, his Adam’s apple a sort of coastline. I am frightened to remember that I am older.

Arizona is in the brick of Baltimore.

The city flanks itself on elbows of peppered red, burnt clay brick and rusty metal and working men talking to themselves. Off the train it was raining, some homeless man counting quarters asked after you. “I like this city,” I told you later, “It reminds me of Philly,” and you said, patting your nameless dog, “I love it like something all you want to do is take care of.”

A sock like a waving mitten is tied to your windshield where the wiper broke in some storm on the way to some party. The drive bristles around the car; the pines like Cape Cod, the grey sand reminding me of an LA beach. On our way to the campsite we talk of giraffes. Your ex-girlfriend left you an almost life-size stuffed giraffe you keep in your room. “I hate it now,” you say, lying. Your shirt is either grey or green, matching your eyes that are like bullets or marbles. “How does someone just dissipate? How do you just say how are you? Like I used to know you. All of you. Now it’s like you’re just
another person, like you’re anybody else.” We let your bitterness slide under us with the car’s passing shadow.

“It’s 75 degrees,” you say, “Feels like 80.”

I have a coffee. “Could have made that,” you said. You talk about how your new job is so much better than being a barista. You give tours, pick on people, become an actor. “I can’t even picture you doing that,” I tell you. “Oh yeah, I’m pretty well versed in the art of being a tool,” you say. We’re all twofaced, 3D, competent and careening.

On the flight to Hawaii I think of the countless visits I’ve already paid in my head. I’ve been there many times. Every rock will be the same but different. And they will unfurl and morph in my dreams of recollection.

At the campsite your tanned step cousin adopted from Taiwan tunelessly strums his guitar and sings the Shabbat prayers atonally with his whole heart. He is a mere and precocious seven and fits into his pale, blue-eyed mother like a flute or a sapling from their home. The challah we eat is as soft and golden as morning clouds.

Curl around the lake was a highway like the fraying string of a child’s yoyo. We dipped slowly into the water like pH strips and pretended it wasn’t there, ignoring the hanging green exit signs in the distance, discover a chest of aquaflorei swirling like serpents or seaweed. The lake is still and cool as glass and it shimmers. Smooth and topoisi, it is as gorgeous as sunset.

We could be anywhere. We could be anyone. We arrive back to Baltimore.

We return to summer, summer is a flimsy and flaking space of time and we smiled at everyone like shy school friends, and they returned, smiling, watching your small and buoyant cousin shout and play on all the rides, the city melting around him like wavering backdrop, he was like our brother or our child.
ISABELLA ESSER MUNERA

Work is a Religion

work is a religion ambition is a prayer get on your fucking knees

Drink coffee. Eat pills. Wear nice clothes, pull them off, be naked, switch to comfy clothes. Try your best to look aesthetically pleasing in your disarray; continue. Vanity ambition, delusion, disenchantment, perseverance, defeat, determination, a vanity swells again, do not question my authority. Night milks itself out into morning. Let your fingernails grow, pluck at every instance of your skin; there must be something to pluck and pull and tie round, dock, yourself to against: your eyes are spinning. I did not ask for this you are thinking, but I did demand it, I did not ask for this you are thinking, but I want to command it, I asked for this, you are thinking, can I stand it, and mirrors dissolve into one another in your mind.

In the end you birth a child and don’t really believe it’s there, even though it is screaming and dripping with your blood, you cannot really comprehend it and its physical fragment reality of you, and you blink at this thing in sudden horror of your responsibility, wrinkling your nose at the stench.

“Well, your hair,” she says, her eyes masked in the huge black lenses hanging over brow and just skimming the cheekbones, between her face and yours. The space whittles into your thumb that sees its reflection in the spirals of the wooden table and you circle them round and round with your finger, like magnets upon greeting each other, unconsciously and not fast enough to illustrate your surprise, say quickly, “I know, it’s grey,” before she has a chance to spit something out of her thin, heart shaped face, so small and shiny in the sun, the creams you know she applies providing a permanent sheen, the wrinkles carefully and inconspicuously folded into themselves as she smiles, the shades unblinking and alien and chic.

“No,” she says, “I mean, you have a lot of hair. It’s really nice hair.”

And you laugh because you know few people keep their hair long, and you’ve dyed it, and she quickly asks about dye, about your wife.

Her husband asks you how you are. If you are busy. Across the table you stare at this nameless, open-eyed couple, the birds humming to themselves in the background.
Your wife is busy, you tell them. You drink the sixth beer you have had in the past forty-five minutes and they sip their wine silently. It is a softly glowing pink in the dusk light and in a single clear slender glass slides wordlessly back and forth from one another. The beer is cold and pickled in sweat and tastes like horse piss. American beer they chilled for you. It fits snug in your hands like the rounded curl of a child’s grip. They hold the wick of the wine glass with their fingertips, delicately. It springs up like a sapling.

You vaguely mention streets and things that happen on them, trying to remember the ones they walked on when they visited you. You find yourself theorizing, generous philosophy spills out of you and it catches in Thomas. You would have been friends in school. He uses his hands like he was opening portals, stretching them out and explaining them for you. You look into them curiously, politely deny another flank of steak.

The corn twists on the grill like a flagrant yellow corkscrew, a gypsy begs, drips in Munich. Some thin parchment paper slip brittle in the summer heat, she stretches on a concrete ledge over the pavement, the heat of the afternoon cracking her dark skin, her black hair flapping like a flag in strips; she twists, she twists. Was she crazy? You don’t remember, now. You were younger when you had the time or made the time to watch her.

You do not wear your wedding ring.

They ask about the children. You move your hands and pivot your head planerly. Think of the vacant ambulant ambivalent drifting the girls make in their soft blue summer dresses, their hair long and golden like their mother’s. They glide through the city as though passing along beach dunes, they roll their eyes up and stick burning things in their mouths. They hoot good-naturedly, flashing their pretty fingers in peace signs, grin charmingly at parties and through bites of the small dark plums swept up in the market stalls casually picked, swing off their bike, to the bus, their teeth are small and curve up, at the corners where their skin meets their eyes their mischief softens into capricious youth, blurs into blue, kindness warm like their mother’s swimming tranquilly there, the tranquility of years humming slowly, walking towards them, backpacks on their broad shoulders, muscled and paved with olive green military linen, ambition furiously pedaling down the highway, they glance over their shoulders, amused, nod cheerfully, watching it pass, looking on.

The knot where your heel and ankle fuse up into your standing support system burns. You remember a lifetime of running, of stairs.
“Life stops for them,” she declares, serenely. A hard box in fine paper, like a challenge or a comment. She leans back in her chair but does not drape her arms over its rests. You (still) cannot discern her eyes and her mouth is an ambiguous horizon line.

“Franciscka fights all the time with Lina,” you tell them. You talk about how mothers cannot stand their daughters, how daughters will always remain daughters to their mothers, how mothers will always remain mothers to their daughters, how everything is a function of a relation to something else. Your father rolls himself up from the heavy chair by the window, the city a dull childlike kazoo anonymous and plastic and far and jazzy and muted below him—rolls up the red medicinal review magazine alongside his hips, rolls himself up with a spine agile as a whip that sprung into rivers when he was a dollop of a kid, pale and watery like white early sun, a skeleton of morning, vanishing before the day came upon him, remember when he showed you this lagoon far from the steamy city you ran towards, slouching and puffing his chest proud, heaving with emotion, remember when this square man opened his hands out like a king to the empty flatness of an olive lagoon, this square man that once had been scrawny with youth, that once had been mere lines.

Words stick in your mouth like houred gum. Briefly you remember the days of dip, soaking in your teeth. You run a tongue over your molars, suddenly conscious of whether anything is stuck there.

“Her mother isn’t too good,” you tell them, sighing. “Her memory isn’t so good, and she wants Franciscka there all the time. Fran says she’s fifty, she isn’t just a daughter.” You all start talking about irony.

The couple’s daughter home to visit is young with pointed features and arrogant eyes, thin and elegantly boney, hair piled messily and importantly on top her head, face drawn forth like an arrow. She angles herself against her chair, she has not slept; she is twisting a golden engagement ring. You can tell this and feel this, her eyes deep and dark, her skin translucent, something restless burning, her sleeplessness slithers over her crossed arms itchy and uncomfortable like an old, hairy costume feather boa in a grandmother’s closet that seems faintly to glow and then hiss and crowns you with its ancient silent splendor and you tip, carefully, into and out of the mirror, lifting yourself into and out of parallel realities and carefully considering the life of a movie star before you know the difference between stars and movies.
You want to reach out and stop her. You want to tell her everything. She pales and glows and flashes in an instant, her profile sharp and magnificent and regal as an Egyptian queen. A newness, a freshness. I have lived in cities, you want to tell her. She exits. Youth muted, stuttered and stopped as you stare, distancing and smallening like a train pulling through distance. It no longer aggravates, but it surprises, like a shot of something sharp, so unfamiliarly sterile and clean in the doctor’s office. She is living in the cities now, her lovers spinning behind her like revolving doors.

“They are happy, the girls,” you say. Ungrateful and glittering. You suddenly realize that Thomas will soon be a grandfather. Another dimension slides away.

The night has plummeted around you and settled in an inky temperance, teething and warming itself in the flickering of the small, cute lanterns she has discreetly set, glowing gently behind the looping iron cast. “From Morocco,” she explains, looking you in the eye and smiling. Her wrinkles web out around her eyes like echoes. Your wife is younger.

In a sudden moment of clarity, you realize you are living a moment in a movie.

The wife excuses herself, slipping into the kitchen where she leans against the counter and moves around it mechanically, begins to wash the dishes, looking out at the dark hills through the window, moving her hands in smooth, even circles across the white plates.

You and Thomas loan your voices to the night, tug at each other, speak in German. Eventually you become conscious of time, of age, of manners. Slowly, like waking, you leave.

You drive through the silent American suburban streets, the houses like people with long yellow eyes and visions that spiral in and through them, flicker, shut, snap up, fading away behind you, remembering the first time you ever rented a car deep in the heart of America when your sweat didn’t bother you, this small silver car is scentless and you feel huge and then you don’t and are another anonymous seamless grey part swiftly moving across the landscape. You consider playing the radio, but you don’t, and suddenly think about the enormity of airplanes and are overwhelmed. When you pull into the hotel, you feel like getting up slowly and instead sit there for a moment, the engine running. Then you shut it off and go inside.
ISABELLA ESSER MUNERA

At the Bridal Shower

The breeze at the bridal shower was nice.
“\(\text{I live fine,}^{*}\) Ruby was saying. She had taken off her large sunglasses; they were sitting next to her empty tin cup of wine.

“I learn a lot, living on my own. I play jazz, I cook. You know, I never learned to cook, but now, I really, really like it, I play my jazz loud, sometimes I have some pot, a little pot, I say, what the hell, so I have a little pot,” she shrugs, waving her hand dismissively, leaning back from out of the white umbrella, “and my wine and I just have the whole house to myself and sometimes you know, the room is like it feels full of people, and the music is so loud and I say, oh my god I’m drunk, I need to go to bed!” The mother of the bride laughs; her eyes are large and liquid, they slope sleepily under her eyelids. Her eyelashes are laced in mascara, they are as sharp as butterfly tongues.

“I learn a lot on my own,” she says, nodding. You see her collarbones beneath the loose blouse. They are as sharp as her cheekbones; she has a face like a diamond, heart-shaped and pointed, splintering at her large, liquid eyes and framed softly with a black bob.

“I don’t like it what they say,” her Colombian accent thickly glossing the words. “Ruby, oh Ruby is so lonely on her own. I learn a lot on my own. I learned how to cook, I never knew how to cook. At my house we always had empleadas, I never cooked, and I was never home! I left, I was out in the street, oh, I was...I liked it! I liked to be out in the street, I left home very early, I said, what the hell! I was, okay, I was a little bad girl. I didn’t like to work, and I liked to dance, I still like to dance! And I was never with my mom, my sister was with my mom. My sister was always with my mom; when I went to school I didn’t live at home, but Martica lived at home ohh...she lived at home very long time. She was always with my mom, so she cooks. And I see her and I think, wow, she is just like my mom, so like my mom, always in the garden, always with her finger, saying, ‘Listen!’ just like my mom.” It is dusky now and the light has turned to a low simmer, golden. A little chilly and around the table the other women trace the bottom of their tin cups.

“Let me get you some more, honey,” Ruby says, to the youngest one.

“No it’s okay \textit{tía},” she tells her, “I can get it. Where is it, in the kitchen?”
“By the fruit,” Ruby says, nodding.

The young woman gets up a little awkwardly from the heavy wooden chair and leaves.

Across the deck at a round table without an umbrella a man and a woman sit, a little older, with dusky paper skin, squinting and quiet. The women looks queenly; the man is smaller, rounder, something about him feels weak, even though he has a long curly red beard and his eyes, black and small, look bright. If you did not know he had been heavily into drugs for most of his violent life, you would take his small frame in his white uniform and tall hat for what he was, the chef and the daughter’s father.

The woman next to him has loose black hair and smiles very gently. She does not take her hand off of his.

“Here, do you want some too?” The young woman returns with the bottle, uncorked, liberally but carefully pouring it into the ladies’ glasses.

“Gracias mi amor,” Ruby says, smiling. She is beautiful against the sun, and closes her eyes briefly.

“You know I am so happy for Paulina,” Ruby says suddenly, abruptly. “I mean sometimes it’s such a drag, none of my friends can go out anymore, or they want to go out with couples. Ugh, que peresata. And I say why the hell would I do that? No, now I have my places I can go out on my own, or I can go with Marga.” She nods to the permed red-head with thin eyes and thin lips, both outlined in smooth black charcoal, a sort of gypsy who is too drunk not to smile. “She is so happy,” Ruby continues. Behind her, her daughter Sara waves, grins, modelesque and tall in her heels, brown hair curled prettily leaps giddily over to her father the table over, her heels making a light clicking. “And Chris is such a good guy. I love Chris,” Ruby declares. “And you know, so what, so what if they marry? Let them marry! They live together already, you know? And they are happy, so let them be happy! Let them marry, and then you know, eight years later so what if they say, my god, this is marriage?” She rolls her eyes but then laughs. “Ah...it’s okay, they’re happy, so what.”

“You don’t know that,” the young woman says gently. She makes eyes at the blond Russian woman, who herself has beautiful little blue eyes set against the warm folds of her face. She is dressed modestly and wears no marriage band; she has been nodding at Ruby this whole time with kindness. Every so often the Russian woman and Ruby get lunch together. “You never know what could happen,” the Russian woman follows quietly.
“That’s true,” Ruby nods, drowsily, thoughtfully. “That’s very true.”

After the guests leave Paulina sits down on the bench overlooking the pond and the patio, between her mother and her aunt. Her mother has now put on a purple hoodie, tucked her hair into a headband, and changed into polka-dot boxers; her aunt remains in her white blouse and white pants. Paulina looks like a mermaid in her sweeping mint dress that she has clutched to her breast all evening, being a size too short to fit into her sister’s taller, gazelle frame.

“I love you,” she tells her mother, drunk. Kisses her.

Paulina’s hair is long and black and falls down her naked back. You can see a tattoo along the rim of the gown, just as it tucks into her torso. It reads I carry your heart, I carry it in my heart and refers to her Sara, who has since left with the other bridesmaids.

She leans back against the two women. “I’m so fucking happy,” she says grinning. “You know what ma, Daddy did good. The food was fucking awesome.” Her tiny aunt Marta furrows her brows then quickly releases them, says nothing. “You’re amazing, tia,” Paulina turns now to the petite, put-together woman with sharp green eyes. “Your house is beautiful. And my girls...holy shit, my girls,” she laughs, falls back. Her mother smiles at her, then resumes closing her eyes. “I’m sorry tia Marta,” Paulina belatedly remembers to apologize to her prim aunt, then continues, “I can’t believe how fucking happy I am. You know I didn’t even like Chris at first? I was like, ew, get him away. I was so fucking mean. I played with him. But then he took me to Atlantic City, you remember that ma? I wasn’t sure if I should go, and she was like, “Heijita, just go, all those perros you’re always with, just go—you remember that ma? She didn’t even give a shit, I was dating this Dominican then who she fucking hated...and so I was like, ok I’ll go, and it was kind of awkward at first, but then, tia Marta, the second night...I just told him, listen this is how it is. I just told him, straight up, this is how I am you know, and if you don’t like it, well then fuck yourself, I’m sorry, but fuck yourself, and he just...we just laughed, I fell in love with him in Atlantic City, I’ll never forget it, I fell in love with you in Atlantic City. I came back ma, you remember, and I said, I’m in love, I’m in love. And now we’re going to get married. And he’s my best friend. Chris and I, we can be totally ourselves and we totally get it and we have our own, our own little bubble,” she crooks her elbow, makes a circling gesture with her index finger around it, “and like, everyone can come here, like right on the edge of the bubble, and some can even come in, I want
them to come in, but like Chris and I are here, and this is our bubble, and this is our fucking space, and if you don’t like it, you can leave. We know everything, together, and just like, instant. And you know what, Chris loves me so good. He loves me so good. I never was with a guy like that. Chris is my best fucking friend, and I tell him, and I know, he loves me, so, so good.”

Against the final burning orange that slips in the background behind the three women, Martha shifts, touching her niece lightly. Ruby looks as though she is sleeping, and Paulina stares out, her cup empty. “I’m going to have one more cup, and then I’m gonna go,” she says.

“No, more wine?” Martha says, appalled, glancing briefly at her sister. Who promptly looks up and addresses her daughter, “No, are you sure?”

“I’m going to stay maybe like half an hour, and then I’ll go.”

“Are you sure? You’re going to be ok?”

“Yeah, yeah ma I’ll be fine. I know the way.”

Paulina exits, lifting her loose mint gown and holding it against her chest, Cinderella over the steps, into the house. The two sisters sit quietly for a moment, looking at the pond. A face appears in the doorway to the house. It is the young woman who consoled her aunt earlier, and now she called, “Ma, do you want me to start on the dishes?” Martha waves her hand. “It’s okay hijita, we’ll do it later.”

The girl nods and disappears back inside, where she finds her cousin and kisses her, seeing her drunk and happy and beautiful, crassly on the mouth. “You look gorgeous,” she tells her. “I love you,” Paulina says, smiling, hugging her to her chest.

She leaves shortly after. Ruby makes her young niece promise to visit her often in New York and bids them all a good night, and Martha calls her husband, telling him to come home.
BRIAN COX

November

A step outside is met with cold beauty, iron preservation of the soft yellows, of the dead browns, of all nature boiled down to an essence to be injected in one dose into the central nervous system, nerves on edge break the mold of warm, lazy Saturdays and four-mile jogs in the August rains of yesterday.

The sun no longer breaks in columns of fantasy among the leaves but rather surrounds flushed cheeks and chattering teeth, bodies swathed in attic jackets and crawl space mittens.

"I love the cold," she used to say, one hand pressed against my beating heart and bare chest, eyes locked, "It makes me feel alive."
When I was in ninth grade, my English teacher nicknamed me the absent-minded professor. It was a distinction born out of a combination of affection and frustration, because while it was clear I could do the work she gave us, I wasn’t always great about handing it in. It wasn’t laziness as much as it was forgetfulness, which had been a problem for me for as long as I could remember—which, admittedly, wasn’t very long. My train of thought had no tracks, and when everyone else would arrive at the station, I would dive headlong into a ravine. My mother once yelled at me while I was playing the piano, and I was confused until I realized that instead of taking out the garbage like she’d asked, I’d put it under the piano bench and forgotten about it.

I tried a number of different fixes—I would mark different colored stripes on my hands with marker and designate a memory to each stripe, or I would hide little pieces of paper in my pockets with reminders written on them, which worked well until I found them fossilized in the dryer, having never been removed from the aforementioned pockets. For a time, I carried a camera everywhere I went and took pictures of anything I thought I might want to remember later, but when my laptop finally gave up the ghost and I had no more memory card space I had to switch to a different method, which was carrying around a little notebook in which I wrote things down—a diary, essentially. This was foolproof up until the point where I forgot to bring my notebook with me or check it when I needed to, but so far nothing else has really worked. I write down anything I can think of in my notebook. Appointments and dates are programmed into my phone’s calendar, but important things like who I was with on which day and what we did, I write down in my notebook. I copy down everything I can think of, things like “Chrissy was wearing the red shirt with gold sparkles, the one I have too, and we ate cheese calzones and watched Buffy the Vampire Slayer”—these little details sometimes overshadowing the big ones, like how I remembered that Chrissy was wearing a red shirt, but until she reminded me, had no memory of how she had kept me from falling over a cliff on our walk a few hours prior.

I’m always tempted to lie in my diary. You’d think that when you’re writing for yourself it’s a free pass to be honest, but because I
know that what’s written there will most likely be the only thing I remember later on, I muse over the possibility of writing my life just a little better than it actually is, adding some spice when it needs it and sweeping my more embarrassing moments under the rug, changing how I handled things. I never actually do this because first of all, it’d be inconvenient if I remembered something differently than everyone else, and secondly because, let’s face it, lying to yourself in your diary is kind of pathetic. If I lie, it’s a lie of omission, but my memory being as bad as it is, who can tell whether or not that kind of thing is intentional?

And yet, even when I don’t write down lies, I catch myself lying in my head—my brain plasters over things which are uncomfortable or don’t match the rest of the décor, and in the absence of that memory I make up things that seem to fit, cutting out my own jigsaw pieces for the puzzle. Alien pieces get shoved into real memories, and then it’s hard to discern which parts are real and which aren’t. I know that I once swam in the Mediterranean and watched my shadow glide across the white rocks at the bottom while the girl I loved watched me from the beach, but I also remember her swimming out to meet me, our shadows becoming tangled like seaweed on the rocks, and if not for the fact that I know she hates cold water and never once got up from her towel I’d never know the difference. I conflate things which have happened with things I wish had happened, sticking should-haves into my mind like push-pins into a map, that map of my life filled with those red pins in all the places where something should have happened but didn’t: there’s one in the Heathrow airport for when I should have left the line and kissed her, one in Tampa, Florida for when I should have said goodbye to my grandmother in the hospital, one in the art classroom of my middle school when I should have said “I’m sorry,” and one across the hall where I should have said “thank you.” One on a bench in Philadelphia where I should have told him I loved him instead of hoping my hands could press the knowledge into his chest, his shoulders. Three in Baltimore for when I should’ve said something else, should’ve kissed my girlfriend again and made it better the second time, shouldn’t have looked away when she held my hand.

In all of these places I wish I could go back and whisper in my own ear, give myself the cliff notes to my life. I wonder if it would be worth it to give myself memories I never had, or if in doing so I’d lose track of how I became who I was somewhere along the way, or if I already define myself by those things I wanted to do but didn’t.
Sometimes I think it wouldn’t be too bad to let something very painful slip away, but the mind, Freud said, is an ocean, and no matter how bad I say my memory is, things do not sink, they come back on the current like driftwood, weather-beaten and unfamiliar, and I roll them back into a strange grey sea. I dwell until it becomes unhealthy. I’m told that the worst thing a person can do for themselves is let things linger the way I do, like seaweed around my ankles, but luckily I can distract myself by pulling out pushpins in my map, coloring over the holes, and writing stories about someone else in my diary.
I returned home from the hospital in early February, arriving via a train that stopped half an hour away from town and then a ride I was bumming from Dan. I'd been worried about what people would say, but news of my arrival was overshadowed by a snowstorm which blew into town the week before I got there and the double homicide that had happened the night before. When I got off the train I didn’t know about the homicides but was acutely aware of the biting cold. The storm itself had passed, or was resting under the slate-colored sky, but it was still cold as hell. Snow moved in little wisps around my feet. The only thing that protected me from the cold was my backpack, and even that had started to feel like a frozen boulder. It held only clothes and a few essentials, my iPod and toothbrush and stuff. Most of the things in my dorm would come in the mail later.

The train stop where Dan was picking me up resembled a large, possibly handicapped three-walled outhouse, and I opted to stand outside instead, occasionally taking my hand out of my overcoat to pull my bright red scarf over my nose. It sagged terribly, the elastic having long given up the ghost, so I occupied myself with this small battle until I heard the familiar roar of Dan’s pickup rolling up the trail of frozen mud and packed-down snow behind me.

The pickup had a snow plow attached to the front, and for some reason this warmed me. I felt tears burn my eyes. I wiped viciously at my face with one of my oversized snow gloves and ended up smearing a fine layer of clear snot across my cheek. Dan’s truck stopped and I wiped my face as clean as I could with my scarf and let it hang loosely around my neck. The driver’s side door opened and Dan stepped out, his tall rubber boots hitting the packed snow with a low thud, one after the other. He stared at me for a second as if he wasn’t sure who I was—as if maybe he’d come to the wrong train stop in the wrong middle of nowhere and found the wrong girl in the same giant coat she’d worn since high school. It was terrifying, but in a second it was over and he was smiling at me, arms outstretched. “Camille!”

I took a few quick steps which turned into a run and embraced him, and he spun me just like he had in high school, whenever I felt lonely at one of our homecoming dances. I pulled back to get a good look at him, trying to ignore the fact that he probably wanted to look at
me too, to see if I had changed indelibly somehow, or if I’d finally
gone off the deep end—or maybe he was just happy to see me, but I
wouldn’t allow myself to consider that possibility. He looked the
same—light blue eyes, red-faced, large-jawed, an uneven shave which
made me think that maybe he’d tried to grow a mustache and then
thought better of it. Still had his Minnesota Vikings cap pulled down
over his overly large ears, still had his faux-sheepskin lined coat.
“Camille? What’s wrong?” He gave my cheek a playful tap with his
knuckles, bare hands red from the cold. “You crying?”

“Nah. Freezing slowly to death.” I resisted the urge to wipe my
arm across my face again. “You got any tissues in your truck?”

“I think I got a towel from the gym in the back.”

“Works.” I shrugged. I let Dan help me into the passenger’s
side and shivered in the sudden warmth after he’d slammed the door
shut, then extracted myself from my backpack and dropped it between
my legs. I unzipped my coat, baring a dark green hoodie emblazoned
with iron-on letters: MSU. I’d forgotten I was wearing it, and I looked
away, pulled my coat back over my chest. The promised gym towel
was not in the back seat, or if it was, it was trapped under piles of
Dan’s crap—old sweatshirts, hockey sticks, what looked like most of a
car engine wrapped in a table cloth: if it caught Dan’s attention it
ended up in his back seat. I wiped my face with my scarf again before
he’d shut his own door.

“What’s it been now, a year? Crazy.” I watched the dashboard
lights flicker as Dan pulled his car out of the sad excuse for a parking
lot, glad to be seeing something that wasn’t snow. An empty can of
Red Bull rattled in the cup holder. His high school graduation tassel
swung from his rearview mirror and I fiddled with the blue and gray
strings.

“Almost,” I said. We were driving beneath the latticework of
snow-decked trees now and I felt obliged to look at him, but his eyes
didn’t leave the snow-packed road. “We saw each other on St.
Patrick’s day. Jonah’s party.”

“Damn,” he said. “Crazy.”

“Tell me about it.”

I heard the crunch of a branch beneath the truck’s tire chains
and looked out the window. Maybe the snow had looked nice when it
first fell, but now it was muddied and thrown up against similarly dirty
trees, and the overcast sky did nothing to help the sick pallor of the
woods. We’d turned off onto Blackburn road, which was clearer, but
still empty, the single yellow line faded to almost nothing. I wondered
when he was going to ask how I was, or if I was going to slip up and ask him and then be forced to give an answer when he returned the question. I was considering this when he said “Oh!” so loudly that I started in my seat. “Camille, did you hear about what happened yet?”

“No? I mean, it depends, what was it?”

“Oh, shit.” He jerked the wheel to avoid what looked like a possum on the road and I gripped my armrest. I’d forgotten how hazardous it was to be in a car with him and it took me a few seconds to gather my thoughts. “

“What were you talking about?”

“You know that old couple living down near Butler? Two streets down from you or something?”

“Not really, no.” I didn’t know any of my neighbors very well. My parents were loners living in a microcosm of forced intellectualism involving dry educational videos on economic principles and hardcover Richard Dawkins books, a lifestyle which they did not deign to share with anyone else. Both of them worked in other towns and presumably had social lives there, ones which I always felt were somehow inappropriate to ask about. Most of the people I knew in town I knew because we’d gone to school together.

“Yeah, neither did I. I don’t think anybody did, everyone I talked to said they’d never heard of them before. But okay, so it’s just this old couple living together, them and their dog, and yesterday morning the guy goes into his shed, takes out a shotgun, goes back inside the house and shoots the woman and the dog like it’s nothing. No reason. The other Dan, Dan Trellis I mean, said that when they got there he was just, like, sitting at the table waiting for them to show up, and the woman and the dog had been sat on the couch like they were still alive. And I don’t mean they were sitting there when he shot them, I mean they’d been moved to the couch.”

“Jesus Christ.” I gave a thin little whistle for emphasis. “That’s creepy as hell. No reason at all?” I tried to imagine it, Dan Trellis and the other officers walking into one of the nice little cottages that lined the streets down near quaint little Butler and finding that. The other Dan was a mutual friend of ours, so I was probably going to hear the story from him too at some point.

“They were both in their eighties so Trellis says they think it must have been cabin fever or something, from the storm.”

“After a week? There has to have been something going on before that. People don’t just lose it after a week.”
“Yeah, well, who knows? By the sound of it they didn’t really talk to anyone so no one could really tell the police what their home life was like. Maybe they fought every night and the guy wanted to do it for like fifty years or something and then he just --” he snapped his fingers, “—you know. Seriously, though. Double homicide in a town where people don’t even lock their doors, it just blows my mind. In their eighties, too. Christ.”

“Double homicide?”

“Yeah, the woman and the dog.”

“I don’t think you can legally charge someone with homicide if it’s a dog. He’s probably going to get charged with murder, and then with whatever crime you charge someone with when they kill a dog.”

“Tell it to PETA or whatever. And everyone else too, everyone’s real worked up about the damn dog. I get it, if anyone ever hurt Riley I’d probably rip their head off, but it’s like they’re more upset about the dog than the wife.”

“Misplaced priorities.” I pulled my legs against my chest, knowing Dan wouldn’t really care about what my wet boots would do the passenger seat. Outside of the window, tree branches weighted with snow hung low to the ground, like curtains. The clouds were prominent and threatening. Dan and I had reached a conversational impasse. In any other situation he’d have been talking up a storm but now he was quiet, eyes flicking from me to the road. Waiting, I suppose, in the most tactful way he could manage. I decided to bite the bullet. Then I immediately changed my mind. “How’s everyone, aside from that?”

“Mostly good, I guess. Jonah and Molly are dating now.” “No shit?”

“Yeah, apparently it’s been a long time coming. I guess I got shit for brains or something, I hang out with them every other weekend and I never even noticed. It’s nice. They’re real happy.”

“Wow. Yeah, good for them. That’s awesome. What else is new?”

Dan shrugged. “Besides that and the homicide, not too much happens around here that isn’t clockwork. There’s the snowstorm, I guess.”

“That’s pretty crazy. Snow in Minnesota?”

“Unbelievable, I know.” He clicked his tongue and hummed a little as we turned at a stoplight. “How are you?”

I’d failed to notice that we’d gotten into the sparsely populated area that constituted the edges of the town and was suddenly very
interested in the houses we started passing with increasing frequency.

“Did the Murphys’ paint their house a different color?”
“No, I don’t think so. Pretty sure it’s always been blue.”
“Right.” I looked at my gloves and felt almost embarrassed by them, by how big and bulky and stupid they were. I took them off and dropped them between my feet. “I’m okay, I guess.”

“Okay is fine.” Dan fumbled around in his jacket pocket, forgetting, I suppose, that he’d switched out cigarettes for Xanax and nicotine patches two months ago—this I’d found out on Facebook via a picture of a box of Kools sitting in a garbage can. Another picture of Dan giving victorious thumbs up to the camera. Force of habit was strong enough that he checked his other pocket before relenting. “I mean, you’re really okay?”

I shrugged. “Fine enough to be here. Not fine enough to be at school, I guess.”

“Yeah, you’re taking some time off, right? That’s good. You need a vacation.”

A vacation. It was strange to hear it put into those terms, like it was a choice I was making. “A whole semester, actually.”

“Whoa. How long is that? Is that the rest of the year?”
“I go back in the fall, yeah.”

His hand twitched toward his pocket again. “So how does that work? Do you make up those classes somehow later?”

“Maybe. I might be one of those fifth-year seniors. I don’t really know what I’m going to do.”

“Hey, that’s not so bad. College is fun, right? So you get another year to do like, I dunno, college stuff. It’ll be alright. I know how it is. I got held back once, remember?” he said.

“And it ended up being great because that’s how you met me, right?”

“Because I got to redo tenth grade and I knew everything already, so everyone thought I was hot shit.”
“No, everyone thought you were stupid because you were redoing tenth grade.”

He barked a laugh, a brief huh! sound, and I started. His laugh had always been alarmingly loud, even though I’d known him for years. “You can’t even talk. We met in fucking remedial English.”

“When I go back to school I’m going to meet someone in remedial neurology and he’s going to be my new best friend.”

We laughed and I felt something unwind. Broaching the subject of my impromptu homecoming with Dan somehow made the
thought of discussing it with my parents a little more bearable, even though Dan hadn’t asked for the details yet. I wondered whether or not talking about it would let us move on or drive a wedge between us. I’d sort of had the idea that once I had the opportunity to talk about it everything would come out, but instead it was like a rock in my throat.

“So, like.” He glanced at me. Looked straight through the windshield and pressed his hand into his pocket again, then after finding nothing, let it rest against the half-empty can of red bull rattling in the cup holder. “Why did you do...what you did?”

“What did I do?” Dumb question. I already knew that one. I’ll take ‘What I did’ for $500, Alex.

“Try to kill yourself?” His voice hit a higher, confused register.

“Oh. Yeah.” I followed Dan’s line of sight through the windshield, watching the patches of dirty snow pass under our wheels. “Uh. I don’t know?”

“Seriously?” He still didn’t look at me and my stomach twisted like a balloon animal, something crazy, a giraffe or a porcupine maybe.

“Seriously, I don’t know. I can’t remember.”

“How do you not remember that?” He gesticulated wildly at me. “Did you seriously not think about anyone else? About your parents or your friends or anything? That’s so fucked up.”

I snapped. “Sometimes people are fucked up, okay? If you wanted a friend who was happy all the time maybe you should have gotten another dog. Seriously, I—shut, watch the road!” We’d started to drift over the double yellow line. Dan jerked the wheel again and pulled us back into place, and I felt nausea rising.

“Can you open the window? I’m going to puke.”

“Button on your right. Lean to the side so it doesn’t fly back and hit you in the face. I learned that one the hard way.” I cracked the window open and a brisk tail of wind slapped me. This happened a few more times before I closed it and opted instead to wipe the condensation off with the back of my hand and then hold it against my forehead, as if I was swooning. We rode in silence for an excruciating minute.

“I’m sorry.” Dan said at last. “I shouldn’t have flipped out on you like that. That was shitty.” When I didn’t speak, he spoke again. “That was awful, what I said. You didn’t need that.”

I was still hurting, but I shrugged. “No, it’s cool. If there was ever a time to lose your shit, it was probably right then.”

“Camille—”
“It’s fine, I get it.”

“Camille, we’re here.”

I hadn’t even noticed that we’d pulled into my neighborhood. The last time I’d checked we were still on the main road, and the sudden change of scenery was disorienting. We had to have passed through a temporal pocket or something. Dan slowed the car and I watched blocky white McMansions drift by, indistinguishable and alien. It was a great place to live, actually. Lots of neighborhood potlucks and friendly dogs. Better than a lot of places. We passed one cul-de-sac, then another. I stared at the approaching lamp post that signaled the entrance to mine with a sick, mounting dread. We turned onto Swan Circle Lane and I saw my house through a cluster of trees which sliced it into irregular vertical strips.

“Dan, stop. Stop the car.”

“What?” He seemed concerned but did as I asked. “What’s up?”

I rubbed my eyes so vigorously that I got an almost instantaneous headache. “I can’t do this. Fuck, I just can’t.”

“Camille. Come on. You have to.”

“I know.” I hid in the darkness of my cupped hands. Didn’t cry for some reason, even though the headache was pissing me off. “I mean, yeah, I know. It just kind of sucks.” Dan didn’t respond and the balloon animal feeling in my gut started to prepare an encore. “Can you just let me off here? Your truck is really loud. They’ll hear it. I don’t want them to know I’m coming until I’m there—like, I don’t want them to see me and prepare a script. If they haven’t already, I mean. It’ll make things weirder than they already are.”

He nodded, turned the engine off. I opened the door and swung my backpack onto one shoulder. “Thanks, man. I really appreciate this. I’ll get you gas money or something.”

“No you won’t. You’re not allowed.” He looked at me for a few seconds and I stared at the space between his eyebrows, a trick I’d learned to make it seem as if you’re making eye contact. “Are you going to be okay?”


Dan shrugged. “Don’t be sorry. Not right now. The guilt’s going to fuck with you.”

“Already has. I appreciate the sentiment, but I’m keeping it around for good reason. I’ll see you around, okay?” He paused, and then nodded.
“Call me anytime. I mean it. I’ll see you later.”

I slammed the door shut, and though I couldn’t see through the tinted windows I took a few steps back and waved. I turned away as the truck pulled out of the cul-de-sac, my backpack suddenly weighing a ton. I looked at my hands and saw they were red and dry, one of my knuckles bleeding from a crack in my skin so small I couldn’t feel it. I’d left my gloves in the truck. The clouds were flat again, and I saw snow fall in little flurries through the grey sky. I hoisted my backpack over my other shoulder and started off towards my house, picking over all the reasons a person could possibly have for doing something incomprehensible.
DOMINICK KNOWLES

Lung (for D. Avitabile)

in the broken down knot of possible worlds, beneath the black tiles of sky, nothing comes to mind but the pulmonary ocean. in full vigor, conjuring up wet sand in fits of emphysema. my grandfather’s insignia: the charred lung.

at the shore I can see the lung in several states of decay at once, buoyed to the pulmonary ocean. from rogue bulbs of tar rattles a decade of prayers. white soul drifting toward the sky tiled black: thread of love a leash to lead it, breathing, back
Tether

Retro wide brims on a salty, September day,
Rain’s skittery droplets dance on wiry Wildebeest legs,
Enveloping me in jazzy thunder thrums
And spicy Krylon creole.

Oh! Tether please, these feather leaves
Into crispy autumn tunes,
Mishmash the lavish luaus
And gaudy pantaloons.

Your incense skates in figure eights
Around your worn-out soles
And gobbles up that tie you wear
In crooked sunset tones.

I muss your hair, You smack my face
But your smile... I can’t erase
The honeyed joy of dancing under
Candied music moons.
Hold Still

While I etch you into eternity,
Driving your chin onto the graphite-stained page,
Forcing it to stay
For the moments you desert

This stool of endless parlor hours,
Worn smooth by a thousand grungy asses,
As you would so affectionately say,
Winking and nodding in the direction of
Some unfortunate, faceless grandma
In the crowd.

Miss Gail Parks refills our colas,
Spattering the thick paper with
Accents of unintended color.

I grimace,
My mouth carving the same lines
As the downward curl of your ear

On the page now
For a bedouin to find
Five hundred years from now,
In a crumpled grave
Of poems, pride, paper cups,
And everything between.

I hide behind my lashes
And pray for you to squirm
So I could draw it all again.
One can’t measure in a clever algorithm
The sound underneath hymns in hot churches,
Voicedead, a laugh, a creak from a worn pew.

Soaring/floatable lifeful memories/MElodies
That fall out of your mouth/lungs like
Basketball passes, wild, dancing/

Liberated among the rainbowed light
Streaming in through caricatured Mary.
I like most how a particularly rich and

Evocative line of tenor interacts with
Tapped/high piano notes, especially in
New England churches. It’s delicate,

But lodges itself in the folds of my brain,
The way it ricochets, music, which is breath,
Which is life, which is sound, hitting things,

And sounding expansive as the Atlantic.
(Southern Churches do it too, but the best
Music there is the kind you can smell,

Where they are lodged alongside, memory.)
Liv, I saw you today and you looked sad,
Full of bizarrely bitter nostalgia.

We used to go up and down the coast,
Invade churches with our laughter
And admire (genuinely) their age,

How it made our cracking voices denser
With careful stonemasonry and pipes,
Reverberation lush, big, uncompromising
And vast like the world. The aisle
Down the pews always looks like a cliché
Highway into sunny paradise from the front,

But wine’s not the blood anymore, just a bottle,
And we’re all floating around in the holy water,
Electric fish holding our breath until we burst.
AMANDA SIERZEGA

The Seagulls of 17th Street
QUINN GILMAN-FORLINI

No Man’s Land
ANDREW TRAN

Summer Flowers
KEVIN MOORE

Float
ANGIER COOPER

A Barcelona Moment
BLAISE LARAMEE

Business Meeting
My father’s love is always inconvenient
and never asked for; it is a gift
in the form of bad comedies and
dead white men.
“\textit{I love Vonnegut, but he was a pussy,}”
my father says to my copy of \textit{Slaughterhouse-Five}
on the end table, setting his Yuengling on top.
The moisture bleeds the little skull on the cover
and I want to move it.
He flips his nights away
behind a channel changer that is a wand
conjuring images to forget he now works in the factory
seven days a week.
The sly bastard he is, he puts in a tape.
(I didn’t even know we had a VCR)
“\textit{Hunter S. Thompson, now he’s a man,}” he says.
\textit{Where the Buffalo Roam.}
He laughs full-bodied at his youth
flowing in frames and
I laugh with him so he doesn’t go it alone.
My father doesn’t ask if I liked the movie,
just like he never asks me about Giulio
and the other boys who have wrote love songs about me.
Or the boy who made my body his playground
and my mind a vacant pharmacy parking lot.
Just sits behind his alcohol perfume.
“I didn’t finish it,” he says,
“I’m not smart enough to get it,
I’m too old to try.”
You know my mom says my
Dad should have been an English major
but no one thought words were practical back then.
So now he wears hazmat suits and
makes batteries for motorcycles and
cruise ships, still
drunkenly arguing authors and banging guitar strings
for memories. So it goes.
SARAH GOW

Clocks

We used to live in a town called Fleetwood which had only been interesting in some time past. My father had stamps from there in his dusty pink binder full of laminated pages of postage. Ones from Fleetwood bolstered images of classy Model-T looking vehicles and women with their white noses turned up, touching steering wheels lightly and delicately.

The only thing left of Fleetwood Autobody was the sign painted over by the historical society (which my father was on the board of). It was a big hollow factory. Emaciated and with gaping mouths that seemed to cry for life again. It read, “Fleetwood Auto Body 1909” as if it were still functioning now and had been for a hundred years or so.

A story that my father would tell about it that scared me the most was one that he had actually made up one night when I had begged for a new bedtime story. The myriad of true stories never had the same affect. These truths included but were not limited to tales of the people who lived across from the factory trying to grow a vegetable garden- but their vegetables always tasted wrong as a result of the chemicals the factory dumped in the surrounding area.

“They all died of cancer,” he added and then changed the subject so the five-year-old me would not dwell on what that meant-considering we in fact lived in the house that sat across from the factory. Our house was an old house that belonged to one of the daughters of the doctor in town. By the time we moved from Fleetwood years later--- both the other houses for his daughters would be torn down to make parking lots for the bank.

No-- the story that scared me the most was about a Janitor who worked a night shift in the factories (my young mind did not question why an abandoned building would have a janitor). If my memory serves me right his name was Stinky La Pep or some variation of that and he would work his way along the dark hallways until the clock struck midnight.

My father always added, “Midnight -- the witching hour.” It was never JUST midnight, it was “Midnight, the witching hour.” Whenever I woke up in the dark I would think of that-- hoping that it wasn’t the witching hour and gathering my things-- rushing in to sleep on the floor in my parents’ bedroom with Spongebob blankets.
La Pep always met with aliens or some other creature of the night, but what stuck with me most wasn’t the encounter at all, but actually that phrase. “The witching hour.” It can mean so many things -- especially to a young girl who made bed posts into crouching demons and could never get the images out of her head.

In fact the traditional tale included a butt spanking machine brought by the aliens to destroy humans -- which was used to spank the butt of the poor janitor. If I remember correctly in a series of trickery the janitor would eventually get the aliens to get their own butts spanked and by morning the aliens would run from the building and through town on Sunday morning to dunk their butts in a nearby river -- thus killing the wild life with their steaming posteriors.

After historical society meetings my father would walk me through the graveyard and he’d practice his history knowledge when I’d ask him about the people’s gravestones. My favorite was the grave for a man’s hand. Yes. Just his hand. It had been cut off in an accident at the factory and instead of disposing of it the man had decided to bury it-- I know for a fact that this is true because I’ve returned multiple times since then and found the spot-- the stone is actually shaped like a hand. The man was buried across the graveyard in some other section that we never bothered to try to find because his own grave was pretty boring after seeing the grave of his hand. Compassionately my father called it “Cousin It.”

Another grave I never found when I was older. My father said there was a boy in town that had died by swallowing a pocket watch and choking on it. This was especially intriguing to me because my father owned a lot of pocket watches and so I thought that one of the ones he kept in glass cases might in fact have been once inside the boy in the story. I believe he was generally referred to as Timothy Franklin-- or something to that effect. Timothy or Theodore. My father might have even used different names when telling it, but when you listen to your father tell a story over and over you come to the point where you enjoy the variations and changes made to it.

Only looking back did I realize he never pointed to the tomb stone when he talked about it. He’d throw up a generic hand gesture in the direction of this stone with a perching angel on it. He never said that it was Timothy Franklin’s grave, but I assumed it was.

The angel looked over a myriad tiny decrepit stones with her fingers pressed tight together in prayer. The time had made her once deep features dull and smooth. She looked like a mother and when I was little I thought about how maybe at night baby angels would crawl
up from the tiny graves -- to me it wasn’t disturbing -- now it kind of is. She had lost her eyebrows to the rain.

I thought of Timothy as one of the angels. Maybe he played with the pocket watch at night with his waiting mother.

“If you press your ear up against the tomb stone they say you can still hear it ticking,” my father said at some point in the story. I think it was the only thing that was really consistent about the story from time to time. I came to adore those things -- the anchors that made up the stories. The line that you waited to hear.

We had long since moved from the old doctor’s daughter’s house that had a crack in the drywall that made the statue-strong figure of my father anxious when I became fascinated again by the story of the boy and the pocket watch.

“How’d he get the watch to fit in his mouth?” I asked my dad one day when he was cleaning the attic of our new house in Kutztown where there was a little bit more to do than talk about the past.

“Who?” he said, lining up my plastic dinosaurs in a row on the shelf.

“That boy who swallowed the pocket watch who’s buried in the cemetry in Fleetwood,” the fourth-grade me replied.

I had a rather stout figure in fourth-grade and I was insatiably curious of everything. I didn’t really know that it wasn’t a wonderful thing to be a short chubby girl with a haircut that her father helped pick out -- “short, so it doesn’t get in your eyes when you fight in karate practice,” he said at Kuts and Karats (the “stylist” I’d gone to up until I was fifteen).

“I don’t know,” he said, dismissing the inquiry.

“Could I take one to school?” I asked.

He leaned over, breaking his concentration for a moment to point to the one in the center case, encapsulated like a precious gem.

“That one. Let me show you something,” he said as he removed the pocket watch from its shell and held it in front of my face.

His fingers were always so big to me. They’re still so big -- they were like the kielbasa my mom made for him in stir fries sometimes. Not fat like ball park hot dogs that we used to eat together at Reading Phillies games - like kielbasa.

First he pointed to the outside and said, “It’s really gold. The letters on the back are someone’s initials that had the watch made.”

“G.W., does that mean it could have been George Washington?” I asked, not joking at all.
I respect my father for not laughing at me and replying subtly,
"That would be interesting, wouldn’t it. But I don’t think he was in
Fleetwood."

“You never know,” I said, with all the earnestness of a fourth
grader.

He then proceeded to open up the watch and point to how all
the little gears rocked back and forth into each other and how each
individual gear and metal had its own ornamentation, little swirling
designs cut into the surface. The way they moved without thought of
ceasing made me think of them as a colony of ants - those gears.

“So I can take it to school?”

“I guess, just be careful it’s worth a lot.”

My father might have meant money and that’s how the fourth
grade me had interpreted it, but it is quite possible that my father had
been referring to the sentimental worth of the piece. He collected
mismatched antiques ranging from one of those old timey telephones
with a bell that hung on the wall to boxes of thick-glass milk bottles
with labels from local milk bottling companies. If you picked one up
he could tell you so much about the little vessel. I never knew why he
cared about them, they were in fact just containers that once held milk.

There was some new girl at school and she had long straight
blonde hair and freckles like God had taken a sharpie to her face and
gotten carried away. I introduced myself, saying, “I’m Sarah and look
at this pocket watch!”

She was completely impressed, or maybe that’s my memory
trying to gloss over the fact that I was so awkward that I used a pocket
watch to introduce myself. I mean she didn’t really respond to the
watch - and she stopped talking completely when I mentioned, “And
it’s made of real gold!”

During recess I checked the time by pulling the watch out of
my pocket and gazing at the surface as if I could actually understand
Roman numerals. In fact could barely even tell time with the thing.

Leaning up against the wall, squinting at the watch (because I
needed glasses and didn’t have them yet) I watched as the intricate
arms of the watch ceased their constant trek and the little gears stopped
clicking their teeth. The watch had stopped ticking. I had to be seeing
it wrong.

Somehow I escaped class to the bathroom. Once in my stall
alone I laid the watch out on the floor and unscrewed the glass cover
on the front like my father had. I touched the little intricate hand of the
watch, hoping to push it into action. Horrified, the thin metal of the hand bent a little with my push.

Frantically I screwed on the glass cover. My face felt hot and my hands were sweaty as I placed the watch back into my jeans.

“Did you show all your friends the pocket watch?” my dad asked.

“Yes.”

“Well put it back when you’re done. Is it working okay?”

I felt that same heat overtake my face and I felt like I was going to start crying right there. “Yeah, I just want to show my one friend and she wasn’t there yesterday.”

“Okay, just be careful with it.”

I was betting on the watch to start working by the grace of God. I remember praying at night before I went to bed for the watch to start ticking and crying when God didn’t answer my prayers. That was back when I still thought that God granted wishes like the tooth fairy.

By terrible luck the next day was the one day a month when my humble fourth grade class would have a speaker come in. They ranged from doctors talking about eating healthy to the local minor league baseball team coming to tell us fourth graders not to do drugs. Today it was the school guidance counselor.

“We just thought we’d take today to talk about truthfulness.”

I gulped and fingered the watch in my pocket.

“We’ll start off with a video.”

The video must have been from the early nineties and it consisted of a girl who had broken her father’s wristwatch and who lied about her sister doing it. I kid you not the only scene I remember perfectly is the little girl bringing the broken wrist watch to her father and him saying, “You’re going to be grounded for a few weeks but I can forgive you.”

I had never been grounded and I didn’t want to start, so this only made me more and more anxious. That disappointed voice the father in the video had. It’s so much worse than yelling. My parents never yelled at me, they only had that disappointed voice. Oh it gives me shivers.

There were several options I considered. I could just put the pocket watch back and act like it broke in the case (he’d totally catch on to that). I could bury the pocket watch and hope he forgot about it (also unlikely). The only other option I devised was to figure a way to give the watch to my five year old brother and blame it on him (this was the best). Besides, he was too young to get in real trouble.
I did in fact attempt this. I gave it to him but he was so bored by it that he kept giving it back to me and asking me to play with his Hess trucks or something and eventually in the midst of this plan I decided to revert to the original plan. Simply placed the pocket watch in its glass dome.

For a child with a normal conscience all would be forgotten about, but me laying in my bed that night, getting close to “twelve o’clock the witching hour” all I could think of was the dead watch beating like my own little tell-tale heart and finally I snapped after a week of concealing the watch.

“Dad your watch isn’t working!” I proclaimed.

His brow furrowed and he sat his beer on the end table to see it. I brought the carcass to him.

With his big father hands he twisted the little knob at the top of the watch several times and the watch began to grind its teeth again.

“It ran out of juice,” he said and smiled at me. He did that thing that dads do when they ruffle their kid’s hair - which was a boy’s haircut.
ALYSE BREWER

In the Kitchen on a Sunday Afternoon

Cut tomatoes stain a white paper plate, and Mia’s fingers slip a slice between her lips - a feature of my mother and my sister. I marvel that a toddler can eat a whole tomato.

Her mother once consumed them daily with salt, and they say during pregnancy your baby eats whatever you do. Korean diets don’t include tomatoes, so like so much in my life I suppose it’s learned behavior.

Tomatoes are the first ingredient in my mother’s Italian gravy for Sunday dinners. On the four o’clock afternoons when my front door swings open, and I’m welcomed by ever present guests –

love and garlic. For bruschetta and braciole; tomatoes are our life blood effort, nostalgia, and wine tasted in every bite for twenty years.

I’ll never know if I share my Korean mother’s lips, but she probably swallowed nails every day, just so she knew her sacrifice would make me strong.
Dear Mom,

You look so happy here. I wish I’d known you when you were in college. You know, we would have been very close in age, your birthday July and mine June. I would have been older than you, actually, but only a little bit.

Pictures are strange, the way they so irrevocably still a moment. I think sometimes about that, how the future for you in this picture is now the past. At that moment you were always going to go to school in Pennsylvania and you never were going to be a math teacher or have kids and you didn’t know what anything would be like. But you know that now, and you can’t go back. It scares me that someday my life is going to be so concrete.

Dear Mom,

Who took this picture of you? It’s your roommate there, Kathi, the one twirling next to you. But who took it? Another friend, I guess, who caught you surprised, dancing or jumping. I’m glad to know you were so happy.

It’s late summer, hot. The streets are sunny but no one is on them. Most are inside, pressing their hands to the cool brick walls of their houses and trying to ignore the sweat running between their shoulder blades. Amy, however, is on the street, her heavy black hair weighing her down.

The bell over the salon door jingles. There’s a woman with an apron and sagging pantyhose waiting for her, scissors in hand. The woman wipes sweat off her forehead with the back of her hand, and the back of her hand on her apron. Amy forces a smile.

“Hello dear. Sit down.”

Amy does, carefully. The leather of the chair is cracked and digs into her legs.

“Now what can I do for you?”

Amy looks at herself in the mirror, tan from the sun, blue eyes, dark hair. She sits up a little straighter and tells the woman what she wants: a perm.

“Allright,” the woman says.

They endure a half hour together. The woman asks where she goes to school. Ohio Wesleyan, right in town? No, Amy’s going to
Pennsylvania. Allegheny. The woman hasn’t heard of it, but she smiles anyway. “You must be excited.”

Amy nods.

The woman wipes her hands on the apron again. She remembers years ago, when her life was just beginning. “Now let this set, okay?” She unpins the drop cloth from Amy’s shoulders.

“Okay.” Amy smiles at her curly, more beautiful self in the mirror.

She walks tall back to her house, excited to show her sister and mother what she’s done. She is a college girl now, sneaking glances at herself in shop windows.

At home she flounces into Anna’s room to show off her new hair.

“Wow, you’re gorgeous!” Anna says, and Amy smiles. She is.

“I’m so hot, though.” The walk was too long. “Do you think I can shower?”

“I don’t know, it doesn’t seem like a good idea…” Anna taps a pen on her desk.

“I’m SO hot though!” Amy says. “I have to!”

Is that how you ruined your perm? That’s what Anna told me, I don’t know if it’s true. You told me it was the worst thing ever, that I got a much better pre-college haircut than you.

But I’ve never even gone to a salon by myself. And it looks fine in this picture. It’s up, and about to fall to your shoulders when you land back to earth.

Dear Mom,

Were you listening to music in this picture? I imagine it’s John Denver because I know you like him. Maybe it was “Rocky Mountain High.”

We’re in your room, just after this picture was taken, out of breath and sitting on the floor together. It’s the first week of school. I’m the one who took the picture. We’re just getting to know each other.

Me: So what classes are you taking?
You: (Name a few, including math and physics.)
Me: Is that what you wanna do after this, something with math?
You: I don’t know… I think I might major in physics. What about you?
Me: English.
You: (Laugh because you know English majors make no money and also because you hate analyzing literature) Good luck with that.

Me: (Pretending to be offended) Well, good luck with physics. You: (Laughs) I’ll need it. (A pause) Sorry, what’s your name again?

Me: Mara.
You: That’s pretty. I’m Amy.
Me: (Smiling. I already knew your name.) Nice to meet you.

But you didn’t major in physics. You became a math teacher because you weren’t sure what else to do, and that’s how we ended up in Maryland. What if that happens to me? Where will I end up?

You didn’t call your parents for a while when you came to college, to stave off homesickness. You were so far away you might have crept up to the observatory and tried to find Ohio with a telescope. You weren’t allowed up there, but you went anyway with new friends, giggly and scared of the dark, scared of the door that might lock behind you. You made it to a wide, circular room, then up, up the rickety spiral stair to the very top, pushing away fear you couldn’t show. You might have looked to the stars and thought that they were the same ones over your house, all brick and stately and still filled with light. You might have done all that, because that’s what I did.

You did call them, finally, and you had to stand out in the hall where the phone was. Probably everyone could hear you saying how much you missed them.

They missed you too.

It was cold, February, but they were sad and missing you. Al suggested a picnic. They all knew it was ridiculous—a picnic in winter!—but they wanted something fun. Nanny told me about that. She laughed but she said it was cold and miserable then. Was there snow on the ground? A frozen picnic blanket, red and white checked and stiff as a board?

*When he first came to the mountains, his life was far away.*

(John Denver.)

We both went to Pennsylvania. It has mountains somewhere—I think we drive through them on our way to Christmas. Neither of us had a life here.

You told me I’d be homesick. You were right. When I got here all I could do was write about you and Dad.
Me to you, Sept. 7th 2013
Homesickness lingers in the morning when I drop my razor and the blade breaks off. When the bus runs late and the nights are loud and bright. I wish my mother was still here, telling me about the emptiness that ebbs and flows.

But you’re not a writer. So maybe you danced and sang your lungs out of words.

Dear Mom,

I wish I knew what it’s like to fall in love. I think you already knew in this picture, though you might not have believed it.

Remember that quilt you made? It was before you married Dad, but both your hands are on there, cut out in off-white cloth and sewn together. You gave me that quilt after we painted my room yellow. We admired the stars and other shapes on it, then you told me about the hands. I laughed and said it was a good thing you married Dad, or else some weird guy’s hand would have been on my quilt. Is love sewing someone’s hand onto your quilt? I think maybe it is. On the road and hangin’ by a song. (John Denver again.)

Just before we pulled into the parking lot here for college, I put my iPod on shuffle and I decided right before my life changed forever that whatever song came on would determine my future. Know what it was? “I Will Survive.” I was irritable and sad and lost that first day but at least I knew I’d survive. Did you have a song? I don’t know what yours would have been. Maybe this one.

Dear Mom,

We’re so different, you know. What were you like then, and how much have you changed? Am I going to be a completely different person by the time I’m fifty? Probably, and I’m scared of that. I’m scared of a lot of things.

Once in love with Amy, always in love with Amy.

Nanny used to sing that. I wish I had a song for my name but all I have is “tomorrow, tomorrow, I’ll love ya tomorrow,” if you say it like “to-mara.” Amy means “dearly loved.” Mara lives under a rock. Remember that week we spent together when Dad was out of town? I was worried we’d tear each other apart but instead you taught me how to drive, we ate ice cream and I bought new shoes—they were men’s but we found them in a small enough size. We went to the nature center after dark and didn’t even realize our luck that it’s not open after five most days, but that night they had a star gazing event, so we
walked around and then we looked at the moon and the constellations. I remember Cassiopeia. I lost the others.

Dear Mom,

You told me some guy had a knob on his steering wheel so he could put his arm around you while he drove. No one's ever done that for me. I was too embarrassed to ask you about him because I couldn't share a story of my own.

That's me in the blue shirt with that ridiculous smile and my hands blurred above me. I'm dancing to a song on the radio. I'm eighteen and I don't know anything yet. Sometimes the world suddenly makes sense to me and I can see my life in a beautiful linear progression. That's how I am in this picture. I always want to question that feeling but there's no good answer, so I just let it be. I just dance.

Dear Mom,

Have you ever flown in a dream? I did once, I dreamed I was a dragon kite and when I jumped out a window I could skim over the Arizona desert. I still remember it, even though it was years ago. I remember how weightless I was, like in water only there was nothing below me.

Dad told me you sent him this picture because you were going to see him soon. He was still in Ohio, he sent you flowers when you left and told him you'd probably be dating other people. I guess the flowers worked, though. Because for that moment, when you found out you'd be seeing him, you weren't even touching earth. And forever, when he got the picture in a white envelope with your handwriting, opened it up, and taped the picture to his headboard, you were flying.

You to Anna, Aug. 19, 1998

For better or for worse, I just move on through—If I bump into something I love, I move on toward it. If I don't like it, I move away.

You wrote this in your 30's. You're older now. I know maybe you're not happy with everything and that you started making weird hippie collages and telling me that if I concentrated on something hard enough the powers of the universe would bring it to me. Sometimes I'm worried that you're not happy and sometimes I'm sad when I look at this picture because your life could have gone in so many ways. I was worried you picked the wrong ones. But I don't think you did. Because just like you said, you chased what you love, and what better way to live is there?
I know what happens after this picture. Eighteen-year-old Amy, you don’t. You don’t know what’s going to happen in your life, but you’ll follow that advice. You’ll fall in love and get married and become a math teacher and then join a company that starts in a barn and grows to an office building. I think you’ll love all of these things. You weren’t ever afraid— to move, to a new job, a new state, to leave this college and go to another so you could be close to Dad. You weren’t afraid to jump. I am in awe of you. I miss you. I’d say good luck to you, eighteen year old Amy, but I don’t think you need it. You’re brilliant already.
Nine

“Give me those, Mo.” Emily snatched the keys from my hand, giggling. She pushed her brown curls behind her ear, checking her empty wrist for elastics, and got into the driver’s seat. I stopped, gripping the side of the car, waiting for the trees in the yard next to me to stop swinging like pendulums. I opened my mouth to argue as the engine roared to life.

“Em, are you sure you can drive? Come on, we’ve both had a lot to drink. And wait, I watched you camp-fire that bottle! Don’t act like you’re sober right now,” I said.

“Have I ever not gotten us home safely? I’m fine. We’ll be home in, like, nine seconds.”

I got into the car, slamming the door shut.

As promised, and as always, we made it home. Emily made some snide comment that I didn’t care to hear.

I closed the car door and walked into the front door of the house, kicking off my shoes into the corner by the door, walking straight through the kitchen and heading straight for the shower. I heard the sound of the metal trashcan clang and level on the concrete driveway, followed by a loud gag. I never understood how she was able to hide how drunk she was.

“I thought you weren’t that fucked up, bitch,” I yelled into the hallway. I peeled my pants off, grabbing a towel from under the sink. I heard her gag again into the echoing trashcan. She didn’t reply.

“Stop letting me let you drive home when you’re drunk,” I yelled again. I heard the lid slam back onto the can, and the front door shut. “One of these days, you won’t get lucky like you usually do! Then what? I wish you would stop drinking and doing whatever-the-hell else so much, Emily. Shit’s bad.”

“And I wish you’d stop smoking so many damn cigarettes, Mone,” she said.

I rolled my eyes, turning the shower knob to hot. I leaned my forearms against the cold, white walls, resting my hands against my wrists. I counted slowly under my breath - isn’t that what they say to do when you’re stressed? I heard Emily shuffle into the bathroom and over to the toilet.
“Hey, is there any conditioner left in there?” she said. I picked up the bottle, telling her that there wasn’t much left. She groaned.

“Holy shit, I always figured it was always you who used so much, not me. Whoops. That shit’s like nine bucks a bottle. Nine bucks a bottle! Like, what the fuck are they using in there, you know?” She flushed the toilet. “Do you think you’ll keep your hair that short?”

I recently had cut my hair. Not like a trim, like really cut my hair. All that was left was about a half of an inch of blonde fur. I dug it, but I never got a clear read on Emily’s feelings toward the change which she referred to as “a little bit drastic”.

“Probably for a while,” I said. “I mean, I don’t see why not, you know?”

Emily mumbled something in agreement and washed her hands.

“I don’t know, Mona. It’s a good thing that you’re skinny, you pull off the bald look so well. I could never do that. I would look horrible.”

I took a deep breath, letting the warm steam fill my lungs, holding it until I was dizzy. I reached for my razor and immediately put it back down, deciding that having smooth legs wasn’t a current priority.

“Hey Mone, do you think you’ll be out of the shower soon?”

“Yeah, just a minute, what’s up?”

“I think Drew is going to come over in a little.”

“Emily, it’s three in the fucking morning. Are you serious?” I said. I just wasn’t in the mood tonight. I turned off the water and grabbed the thick, green towel from the hook, pushing open the curtain. Emily sat, back to the door, looking at me. She raised an eyebrow, the left side of her mouth turning upwards. She giggled, and I shook my head at her, letting myself relax.

“You better fuck extra quiet, dude. I’ll walk right in there and scream at you if you two wake me up. I’m so serious.”

Emily undressed, picking up a glass of what I assumed was wine from the sink as she grabbed a towel.

“Really?” I said, brushing my hair.

“Mone, shower wine is the best time. And wine time is all of the time.”

I said nothing.

“We should really fix that door, Mone,” Emily said mid-sip. Her voice echoed into the wine glass as she spoke. She took a long drink. “You know, the front door? It creaks.”
I walked out of the bathroom.

I woke up at 10:30, according to the digital numbers that glared an angry red into my sleepy eyes. I reached over, feeling around for my phone and a cigarette. I found both quickly, for once. Good morning, indeed.

I walked into the kitchen. Drew sat at the kitchen table, drinking coffee that looked more like dirty, sugary milk and staring off into space. His skin looked even more tan this time than last. I wanted to ask him if he went tanning, but figured it would be rude. Emily was standing over the stove, hair wild, beer to her lips, wearing a cutoff t-shirt and silk underwear. We both sort off existed in the house this way, even when Drew was here.

"Drinking already, huh?" I said, trying to sound as non-confrontational as possible.

"Morning, Mone!" she said. "Just hair of the dog, you know?"

I chose to let it go and instead asked what she was making.

"Scrammed eggs and bacon," she said, turning around, grinning. "And lots of coffee, just for you."

I smiled and grabbed my mug – a large, violet cup that could hold at least eighteen ounces of the beautiful stuff - and filled it up, with just a dash of cream.

"You two officially together yet, or what?" I asked, stirring my coffee slowly. The two of them chuckled, and I left it at that.

"Have you seen Pink Lady, Em?" I asked.

Emily reached to the edge of the counter and grabbed my favorite pink lighter, tossing it to me. I grabbed a cigarette, my mug, and headed towards the front door.

The beauty of living on the corner of the street was all of the potential porch space. Emily’s only requirement to a house was having her own room, and my only requirement was porch space, so when we found this tiny house on the edge of a street of town, we knew it was the one. We had always been best friends, and living together just made sense.

I sat, bare thighs against the old, rough wood, and lit a Camel Red. I let out a deep sigh of relief as I let the sun wash over my skin. The neighbor across the street was dragging his lawn mower out of his shockingly cluttered garage, and waved to me. I got up and walked to the newspaper that lay in front of the house, releasing it from its thin plastic sleeve. Tuesday, September 9th Today’s News wasn’t too riveting. I stared at the comics until my coffee cup was empty.
"I’m 22 years old, Mona. I’m still allowed to be an asshole. Haven’t you heard of doing whatever you want in your twenties? You know, living unapologetically, or whatever-the-fuck you say? I’m still allowed to do whatever I want!" Emily flung the sweater she was holding across the room and onto the loveseat. “It’s not like I’m 30 with three fucking kids, Mone! I’m fine! It’s not like I’m drinking nine bottles a day! Stop trying to mother me, Jesus Christ!"

I looked up at the ceiling, laughing in a fit of frustration. I knew I should stop her, somehow. I think we both knew that she shouldn’t leave the house. It had to already be 11:30 – she had no business going out tonight.

Emily was the All-American high school student. Captain of the track team, honor roll, All-State choir - she was a good kid. The summer before her freshman year of college, her mom randomly died of some sort of heart complication. She rarely talked about it, even to me. Well, her freshman year didn’t go so hot. She got caught drinking in the dorms a number of times before she ever turned 21, and it eventually escalated to a “leave of absence” that never quite picked up again.

“You’ve already had at least two glasses of wine... Come on, Em. It’s a Tuesday, my God.” I stared at Emily. I knew my argument was futile. I threw up my hands and turned away from her.

“Fine,” I said. I walked toward my bedroom. “I’m going to bed. Please be careful. Please don’t drive drunk. Please be safe. I love you. Bye.” I shut my door behind me. I stood silently for a moment, listening for the sound of her boots or the slam of the front door. After a few seconds, I moved to lay on the bed. I heard the front door close, and Emily’s car start. I laid there, staring at the ceiling, listening to the buzz of silence. An hour passed.

I looked over at my phone - no missed calls, no new messages. I sent Emily a message.

“Hey, are you good?”

I stared at the screen, waiting for the read receipt to register. It didn’t. I paced around the house, folding laundry and organizing the kitchen drawers. 3 AM. No read receipt. No call.

5 AM. Nothing. I called Emily’s phone, trying hard to focus on the evenness and consistency of my breathing. It went directly to voicemail. Fuck. I grabbed my cigarettes and Pink Lady.

I leaned into the door, turning the knob, grimacing at the terrible “creeeaaaak” and shuffling to the top step to sit down. A
rogue splinter cut the back of my thigh as I slid into a comfortable position.

"We really should fix that door, Mone," I murmured. Leaning against the railing, I smacked the bottom of my pack against the inside of my wrist until there was a light, rectangular welt. I selected one from the half-empty pack, holding it between my lip as I lit it. I smoked slowly, stopping often to watch the lit end eat itself away just as quickly as the sun was rising. I watched the thin, gray ribbons wisp into the air, wondering what it was like to be as peaceful as smoke. I smoked each cigarette, one after the other, until I held the last one, rolling it between my thumb and index finger. Nine cigarette butts sat beside me in a line, almost in a perfect row. I lit my last cigarette and watched as it burnt away into nothing. It was 7 AM, and the sun was just a little bit too harsh for a cool September. The world seemed too quiet, too bright.

I picked up the empty pack, turning it over in my hand, studying it. I brought the lighter to the bottom edge and held the flame to the plastic and cardboard surface until it was engulfed in flames. I held it until the flames licked my fingertips. I dropped it onto the concrete sidewalk, watching it twist and writhe in the flames, until it went out completely.
Wake up.
Realize that the first thoughts in your mind in the morning are a series of increasingly uninspired expletives.
Take a shower and do the only dance you know—the twirl past the wad of hair no one wants to clean up.
Shuffle to breakfast and eat the same damn bowl of Fruit Loops you ate yesterday.
Forget to grab your textbooks and head to class—maybe today you’ll have the guts to contribute something of value. But when Dr. Dumbass asks a question you have an answer to, you’ll freeze—hand half-raised and mouth inexplicably dry.
Run into that person in your dorm whose name you should definitely know but don’t.
Wonder for far too long if you’ve forgotten to do something and miss something else in the process.
Settle in and put a sad excuse for a CIE essay on paper, then put a sad excuse for a sonnet on another sheet.
Read like a madman—legs refusing to sit still, torso shifting to various slouching positions.
Move over to the bed instead and find yourself reading the same line over and over before closing your eyes because you
can’t
stay awake.
Hope that three other people
are up for Mahjong.
Watch your table at dinner
become more than just your closest friends, then
observe yourself. You
have nothing to
say.
Continue to
be terrified of “normal” social interactions.
Waste far too much time on the computer and then
think about how you
take forever to
fall asleep.
Be thrilled at the prospect of
doing it all over again.
Showers

I can feel your words plink onto my window pane.
Each lush phrase full of intent and hostility,
Perfectly packaged within a droplet of rain.
Te encuentro

bajo la lluvia, cuando busco
las mejillas, el pelo, los ojos
que conozco.
Te encuentro en lágrimas que
cacen sobre nuestros cuerpos
unidos a la tierra.
No seques tus lágrimas.
Prefiero tu cuerpo desnudo
con las lágrimas corriendo
por la espalda.
¿Qué dicen las gotas
cuando resbalan dentro del
ombrego?

Sustento de nuestra madre.

Te encuentro
sola,
perdida con el
paso del tiempo,
brevemente loca en
tu amor por
quien te abraza.
Te encuentro
llorando con la lluvia,
contándole tus secretos
al viento.

Madre, madre, te digo,
hija, hija,
estoy aquí contigo,
cantando
a tus llantos.

∞

104
I find you
in the rain, as I search for
the cheeks, the hair, the eyes,
that I know.
I find you in tears that
fall upon our bodies,
tied to the earth.
Don’t wipe them away.
I prefer your body unclothed,
with tears running
down your back.
What do the raindrops say
as they slide down
into your navel?
Sustenance from our mother.
I find you
alone,
lost in the
passing of time,
briefly intoxicated
in your love for
whomever is holding you.
I find you
crying with the rain,
whispering your secrets
to the wind.
Mother, mother, I say,
daughter, daughter,
I’m here with you,
singing
to your cries.
It was an English class held in Myrin 201, in the library of Ursinus College. The professor was Jon Volkmer, Ph.D., and the students were, in no particular order, Anthony Willie Chang, Paul Joseph “Boomer” Druchniak, Timothy Michael “Michael” Heimbaugh, Darrah Melita Hewlett, Linden James Hicks, Joshua Brandon “Josh” Hoffman, Colleen Elizabeth Jones, Kathryn Ann Kehoe, Blaise Nicholas Laramée, Briana Fay Mullan, Gerald Francis “Jerry” Rahill, Steven Barnett Salomon, Nicolas Wyatt “Nic” Shandera, and Nora George Connor Sternlof.

Anthony said, “Hey, Josh, isn’t it a little creepy that you know all of our middle names?”

Josh said, “I have my sources, and you have them, too, except maybe you wouldn’t be able to find Jerry’s middle name.”

It is at this point in the writing process that Josh has his first distraction and goes on Facebook. Josh is unmedicated today.

Jerry asked, “Why not?”

“Because it came from the housing lottery list, and you’re a senior, and Anthony’s a freshman.”

Nora said, “But the housing lottery list only gives my first middle name. How did you get my second middle name?”

Josh said, “You told me on Saturday, September 1, 2012.”

Colleen said, “We’re given too many extraneous details. We don’t need to know that the author went on Facebook on the first page.”

Steven said, “Also, it seems like there are too many characters. We’re introduced to fifteen people on the first page.”

Most of the class concurred.

Boomer said, “Actually, I think it works here only because we’re all familiar with these characters. I hope the audience stays to that.”

Blaise said, “I love how Josh remembers the date he learned Nora’s middle names. It really defines his character, like all he’ll be doing is recalling insignificant events from his life and the dates on which they occurred.”

Dr. Volkmer entered Myrin 201. “Hi, Josh,” he said.

“Hi, Dr. Volkmer.”

“You can call me Jon.”
“Okay. I haven’t done the readings for today.”
“It was two goddamn songs, Josh! Five minutes!”
“Actually, Jon, it was four minutes and forty-three seconds.”
“So you know the exact number of seconds to the songs but didn’t listen to them?”
“Yep. I’m a Math major. I do arithmetic for fun.”
“Well, lucky for you, we’re going to listen to them here, anyway.” Jon pulled out an audio cassette player. “Hey, are you trying to portray me as an old fart who can’t handle technology?” he asked.
Josh said, “Maybe.”
Jon said, “Okay. Today, as part of our postmodern/irrealism unit, we are going to pick apart, line by line, classical works by Alvin and the Chipmunks. The first song we’ll play is ‘The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don’t Be Late).’” He pushed play on the eight-track player.
“Alright you Chipmunks, ready to sing your song? / I’d say we are!/ Yeah, let’s sing it now!/ Okay, Simon?/ Okay./ Okay, Theodore?/ Okay./ Okay Alvin?... Alvin?... ALVIN!/ OKAY!”
Jon stopped the recording. “So what are these characters like?” Kathryn said, “Well, the other chipmunks seem to be doing their job, but Alvin seems a little disrespectful to not be paying attention.”
Nic said, “I wonder what these chipmunks look like.”
Darrah started creating Sims characters to resemble Alvin, Simon, and Theodore until Jon said, “Darrah, pay attention, and Josh, stop committing the authorial fallacy!”
Jon hit play again. “Christmas, Christmastime is near.”
Blaise said, “Setting.”
“Correct. This song takes place in late fall or early winter.”
“Time for toys and time for cheer./ We’ve been good, but we can’t last./ Hurry, Christmas. Hurry fast.”
Jon stopped the recording. “What do we learn about the narrators here?”
Michael said, “That they’re really excited about Christmas, enough so that they request of the holiday a warp in space-time to allow it to arrive sooner.”
Anthony said, “Yeah, they’re so focused on being good for the sole sake of getting good presents, seeing as they can’t last being good for so long, so I guess these are real shithead chipmunks.”
“Good, but there’s something else here. Josh will be able to pick it up after the next lines.”

_“Want a plane that loops the loop./ Me, I want a hula hoop./ We can hardly stand the wait./ Please, Christmas don’t be late.”_

Josh jumped in, “Ooh! Ooh! I know because I’m a smug Environmental Studies major! This represents the rampant materialism of society. It’s like they don’t understand the true meaning of Christmas—not that I would have much experience with that, anyway.”

Michael said, “Yeah, not once do we hear a mention of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in this Christmas song, nor a single mention of going to church.” He then said, “Wait, is that your caricature of my Catholicism?”

“Maybe,” Josh said as he and Steven chomped on slices of matzah.

Jon asked, “Do we agree? Does anyone else want to offer another interpretation?”

Jerry added, “The toys happen to be the popular toys of the 1950s, when this song came out.” He then asked, “Wait, why was I the one to say that?”

“Well, the Outlook address book says you’re a History major,” Josh said.

“We don’t need to listen to the rest of the song. It’s exactly the same thing,” Jon said.

“Actually, in the second iteration, Alvin says, ‘I still want a hula hoop,’ instead of ‘Me, I want a hula hoop,’” Josh said.

“So you have listened to the song!”

“Yeah, just not recently.”

“So is that little difference important?”

“Yeah. See, the second iteration doesn’t have any grammatically incorrect redundancies, demonstrating that Alvin has matured over the course of the song, albeit only slightly.”

Linden said, “Now. Josh. I read your piece in the 2013 issue of The Lantern. Don’t you—uh, get tired of using song lyrics to tell short stories?”

Josh said, “Maybe.”

“Also, stop messing with my punctuation.”

“Sorry.”

Jon put the needle over the record on the phonograph. “_I told the witch doctor I was in love with you./ I told the witch doctor I was in love with you._”
“Now,” Jon said, “the repetition of the first line makes it resemble blues poetry, which has a stanza of six lines whose pattern is that the first two lines repeat themselves, and then there are two more different lines, the last of which rhymes with the second and fourth lines. If Josh put slash marks after ‘doctor,’ it would be appropriately split up like a blues poem. Everybody got that? That’ll be on the test.”

Briana said, “I thought this was a prose class with no exams. What are we even doing here, Jon?”

“That’s Dr. Volkmer to you,” said Dr. Volkmer as he cranked the Victrola.

“And then the witch doctor, he told me what to do./ He said that/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bang bang./ Oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bang bang.”

“So what’s going on here?”

Briana said, “Well, this guy is a witch doctor because there’s no fuckin’ way he finished his real doctorate.”

Dr. Volkmer said, “You mean like I have.”

“Yes, Dr. Volkmer.”

“Doctor Professor Volkmer to you!” said Doctor Professor Volkmer as Josh plagiarized from a SpongeBob episode. “I’m gonna go back to being Jon.”

“I told the witch doctor you didn’t love me true./ I told the witch doctor you didn’t love me nice,/ and then the witch doctor, he gave me this advice:/ He said that/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bang bang./ Oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bang bang.”

“What’s going on here?” asked Jon.

Nora said, “The narrator has an erroneous belief that because this woman doesn’t reciprocate his affection, he must have some medical problem, which is supposedly going to be fixed with this oo ee oo ah ah ting tang walla-walla bing bang.”

At this point, all of Jon’s papers fell off of his desk. All fourteen students ran and crawled toward the mess to grab those papers and to kiss the feet of their beloved Creative Writing professor.

“You’ve been keepin’ love from me just like you were a miser,/ and I’ll admit I wasn’t very smart./ So I went out and found myself a guy that’s so much wiser,/ and he taught me the way to win your heart.”

“Whoa, there,” Colleen said. “That is so problematic.”
“It’s almost as if this guy thinks she owes him her love or something,” Darrah said.

Jon said, “See, all I have to do to ruin your childhoods is play you the songs. Have you ever heard that ‘Ring Around the Rosy’ was all about the bubonic plague? Or how about that song, ‘Five little ducks went out one day,/ over the hills and far away./ All of the ducks went quack quack quack,/ but only four little ducks came back,’ that very song that taught you all how to count down from five? How about ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’? ‘Humpty Dumpty’? ‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’? Anyway, what were we talking about?”

Blaise said, “It does seem like the narrator of ‘Witch Doctor’ is telling the truth about some things,” reminding the class what they were talking about.

“Like what?” Kathryn asked.

“He admits he wasn’t very smart, although I’m having a hard time believing the witch doctor was that much wiser.”

Josh said, “Maybe the witch doctor doesn’t use ‘that’ where he should use ‘who,’ like the narrator does.”

Blaise said, “I like how we’re confused about how to refer to Dr. Volkmer. It symbolizes Josh Hoffman’s simultaneous intellectual acceptance of but visceral discomfort toward the idea of calling a professor by a first name.”

Nora said, “It seems like Kathryn, Darrah, and Colleen could be merged into the same character, as could Anthony, Nic, and Jerry.”

“But then the class wouldn’t be big enough, and we wouldn’t be able to have this class at all, and Jon might have to take on a second CIE class,” Boomer said.

“My friend, the witch doctor, he taught me what to say./ My friend, the witch doctor, he taught me what to do.”

“So we see a disruption of the blues poetry pattern here,” Jon reminded the class. After running through a fifteen-minute tutorial with Computer Science professor April Kontostathis, Ph.D., he hit play on his computer.

“I know that you’ll be mine when I say this to you./ Oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bang bang./ Come on and oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang/ oo ee oo ah ah/ ting tang walla-walla bing bang.”

Briana said, “Yeah, I don’t think it’s gonna work.”

John and Mary met on the library plateau. What happened next?
John said to Mary, “Oo ee oo ah ting tang walla-walla bing bang. Oo ee oo ah ting tang walla-walla bang bang.”

Mary said, “Let’s fuck right now!”

Kathryn said, “I don’t know if people are going to get the intertextual reference to Margaret Atwood’s ‘Happy Endings.’”

Jon said, “Yeah, this seems a little too inside baseball. For example, not many people outside this class are going to know why Darrah building Sims characters is in violation of the authorial fallacy or even what the authorial fallacy is.”

Boomer said, “Actually, the authorial fallacy is probably a well-known concept. It’s not like you made it up.”

Josh said, “Actually, it seems that Googling ‘authorial fallacy’ only turns up stuff about authorial intent or intentional fallacy. What we call authorial fallacy everyone else calls biographical fallacy.”

Nic said, “Also, no one outside this class is going to know about the two incidents that occurred this semester that would make us all bending down to get papers funny.”

Linden said, “The death near the end seems inexplicable to those who haven’t read—”

The librarian Diane Skorina ran into Myrin 201. She had a nondescript face and personality because Josh Hoffman has never knowingly met her and thus has not attached a name to the face of Diane Skorina nor a face to the name of Diane Skorina. “Someone’s giving birth right outside! Is there a doctor in the room?”

Dr. Volkmer jumped up and said, “Shit! This was my worst nightmare!” as he ran out of the room and down the stairs. The class ran to the windows to watch.

“What’s happening?” Steven asked. “We just suddenly get introduced to four more characters in the last two pages? What’s the deal with that?”

Mary gave birth to triplets: Alvin, Simon, and Theodore.

Michael said, “This surreal birth by a woman named Mary is evocative of—”

Steven said, “Now we have three more characters? What are we up to? Twenty-two?”

Dr. Volkmer entered the room soaked in blood and said, “Don’t worry. John and Mary died, so you only have to keep track of twenty now.”

The class cheered, “Yay!”

Anthony said, “See, this is where I’m losing my sympathy for the narrator. The class is cheering at the death of human beings.”
Josh said, “Wait, something doesn’t seem right about this. Mary’s story was a throwaway use of the mystical pregnancy trope.”

Jerry said, “I don’t understand.”

Josh said, “It might just be that Mary had to get pregnant and pop out triplets in a matter of minutes for the sake of the comedy and irrealism of this piece.”

Josh said, “No, that’s exactly the problem here! It’s talked about on Feminist Frequency, this trope of women being portrayed as mere childbearers, usually for some alien or magical force, without portraying any of the realities of childbearing. While this was no alien or magical force, the surreal rapid circumstances of the birth followed by Mary’s death makes this smell a little problematic.”

Josh said, “But John died, too!”

Nic said, “Dude, you’re gonna argue about this with yourself?”

Josh said, “A good chunk of my pieces are using real characters from my life for me to deal with my problematic deeds through sometimes humorous lenses.”

Darrah said, “I mean, you used me and Colleen as feminist characters before. Couldn’t one of us stand in for Josh’s feminist side?”

Colleen said quietly to Darrah, “Hey, have you noticed that this piece hasn’t passed the Bechdel test yet?”

Jon said, “I think people might get confused because even though ‘Jon,’ and ‘John’ are spelled differently, they sound similar. That aside, I kind of like the metatextuality we got going on here. Just in mentioning the metatextuality, there arises metametatextuality. In noticing that, there arises metametametatextuality, and in noticing that...” The remainder of class went on like this. Some guy named Max Bicking—

“Now there are twenty-one extant characters. What the fuck?”

Steven said.

“Just keep reading,” Josh said.

—would one day marvel at how this represents infinity.

Nora suggested, “See, Josh already mentions earlier that he’s a Math major, so you could lump Max’s role into Josh’s instead of introducing yet another new character on the second-to-last page. Even if Josh wouldn’t marvel at the infinity of Dr. Volkmer’s ramblings here, and even if there is a Max Bicking many of us are familiar with, this story doesn’t need to be accurate or faithful to the truth.” At this point, every orangutan population in the world bounced back from endangerment. “Well, that would be nice, but it’s not what I meant.”
Linden said, “Is this some sort of revenge fiction in which you lift lines from our feedback on your last piece and exaggerate our characteristics?”

Josh said, “What? I’m sorry. I couldn’t hear you.”

“... and in noticing that, there’s metametametametametametametametametametametametextuality...” Jon continued until his pocketwatch cuckooed at 2:45 PM. “Alright, class. For next time, we’re going to listen to a Necco Wafers jingle by Jon Volkmer and ‘Dick in a Box’ by The Lonely Island. Have a nice weekend!”
Caylon Fowlkes

The Diamond on My face

He pressed the needle through my nose
and there he placed a diamond.

The diamond I bear is my galaxy.
With it, I bare a mysterious
young woman inside dying to break free,
exposing her though I wanted it for myself.
I quiet her with the diamond on my face.
Wearing it proudly I prance in as much sun as possible,
hoping it will jump through eyes
demanding wonder and fascination.
How can you not stare into the galaxy?
A million colors and flashes in one rock.
My piercer said it
was "princess cut."
So I'm basically always serving
a princess.

I love the black hole just as much.
I love the fear of pulling the diamond in deeper
and deeper. At any moment it could sink
and be lost forever.
I remove the diamond to clean it
and sneeze at the tickle of the
metal L-shaped hook scratching
my nose meat.
I get close in the mirror
studying the black hole,
the little world it has created on my face.
I try to breathe through it, whistle.
It is dark and mysterious
and loves when the princess leaves
to pamper herself;
plotting for her return to
pull her in deeper
and deeper.
Isn’t it funny
How sometimes the things we love most about ourselves are the things
we hate the most in other people
My little sister trailing behind like shadows tracing me under the street
light
And why don’t I love how similar we are
How she loves the same shoes and listens to music I approve of
The only other person in the world that would put The Clash and Paul
Baribeau on the same playlist

Our matching hair brushes filled with matching hair
Brown that turns golden in sunlight
And how many pairs of size 8 chucks got worn right through the soul
between us
It feels like she’s reliving my life, and all the teachers at the high
school know she’s my sister when they see her

But I wonder if it’s because we breathe the same air
Our beds touch at the corner and as we sleep I breathe out the air that
hovers under the glow-in-the-dark stars we stuck to the ceiling
Before she sucks it in and makes it her own

Our life is one little guitar and ukulele duet
Her voice smooth and high pitched like robin in the tree outside our
window
Mine off key and spoken like the branch

She likes poetry
I have to remember the first time I stood on stage a spotlight in my
eyes
and I read the poem about her
She wasn’t there in the audience

But I read it to her later
at home
before we went to sleep
and she cried, tears like the ones I cried the day she was born
And one day I found her school project that under life goals she wrote “stay close to Dana”

Having a sister is like walking on a bridge and looking down and letting your brain piece the picture together between the cracks in the planks until it’s like you’re looking through it at the stream below

Despite all the similarities we’re so different because I’m the one that tackles her onto the bed and burrows under her arm to kiss her pink cheek 27 times. And she’s the one that laughs.
Art is manmade, humans gave stars
names Mara tells me as our arms shape grass
angels in the green field absence of snow,
charting dots punched tin-can lights like Galileo’s
gold spyglass. *The amazing part— he was right.*
Floodlight full moon the night illumes open
sky a dome, sphere of glass, he said
the moon has mountains, he drew crescent crescendos.

Humming, we stand and run loops
through the field our kicks ballet our fog breath smoke
the moonlight sparks until we think we’re
ethereal, but the cold earth our feet feel
says our orbits are not very new.

*Maybe satellites are taking photos, wave!*
We’re specks from space, you’re *crazy*. But—
We will continue grounded sorting specks,
muddled mosaics to capture glints of God’s eye.

We muse, *look at what we can do!*
to the jet that streaks the navy pool pearl,
and suppose the orbits we take to shape angel
craters is the beauty while waiting for the snow,
the contrail a verse within a poem.
Sometimes when I'm feeling really helpless
I try to imagine that my room is not filling with cabbages
They're weighing me down to the bed
It's usually when my girlfriend stays away
Which is probably for the best
Under the pressure of all of these cabbages
Her delicate structure would crumble
Like a twice flooded shack infested with termites
Not that she is a twice flooded shack
Nor is she ridden with termites
Sometimes I picture her breaking through
The cabbage sea and rescuing me
We float over them in a wave without a shore line

I wonder if my house is haunted
Or if anyone has ever heard of ghost-cabbage
I'm sure there is no record of cabbage plagues
That's not the kind of problem that makes money
The news reads, "family of five butchered by psycho"
Not, "troubled kid smothered by killer cabbage"
Paranormal sites would stop getting hits
Since my arm isn't a chainsaw or anything
I really wish it was, though
I could make so many soups out of that cabbage
Now that would make real money headlines
"Chainsaw arm kid terminates world hunger
With cabbage soup"
Class is over. Brandon has Calculus soon. He sees Lucy gathering her things. He knows that she walks the same way to her French class. He waits around. Brandon tries stalling so that he can walk out with her. He puts on his hoodie and places his books into his backpack, purposely staggered and slow.

Lucy sees Brandon out of the corner of her eye. She has been trying to get him to notice her for days. She sees him getting ready to leave; she makes excuses to impede her departure, so that she can walk with him. She rearranges her papers, and rifles around her bag as if she were looking for something. She lifts up her hands in feigned exaggeration.

The bell rings as passing time begins. Brandon moves onto tying his shoelaces. He has sandals, though, and he hides behind a desk, making gestures towards his feet to make it seem like he has shoelaces. His professor sees him, and makes a face before leaving.

The school day has ended. Lucy finally pulls out the pencil she was pretending to search for. She makes her way to the pencil sharpener. She deliberately sharpens a little too long, breaking the point; she tries again. She looks over her shoulder at Brandon; he is still tying his shoelaces.

It is winter. School is out for Christmas break. Brandon slips his hands into his pockets, jingling the pocket change with the keys. He pulls out three quarters, five nickels, and a dime. He makes an audible frown, as he sticks his hand into his other pocket, jingling again. He does this 241 more times.

The school has since collapsed. Rising sea levels have forced populations to relocate elsewhere. Nations have risen and fallen. Brandon still looks nervously over his shoulder at Lucy as she picks at imaginary lint on her ragged clothes. He had finally built up the courage to walk over and talk to her, but the feeling had passed as quickly as it came.

The sun has engulfed the planet Mercury, expanding as it ages. Humanity has been extinct for ages. The graphite in Lucy’s pencil has since decayed to carbon.

As Brandon stares at the smoldering remains of the school, it finally strikes him that he missed his Calculus class; he hopes he can get notes from someone as he finally leaves.
For Chell

You knew
of the monsters
that feed on all
of the energy of
the could-have-beens,
the wish-I'd-dones, the
if-onlys. You knew those
angels of lost
futures, of
possibilities and of moments
neither wasted nor
spent. And now, you know, they
weep for you, and
for everything
that you were to become.
For all the colors
your hair would
have been, for the characters
you might have
embodied. For
all the times I
could-have, should-have
didn't
tell you how I looked up
to you, admired
your spirit, desired your
input. For every
second between
the ripped-off
Band-Aid and the
realization that ripped
away chances,
replacing them with
all of the could- would-
should- haves in
space and
time. For every
lesson you taught
me – those
that I never wanted to learn.
For these words would
never have been
written, and those cherry
blossoms would never have
bloomed without
your breath to
paint them. You knew
of the monsters, and
darling, they know
of you.
HENRY WILSHIRE

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Ms. Edith Gordon,

Thomas Hardwick, a 30-something English travel writer, is running out of money and being run out of his ex-girlfriend’s house. A chance visit to the zoo makes him realize that there is only one place on Earth that hasn’t been covered by other travel writers, and he comes up with an idea he hopes is crazy enough to work: to write a travel guide to Antarctica. Managing to get aboard a student research vessel going to the continent to investigate global warming, he finds himself caught off-guard by the dangers of the voyage: oceanic storms, sub-zero temperatures, and worst of all, pranking grad students. But through it all he writes and begins to pull himself out of the hole he has let his life fall into.

Going North at the South Pole is an inspiring and heartwarming story of one man’s personal journey of discovery at the bottom of the world.

I have a B.A. in English and my work has appeared in The Lantern. This is my first full-length novel. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Terry Hartman

Dear Mr. Hartman,

I’m sorry to tell you that at this time, we are not able to pursue your submission, Going North at the South Pole. Birdhouse Books is a small publishing house and we frequently find ourselves swamped with submissions, like we happen to be right now.

Your submission does sound interesting, and at some point in the future we might be able to pursue it. In six-to-eight months’ time our submissions load will likely be a lot smaller, and you are welcome to send it again then.

Best Regards,
Edith Gordon
Birdhouse Books

Dear Ms. Gordon,
Six months ago I wrote to you submitting, for your consideration, my novel *Going South at the North Pole*. At the time I was told that you were overburdened and unable to pursue it. I am writing now to inquire as to whether this would be a good time to attempt a resubmission.

*Optimistically,*
*Terry Hartman*

*Dear Mr. Hartman,*
At the moment, my submissions pile is pretty low. I would be pleased to get and look over a query letter from you.

*Best Regards,*
*Edith Gordon*
*Birdhouse Books*

*Dear Ms. Gordon,*
Thank you very much for this opportunity! Attached is a reproduction of my original query letter, since I suspect the original has been discarded.

*Enthusiastically,*
*Terry Hartman*

*Dear Mr. Hartman,*
Having received your query letter, I am sorry to tell you that your book does not seem to fit what we want to publish at the moment. Recently, humorous novels have been flying off the shelves, and your book doesn’t quite seem to match that humor genre. There just doesn’t seem to be a market for inspirational tales of self-discovery at the moment.

*Best Regards,*
*Edith Gordon*
*Birdhouse Books*

*Dear Ms. Gordon,*
I understand your concerns, but I believe that *Going North at the South Pole* has great opportunity for humor. I have begun to revise the novel to make it more humorous, and offer the following revised query letter;
Tommy Hardwood, a 32-year old English travel writer, is fresh out of love, fresh out of ideas, and fresh out of luck. His girlfriend left him to pursue a music career and he can’t make the rent. A chance encounter with a zookeeper while running from his landlord makes him realize that there is only one place on Earth that hasn’t been stampeded over by other writers, and he comes up with a zany scheme he hopes is crazy enough to work: to write a travel guide to Antarctica. Stowing away onboard a student research vessel going to the continent to investigate global warming, he finds himself caught off-guard by the antics of crazy grad students. He’ll have to dodge snowballs, avoid being short-sheeted, and make peace with the captain’s swearing parrot if he’s ever going to finish his guide.

*Going North at the South Pole* is a witty and laugh-inducing story of one man’s unusual working vacation to the bottom of the world. I have a B.A. in English and took part in my college’s comedy troupe, *The Dull Lanterns*. This is my first full-length novel. Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Hilariously,*  
*Terry Hartman*

*Dear Mr. Hartman,*  
I am very happy to tell you that we are interested in your submission. The revised proposal fits the comedic genre that we are currently seeking to publish.

I would like for you to send me the full manuscript. I will then be able to get back to you within six months. Hopefully, the full text makes me laugh as much as the query letter did.

I’d like to thank you for your patience and your continued interest. I am looking forward to reading the completed story. I’ll be very busy in the upcoming months so please refrain from sending any further letters until I contact you.

*Sincerely,*  
*Edith Gordon*  
*Birdhouse Books*

*Dear Ms. Gordon,*  
Several months ago you wrote to me expressing your interest in receiving my manuscript. You also instructed me to wait for you to contact me, and I have, but it has been a considerably longer time than you said it would take. I am
very interested in getting *Going North at the South Pole* published, and would like to know as soon as possible whether or not you are interested in publishing the manuscript.

I understand you may be busy at the moment, but it is very important to me that I get this book published, and if Birdhouse Books cannot make that happen, I will have to go to other publishers. I don’t wish to do this, as I really admire Birdhouse Books and the books they have already published.

*Anxiously,*  
*Terry Hartman*

*Dear Author,*  
We are sorry to inform you that Peterson Publishing House is not currently accepting unsolicited submissions. We cannot view your manuscript at this time.

*Keep reading, keep writing.*  
*Lucas Johnson*  
*Peterson Publishing House*

*Dear Mr. Johnson,*  
I am confused by your letter. I had been in contact with Edith Gordon at Birdhouse Books, who had requested I send her a manuscript, but she has failed to keep in contact me in the previous several months. It would be very helpful if you could clear this up for me, since I really want to know what the status of my book is. It is very important to me to get this book published, since I have been working on it on and off for several years now. It is my passion project, my baby.

*Questioningly,*  
*Terry Hartman*

*Dear Author,*  
Peterson Publishing House recently acquired Birdhouse Books. All previously accepted manuscripts and contracts have been canceled and disposed of.

*Keep reading, keep writing.*  
*Lucas Johnson*
Dear Mr. Johnson,
I find your disposal of my manuscript unjustified and aggravating. It was previously accepted, and I am attaching another copy to this letter. I have to insist that you follow through and at least look at the manuscript. I had an arrangement with Birdhouse Books, and if you now represent them you owe me a review. I have recently entered a difficult financial situation, since

I had planned on my manuscript being reviewed and accepted several months ago. I really, really need for this review to occur quickly.

Frustratedly,
Terry Hartman

Dear Author,
We are sorry to inform you that Peterson Publishing House is not currently accepting unsolicited manuscripts at this time. At the present time we are accepting query letters for the following genre[s]: Historical Fiction, Thriller, Teen Paranormal Romance

Keep reading, keep writing.

Lucas Johnson
Peterson Publishing House

Dear Mr. Johnson,
Fine, I will do this your way. Here is a query letter for Going North at the South Pole, revised as a piece in the thriller genre, which I think sacrifices the heart of the work, the really touching and emotional heart of the work. Speaking of hearts, I was recently in the hospital, where I learned that I have a heart condition. I had a heart attack, in fact. One brought on by stress. My doctor made it clear to me that I am under much stress lately and what I really, really need is some good news. Some bad news, some unfortunate news, some news that would bring about more stress, would do me and my weak heart a great deal of damage, at this point. I'm just letting you know what the situation is...

Tom Hardcastle, a 34-year old English novelist, has just gotten over a brutal break-up that has left him without the money to get by, a place to stay, or the will to live. Narrowly escaping a vicious loan shark at an abandoned zoo, he realizes that there is only one place on Earth where his
enemies can't find him; Antarctica. Undertaking a desperate, last minute plan, he sneaks onboard a secretive research vessel going to the continent under the pretense of investigating global warming, he finds himself caught between several factions of criminals and intelligence experts, under cover as grad students. He'll have to dodge bullets, avoid Antarctic storms, and survive sub-zero temperatures in order to get to the bottom of the mystery, while finishing his journal, a record of events.

Going North at the South Pole is a pulse-pounding and nerve-wracking story of one man's epic adventure at the bottom of the world.

I have a B.A. in English and connections to The Lantern Gang, a secretive Chinatown criminal cartel. This is my first full-length novel. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Furtively,
Terry Hartman

Dear Author,

We are sorry to inform you that we are not currently interested in your submission. We are not currently seeking books in the thriller genre.

Keep reading, keep writing.

Lucas Johnson
Peterson Publishing House

Dear Mr. Johnson,

You took another three months to get back to me. And three months ago you said you wanted thrillers. So I wrote you a thriller. You received a thriller. Why are you doing this to me? Why? I just want my book published. Is that so much to ask? I warned you about my heart condition. You seem intent to ignore it, to put my very life at risk. Is that what you want? Do you really want that on your conscience? I’ve attached the current manuscript. If you don’t want my blood on your hands I implore you to read it!

Feverishly,
Terry Hartman
Dear Author,
We are sorry to inform you that Peterson Publishing House is not currently accepting unsolicited manuscripts at this time. At the present time we are accepting query letters for the following genre[s]: None

Keep reading, keep writing.

Lucas Johnson
Peterson Publishing House

Dear Lucas Percival Johnson,
Hello. I acknowledge that it has been some time since our last communication. I received your last rejection letter four months ago. I assume you typed it up at your third floor office with the windows overlooking Clarke Street, presumably before you left the office at 5:20 to catch the 5:35 train to your home in Petersville. Maybe you typed it up at home, in your bedroom (the one with the windows with blue shutters). Likely it would have been typed up sometime after your 7:30 dinner. You certainly wouldn’t have had time during the rest of the day; especially once you left your wife Sandra at home with your two children, Michael (age 12) and Julie (age 8). I hope your children are learning well at Petersville Junior High, and Edwards Elementary School. I am sure they are reading many interesting books in school.

Speaking of interesting books, I would like to request another opportunity to send you a query letter regarding my novel, Going North at the South Pole. The Peterson Publishing House website was very informative about which genres you are currently interested in acquiring. I believe that my novel will meet your current criteria perfectly, if you pay close attention and read between the lines. Actually, I would like to take a moment to just compliment you on the comprehensiveness of your website. The “Shop Online” tab. The “FAQ” tab. The “About Us” tab, that linked to a brief description of each member of the editorial staff, providing details that allowed one, if they were so inclined, to identify just which Lucas Johnson worked at Peterson Publishing House. This information then allowed one, if they were so inclined, to track down said Lucas Johnson on social media. This information then allowed one, if they were so inclined, to discover where said Lucas Johnson lived, and who said Lucas Johnson
was related to. From there it would be a small matter, if one were so inclined, to figure out the basic schedule of said Lucas Johnson.

I hope to hear from you soon.

_Sinisterly,_
_Terry Hartman_

_Dear Author,_
At the present time Peterson Publishing House is not accepting any form of submission, whether query letter or finished manuscript.

_Keep reading, keep writing._

_Ken Booth_  
_Peterson Publishing house_

_Dear Ken Booth,_
What?! Fuck you! I’ll fucking find you! This has gone on long enough! I have a book and it will be published goddamn it! I am a literary genius! I just need my one fucking chance! Publish my book or you and your company will be getting some interesting packages in the mail! I’ll get this damn book published if it’s the last thing I ever fucking do!

_Ravingly,_
_Terry Hartman_

_Dear Sir/Madam,_
It has come to our attention that at some point within the last six months you have sent [a] letter[s] containing one or more of the following to a representative of a major publishing company: expletives, implied threats, direct threats, references to private personal information, unsolicited query letters and manuscripts, harsh language, multiple exclamation marks, references to ties to organized crime, references to ties to improv comedy, and/or references to the Twilight series. [Your correspondence may or may not have contained all of the aforementioned offensive material.]

Regardless of the extent of the violations, all your correspondence has since been passed onto the relevant national law enforcement organization of your resident nation, and any future correspondence attempted will be forwarded to them as well. It is likely that you can expect additional correspondence from them within the next 3-to-5 business days. Furthermore, you have been placed
on the International Register of Unstable and/or Threatening Would-Be “Authors.” Your presence on this list means that you are banned for life from publishing within any UN member nation.

Please do not let these events discourage you from continuing to read and enjoy literature.

Sincerely,
The International Publishing Security Association
“Write hard and clear about what hurts.”
—Ernest Hemingway

Write soft about
what keeps your heart in place—write
all the nights you went to bed
brave and sober, facing the sharp edges
of your mattress island. Monsoon season comes
and you have managed to stay afloat.
Write distorted impressionist paintings about
every single time you have tumbled
down the rabbit hole of love
only to claw your way back out
brushing dirt from your acid
washed knees.
Write blurry, pastel colored plastic scenery,
write acoustic guitars and Christmas mornings spent
eating cinnamon buns in matching pajamas.
Write tart and sour about what keeps the hurt
from seeping into the paper cuts over your eyes
and diluting your blood with lemon juice.
Write unforgiving, write patient, write endlessly,
write candles
losing themselves to heat and gravity, hot
wax cupped like a prayer in the palms of your
cold hands,
write church services spent composing sonnets
about sex pressed up
against the humming soda machine
in the laundromat
across from your house,
tasting the salty sweat on his upper lip.
Write hard and clear about what has tried to kill you—
write hard and clear about what never will.
EMILY SHUE

Shards

I have spent the past twenty years
picking shards of glass out of my hair
from the times you slammed the door so hard
the picture frames shuddered off the walls.
We carried dust pans in our back pockets,
sweeping up the mess you left behind
like hospital janitors on late night shifts
trading places with the patients.
Now I let people crack my chest open,
make a space for their bodies in between my lungs
only to peel their way back out and walk away.
I find myself throwing heart shaped injuries
down into the well of my throat, clenching my fists
as they settle in to eat away at the walls of my stomach.
didn’t know what an eyelash curler
was until seventeen but
ask me how to scrub out a bruise like a stain
from the fabric of pale skin
and I go back to eight years old.
One morning before church, watching my mother
paint lies onto her cheeks.
Drug Store Nude #107 layered over
last night’s festivities.
Here is the truth: I don’t want to talk about it to anyone
except this piece of paper.
Some days I want to strip off my skin
layer by layer and
run down the streets of my hometown,
screaming.
I have never been in love
I am damaged and I am bad weather
but right now
I don’t have a single goddamn
contusion to hide
and isn’t that just
beautiful.
The white wall spun slightly; one second it seemed inches away from his fingers and the next it seemed like miles away from his grasp. He wanted to touch the part of the wall that had chips of paint missing; the exposed grey drywall enticed him.

“What the hell are you doing, Matt?”

Matt heard the wiltly voice but didn’t know where it came from. He craned his heavy head to see the source. “You get so fucking lost whenever you smoke,” Mellissa said angrily, then she laughed and went back to making a crane out of thin blue paper. Matt noticed that her red lipstick had smudged just a little on her top lip and her black curls seemed to defy gravity around her face like a fluffy frame.

Papers and open books were scattered on the floor, like a museum display of two procrastinating English majors. The two had decided to take a quick cannabis break.

“Marry me,” Matt heard himself say. He giggled for no reason while looking up at the white ceiling with black birthmarks running through it. “Why is everything white in this place?” he thought, attention span diminishing by the second.

“I’m never getting married, you know that,” Mellissa murmured, brown eyes still scrunched in concentration. “I’m gonna graduate from this hell hole and get a job doing something. But I’m not my house-wife mother, oh no.” Suddenly her brown eyes were big with passion. “Once she got married she never left the house unless she was buying groceries, you know that? That woman was pretty smart, too. Smarter than my dad at least, she really coulda been something.

But instead of bringing home bacon she fried it. Marriage is a jail for women.” She looked back down to her folded paper that was starting to make some semblance to a bird. “And why would I want to marry you anyways? You can’t even hold my hand without breaking out in hives.” She laughed a snarky laugh

“Oh baby, you’ll get hitched one day and you know it,” Matt said as he propped himself up on the bed. “Besides,” he continued, getting a cigarette, “no one wants to be alone.” He lit the end and watched the white paper shrivel and brown. Mellissa motioned for Matt to pass her the carton. She stuck the white Camel in her mouth but didn’t light it.
“Maybe I do okay?” she said in a muffled way. Matt made the unsteady walk over to where she was folding paper and lit the end of the cigarette. “Thank you,” pause for a puff, “but really. I got shit to do. I don’t have time to make a pot roast and rub my husband’s feet.” They both snorted at the thought of Mellissa being domestic. The smoke they exhaled created a thin curtain between their faces.

“Why do you wanna join the hitch train anyways?” Mellissa asked after a minute of quiet. “I don’t know. I just want my life to be something. I wanna marry a pretty lady and have three kids that respect and love me. Every day I’ll go to work and teach students with braces about Hemingway and Whitman, half of them won’t care but I’ll still make them write essays. I’ll come home at five o’clock and say ‘Honey I’m home!’ Then I’ll grade those goddamn essays with red pen. That’s just how I imagine my life going…” Matt trailed off and looked at his friend, who sat closer than either of them realized. He was hyper aware of the blonde hairs on her knee and the smell of cigarettes and shampoo in her curls.

“Smoke and roses,” he thought to himself. “That’s my girl.”

“Good luck. The new generation’s just going to be a bunch of robots. They’re not gonna read, they’ll be too busy playing computer games. Nah, literature is dead. I can almost guarantee that in twenty years they won’t even know how to write.”

Matt looked into Mellissa’s eyes, her lids sagged like it was too much effort to keep them open, her pupils were dilated and the whites surrounding had tiny red brush strokes. “Why are you always so pessimistic Melly? I know you want the same things I do,” Matt questioned softly.

Mellissa’s smoky eyes closed just then. “Cause I’m not stupid enough to believe in something I don’t have yet, okay? Yeah I want kids to be smart but I don’t wanna get my hopes up about changing the world when I can’t even imagine a world worth changing.” Her eyes opened again but she refused to meet his gaze.

“I gotta go powder my nose or something,” Mellissa said as she stood up.

The lights in the hall seemed dark and murkier than usual. Mellissa reached out her finger-tips to graze the wall beside her as she walked down the homogenous grey carpet.

The stroll to the bathroom took longer than usual, but then again the joint they smoked seemed to make time pass like sand through cupped hands.
She sat down on the cold porcelain toilet and looked at the graffiti covering the stall. Some were initials with hearts around it, there were a few carved cusses, and one set of multiple choice answers. When she finished she approached the sink.

She turned the water on as hot as it would go and let her hands soak. The dull lights flickered slightly; Mellissa moved her eyes to the mirror where she had a staring contest with herself. Her red lipstick had smudged more and gave the appearance that she had drunk too many cups of wine. She was dully aware of her hands burning under the faucet. When she removed them they were as bright as her top lip.

She began her wobbly walk back to her dorm. Her hands felt like champagne bubbles.

All the lights were still on in her dorm when she entered, in fact, everything was exactly how she left it, except one thing.

Matt was sleeping silently on the unmade bed, his fingers still outstretched, touching where the paint had chipped off. Mellissa unbuttoned her black shorts and slid next to him.

Of course she didn’t know what she wanted, but drifting through the stratosphere without a plan didn’t seem too bad for now. She smiled and fell asleep instantly next to Matt. They exchanged warmth and sleepy smiles as gravity refused to anchor them.
“And I think I’ve got maybe twelve new ones,” Lucas mused. The secret bench was our place to sit. Just behind the school where the fence protected us. We liked to sit. Sometimes Lucas would hum. I’d laugh. And he’d pretend he wasn’t humming. But we’d always be sitting as if standing was something you did when you had a future to be falling into. Sitting down made everything slow and hushed: a cryptic place for time. We always closed those garden gates after we snuck into the back of the building. So deft, always so keen on small rebellion, Lucas could click the gate closed oh so quietly. No one could ever hear our murmurs; even our breathing sounds were shrouded by the blurring buzz of school workers or the underclassmen strolling by. It was our last time to sit on the bench. It was our last time. And Lucas was still busy obsessing over his photo collection.

“Could we not talk about that?” I asked, nodding to the box between his knees.

That poor, soggy cardboard box, bent by Lucas’s trousers pushing dents into it so the old photographs inside that pathetic sag-of­a-box would pop up. Running his hands over the top layer of the pictures, he pulled out a photo of a family sitting on a porch. Family picture, I presumed. As Lucas gazed at the picture, his eyes scanning it, he absorbed the image before him like some sort of colorful scientist. People might think he was a photographer. That Lucas had captured all those pictures, who had to be his family or friends or pets (as some of them were of retrievers in Halloween costumes and rabbits outside their pens). But no. Lucas could never work a camera right.

They weren’t his family or his friends, and he certainly wasn’t allowed to have pets.

“I got the last three from a yard sale last week,” he went on.

I think he was talking for a while now, his shy, talking voice. I liked when he was humming. Not that I didn’t like Lucas speaking to me. It was just easier. Easier to sit and stare and not think about anything but the bench and my knees bent a little closer to him. He never seemed to notice when I’d arch a foot over a mound of grass just to have a shoe near his heel. I never got too close though. God forbid. I couldn’t have that. We were friends. That’s it, that’s all we could be.

We had to stay friends—I couldn’t lose him over something stupid like petty love. God—did I love him? That’s too far. Exactly the
kind of thing pathetic people would say. I’m not pathetic—I tried not to be. Of course I don’t love him. I was just too drawn to him. That’s what it was.

“Look, this one kinda looks like you.”
Tapping the pictures down, Lucas pushed the box away and turned to me. “Last day then?”
“Should we write our names on the bench? To keep it ours?” I asked him.

Lucas grinned. He loved doing anything that defied rules, even if it was keying the back of school property. “It will always be ours,” he said, almost testing me.

I looked up at him then. How his eyes sunk in, how his light hair fell over them slightly. Oh, how quiet his face was. Just a shadow over the bench. He could have blended into it. He could disappear if I wasn’t careful enough. The invisible smiles he gave me, the looks of happiness I thought he tried to reflect, but never could. He was never good at that anyway. It didn’t matter. I liked when he hummed and played with the photographs of strangers. That was all I needed of him.

“I know you’re upset,” he stated, blinking.
“I’m fine.”

It was the last time I’d see him because I knew Lucas. I knew we would lose touch. He couldn’t hold onto anything except his pictures. And when he did grab hold of something, like an old album of imaginary families, he was so delicate that he didn’t know how to keep it. His fingers would have a tantrum, ripping the photos out of the gloss of the book. Thrown into the box. Sinking into the bottom of it.

So I knew he’d just have to throw me in there with the others. I sometimes felt like a stand-in for a collectible. He’d probably regard me as a slightly more complex Polaroid after today. It was all fine though. At least I wouldn’t be forgotten.

“We’ll still be friends.”
He said it as if we wouldn’t.
Across the country. That was where he would be sitting by tomorrow. He’d have a new secret place. I’d still be here, sitting on this stupid bench outside our old high school. And Lucas? Studying away where he could see the beach outside his dorm. I never got that. He hated beaches. Hated a lot of things, to be honest.

“Why couldn’t you have gone to a college closer?”
“You know I can’t stay here,” Lucas mumbled.
His head was soaking in a limb of a shadow, his eyes trailing over where my foot was. I quickly pulled it back and tucked my legs under the bench. He didn’t seem to notice. If he did, he didn’t mention anything. I wanted to tell him. Don’t regret anything. Don’t regret this moment. Us just sitting. What would he do if I put my hand over his? Would he mind it? Yes, completely. I retracted. Not physically. I wasn’t too close to him. A friend-distance away. Crawling back emotionally. Shields up. I’m already shielded up. Okay, shielded up more.

“I’ll—uh—write letters,” he told me.
I scoffed.
“What?”
“We can talk on the phone when you’re away. You can tell me how everyone is in California.”
“Tan?” he asked genuinely, eyebrows cocking up. I might say his expression was adorable, but I kicked myself. It wasn’t that.
Fidgeting, Lucas moved his hand up and down his leg. Tick, his eyes slid over to the fence wrapped around the small enclosure. Our own alcove. Our world. He glimpsed at something, mesmerized by the watermarks of the sky or the belts of color that pulled at the trees. Suddenly, his head flicked back to me. “I’ll learn to surf,” he uttered.
“Is this definitely decided?” I felt myself smile. Smile for him. Make him happy.
A muscle within his face tried to grin. “Oh yes and I will grow my hair very long. I’ll reinvent myself.”
“Ha, I’d like to see that.”
He closed his hands. Fists. Gnarled fists, rubbing against his leg. Anxiety splaying out, movements uncoordinated like he had forgotten where he was.
“I will,” he whispered, very serious. “I’ll be somebody else.”
Turning slightly on the bench, I gave him a look. Still sitting. Keep him sitting. If I sit here he won’t be able to leave. When we both refused to speak, the air thickened, the noises of the trees panting on the fence, the chatter of the passing people. We both heard that. The sounds of normality, of the wind being stubborn as it howled over the heat of the garden. I wanted him to say more. I wanted him to say more voluntarily. But he never did. I finally gave up.
“Why would you try to be somebody else?”
“Current personality and demeanor not very satisfying,” he grumbled, as if rehearsed.
“Satisfying?” Should I say it satisfies me? No, that’s weird. Just...just keep it neutral. Keep him sitting. Don’t let his eyes wonder, don’t let him slip out of the gates.

Lucas shrugged. “Satisfying for me. But you...you seem to like me. Don’t know why.”

“Same reason you like me.”

“I’m not funny or smart or cunning.” Like he was irritated at me. Irritated.

“Pffff...I’m not any of those things.”

“Oh.”

God, my feet were tapping madly on the ground. I looked away. He was my friend. He liked old photographs of strangers. He liked flea markets and stealing books from hotel rooms and humming to pop music (he would never admit to the last part). He didn’t like me. At least not like that. Ignore it. Sit down. I snapped my eyes shut. Please, just stay. No I couldn’t be selfish. It’s his life. Attached. I’m too attached.

“Are you...okay?”

“I’m fine.” I responded too quickly.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m fine. I mean, you won’t be too far away. It’s not like you’re going out of country, right?” This is what I told myself every day.

“And I will write you letters.”

“Lucas,” I said, shaking my head. “You don’t have to write letters. We’ve got cell-phones.”

“I know. I’m still going to write you letters.”

I wondered how long it would take for him to stop contacting me at all. That’s what happens anyway. He’ll branch out into his own little world. I’ll have mine. That’s what it is supposed to be like. That is what is supposed to happen. I couldn’t expect someone, Lucas of all people, to still be best friends with me. But the future...I always thought he’d be there with me. That the bench would be there too. And Lucas would never get rid of his photo collection and he’d keep all of it in a room in our apartment. And I’d tell him to—no. No.

Living together? Who was I? I couldn’t think about that. It’s forbidden. I’ve forbidden it. God, I’m pathetic. We’d never be roommates if he’s going to be away. Look at him, waiting for me to talk. Being all patient while I think of how destructive I could make our friendship. It’s burning away anyway, I thought. Do something.
You’ll never see him again. Do something. My foot inched closer to him. Not enough.

“Hello? Blanked out there?” Lucas inquired.

My hand inched closer to him. It was lying on the bench, palm up, open. Open. I looked at my hand and then away. Oh God wait. Lucas saw me. He’s looking at my hand. He’s not moving. He’s not saying anything. He’s staring at my hand as if he’s looking at one of his pictures.

“I would sit here for a very long time if I could,” he suddenly said. Then, exhaling loudly, his eyes flickering over some detail in the dirt, he mumbled, “I don’t recognize...those things. I don’t...”

“What?”

And then he leaned in and pressed his lips to mine and I felt his hand scramble for my open palm and I felt his palm rest over mine so very, very lightly and I felt him and I felt me. Our world waited and it was soft. The world was soft.

He pulled away from it and looked down with embarrassment.

“Sorry,” he said, his voice rounded and lost. His eyes wandered away before he said, “I...I didn’t know.”

“But—”

“I’d try for you.” He shrugged.

Then he stood up with his box and I screamed in my head for him to sit back down. But I didn’t. I was still shocked. I was still. No. He was breaking me by trying to put me back together.

Then he turned and opened the gate and smiled. “Bye Brian. I’ll write.”

A promise? My hand raised to my lips. How could I respond with the stain he had left on my skin and the photo on the bench?

A photograph; I leaned to pinch it between my fingers. Worn. It was of us. Left to die there on the seat. I wish we had taken more.
This morning, winter steps aside for a minute to give her timid sister spring a chance to sing, just once before nudging her back out of the spotlight.

The cathedral cranes its neck, trying to peek over the buildings who are hesitant to abandon their habit of huddling close for warmth.

To those who stop on the street, this morning tastes of fresh coffee with just a little extra sugar.

The clouds also pause, reclining as they take in Spring’s wispy perfume which smells of freshly cleaned white sheets still a bit damp.
The Deadline

She opened her eyes to find it was still dark. After a brief moment of confusion, she realized her long, black hair had fallen over her eyes while she slept. Pushing it back out of her face, she looked at the clock. 7:58. Somehow, she had managed to wake up just before her alarm went off. She reached over to turn off the alarm and sat up.

There was plenty to do today.

She went downstairs to make herself a cup of coffee. As the coffeemaker went to work, she gazed around the kitchen, eventually looking over at the calendar. Her eyes were drawn immediately to the red circle around today’s date, but they darted away just as quickly.

She sighed. At that moment, the coffeemaker finished its job, and she took the warm mug upstairs, not bothering to add any cream or sugar. She sat down at the white desk in her room and took a long, slow sip of her drink. Setting the mug aside, she opened a drawer and took out a pen and a fresh sheet of paper from the small stack that remained. She wondered when she had begun to run so low, but a glance at the bin next to her desk, overflowing with crumpled sheets, quickly reminded her. Shaking her head, she turned her attention to the paper in front of her and placed the pen to the page.

Before making any more than a tiny dot, she had her concentration broken by a chirp from her window. The birds outside began singing a tune that, while lovely, she knew would be endlessly distracting. She got up and shut the window. At the same moment, a thin cloud passed in front of the sun, darkening the room slightly. Pursing her lips, she turned away from the window and went back to her desk. When she sat down again, the black dot on the page seemed as though it had grown by a nearly imperceptible amount. She stared at it for a moment, puzzled, and shook her head again. She was imagining it. Another sip of coffee, and she picked up the pen again.

Suddenly, the room darkened further. Surprised by the abrupt change in light, she went back to the window to see what had caused it. The sky had grown noticeably darker, and it looked as though a storm was approaching. It was strange that the lovely weather that morning had so quickly turned foul. She hoped it wouldn’t rain; she was afraid of thunderstorms. Shaking her head again, she sat back down at her desk, and turned her attention once more to the page in front of her. She froze. The black dot had grown larger this time. She
wasn’t imagining it, she was sure of that. But how did it happen? And why? Suddenly annoyed at her own jumpiness, she told herself it was just the ink setting into the page. She took a hurried sip of coffee to settle her nerves and reached for the pen again.

It was a loud clap of thunder that disturbed her this time. Jumping out of her chair in fright, she accidentally knocked over her coffee mug. The remaining dark liquid poured neatly into the trash bin, staining the crumpled papers it held. Calming herself, she crouched by the bin to see if any coffee had gotten on the rug or the desk. It didn’t appear that any had, so she turned her attention to the bin. The crumpled pages were mostly stained brown, but she saw that a few words were still legible. “Time,” one of them read. “Rejection,” said another. “Late,” bore a third. Pursing her lips, she decided she would clean it up later. She stood up and looked back to the paper at her desk. What she saw made her stare intensely at the page. The black dot had grown again, into a large spatter of ink. That was not the ink setting into the page.

She was frightened, but more than anything she didn’t understand what was happening. The phone rang. The sudden, piercing noise startled her even more. Allowing the phone to ring a second time, she took a deep breath to calm her nerves, and then picked up the receiver.

“Hello?” she said hesitantly. There was no sound coming from the phone, not even a dial tone. The line’s dead, she supposed. Probably from the storm. She was reluctant to look back at her desk, afraid of what she would see. She turned around slowly, and as her eyes caught the page her fears were simultaneously confirmed and multiplied. The ink stain now covered most of the page. Hurriedly, she turned away, wanting desperately to look anywhere else. She found herself staring out the window into the darkness. A flash of lightning lit up the sky for a brief moment, followed by a tremendous clap of thunder. Paralyzing fear gripped her. She wasn’t sure whether she was more afraid of the storm or of the blackening paper at her desk. She eventually decided that the former was worse. Tearing her gaze from the window, she looked back to her desk. The page was now completely black. The rain pounding against the window had turned black as well, staining the glass the same color. Ink began to ooze from cracks in the walls and the ceiling. The ink from the page began to spread all over her desk, consuming the white, wooden surface and staining everything that same terrifying shade of black. Huge drops of ink started to rain from the ceiling, filling her whole room. In mere moments, everything would be submerged. Desperate tears fell from
her eyes, and they, too, stained her hands black. That was it. There was no more time.

She opened her eyes to find it was bright. A dream, she thought. Just a bad dream. She looked at the clock. 7:58. She had managed to wake up just before her alarm went off. She reached over to turn off the alarm and sat up. There was plenty to do today. She went downstairs to make herself a cup of coffee. As the coffeemaker went to work, she gazed around the kitchen, eventually looking over at the calendar. Her eyes went immediately to the red circle around today’s date, studying it thoughtfully. She smiled. At that moment, the coffeemaker finished its job, and she took the warm mug upstairs. She sat down at the white desk in her room and took a long, slow sip of her drink. Setting the mug aside, she opened a drawer and took out a pen and a fresh sheet of paper. She placed her pen to the page and began to write.
Brace yourself for something you
might not want to know, my mother
says on the phone one afternoon.

I sink into a flashback from the previous
fall, when she had called and said:
Hi, your grandmother died.

Listen, she says, I think I know what that story
is missing, the one you’re writing about your
father when he’s graduating from high school.

Right, so it’s 1976, okay, sure, he’s working,
bicentennial, yeah, important, but what you
need to know is, he’s perpetually high. I mean

he is stoned out of his mind. All the time. Okay?
she says. Your father was a pothead. More than me.
I mean, everyone was. But really, your father.

I think about this previous life of a person
I’ve only known as someone who keeps
a reusable grocery bag in the trunk and a
clean handkerchief in his pocket, who will
only wear Hanes Classic crew-cut socks, who
is fascinated by the comings and goings of ducks,

who quietly reads books on Daoism while
sipping a freshly brewed cup of green tea,
falling asleep with his reading glasses on.

I picture him at eighteen, speeding down
the highway in his baby blue Mercedes Benz,
blasting Springsteen, Aviators reflecting the sun.
I imagine him taking hits in the back corner of a parking lot, his feet skimming mellow grass in backyard parties with barrels of Jungle Juice, crashing at 4am, waking early in last night’s jeans on summer mornings to paint houses with a headache stronger than his cups of coffee.

So when did he lose the bong and the cigarettes, the Afro and permanent hangover—at what point did he say, okay, when I get home tonight

I’m going to quietly put on my black slippers shuffle into the den for a PBS special on hummingbirds, and get to sleep early?

Are you there? my mother asks. Did I shock you too much? I’m fine, I say, I thought you were going to tell me somebody died.

Oh God no, she says. No, not today.
My car slices through the heat mirages hovering over the pavement. I gaze forwards at the blue-grey steel of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, wearing the scars of millions of tires that have etched their tired patterns on the coarse stone. The heavy cars drowsily follow the flow of traffic. My eyes keep itching to steal a glance of the Delaware River’s silent waves, crashing below the horizon. The traffic toll lights frantically blink. Reminder: press the break. Too late. A brief sense of panic shoots through my nerves. I take a breath and feel the familiar pressure of my seatbelt against my chest. The cars crawl…inch by inch, like massive bodies entering the city. Perhaps they were anxious to return home, or they were inviting themselves into a city they wanted to know. Perhaps the buildings stacked, crowding one another, looked like old family members, waiting upon the driver’s return. Or perhaps the city had no significance; it was a mere point, a macroscopic destination for a microscopic purpose, only known to the individual who travelled into the city to view it as a kaleidoscope of diversity - foreign land that kept the eyes searching and the mind busy. Maybe I also sought to eradicate the monotony of life, if just for one moment.

Because both of my parents were born and raised in Philadelphia and only moved out when they began a family, Philadelphia feels comfortable, an old friend that may have changed a bit, but I will always love and continue to see. I came into the city earlier than the concert at the Electric Factory began because I wanted to settle myself into the crowd, to be a part of the city rather than an outsider, uncomfortable and vulnerable to the insecurities of feeling lost. I parked along Spring Garden and North 8th Street and walked to Franklin Square where I could sit quietly and be cajoled by the endless dialogue of city life. I sat on the bench and breathed in the vitality of the city. Decay and growth intermingled in one sip. I was intoxicated by the cohesion. Every person like a cog, clicking away, contributing to the pulse of the city.

Giant rain drops plummeted from the sky, umbrellas popped open, plastic bags rustled and the humans of the city took new forms. I stood under a public bathroom overhang, watching the tops of my feet and my white sneakers become wet and discolored as the dirt from my feet soaked through the bleached canvas. Every so often my phone...
would light up, notifying me where Emerson was. Soon I saw him running down the street with his head low, unsuccessfully avoiding the downpour. He met me under the overhang and we both stood there, laughing, enjoying the uncontrollable rain and seeing a familiar face.

Although we met to see a concert, we got together earlier to be in each other’s company without the distraction of a performance. We ran to the food stand as the rain kept splashing down, asked for a couple of trash bags from the employees, poked arm and head holes and continued walking around in search of a liquor store. We walked in, soaked hair and dripping noses, looking for our friend, Jose. Once we bought the bottle, we took a celebratory shot from the opening and quickly closed it as we continued to my parked car to stow away the container and make our way to the venue. We met up with our friend Sara and her boyfriend, Dan. They were already drunk when we arrived, so we glanced at each other and made an unspoken decision that we would stick together because there’s nothing worse than a little drunk white girl making out with her boyfriend and squealing. We saw one of my favorite artists, Atmosphere, a hip-hop duo with Damian Marley, whose music fused hip-hop and reggae.

The concert was deafening. Slug, Atmosphere’s rap artist, spilled his assertive energy into the crowd. Hands reached out, groping the pulses. Agitating the blood in our veins. A young man stood next to me sporting messy dreadlocks, dripping in sweat. He thought the less you shower, the deeper you seem. I thought the less you shower, the deeper you need to clean. I scooted as far away from the white Rasta as I could without being swallowed by the crowd. My back faced Emerson. He put his hands on my shoulders and I smiled. I was reminded that these delicate connections weave the gossamer threads that hold us all the together. The city. The crowd. The performers. My friends. Myself.

We left the venue to get pizza and after walking so long in wet, canvas shoes, my toes formed blisters. I laughed because you could see some of the blood, bleeding through the shoe, staining it rust red where it relentlessly rubbed against my pinky toes. Emerson carried me on his back for a while as I alternated between walking barefoot on syringe and glass covered streets. We bought our giant slices, sat on the curb, and savored the greasy puddle, deep orange beads, trickling out the sides of our mouth. That night I was going to stay with a friend, Nick, who lived in West Philly, but before I headed that way, Emerson and I took a drive to his car which was parked in a lot about five minutes away. As Childish Gambino’s “Bonfire” blasted in my
car, we shouted the lyrics into the summer night. The night has this way of slowing down time. During the day, time trickles rapidly through the hour glass, but at night, it falls, slowly, like molasses in winter, cascading in dark, mahogany waves. As the vibrations shook the walls of our chest, our fears crumbled and we were left raw.

Allowing the dynamics of the bass and treble to touch every corner and crevice of our skeletons, penetrating our flesh. We shouted our youth into the summer air, and we were bonfires, burning in the night.
MARY LOBO

Obsessions and Compulsions

When most people think about OCD they picture someone hunched over a sink, scrubbing the skin from their hands and arms, trying to get every last solitary germ from their body. They picture someone relentlessly going through bottle after bottle of hand sanitizer as they try to cleanse themselves after a moment of human contact. They think of people constantly adjusting their pencils so that they line up perfectly. They think of those “freaks” who are afraid of the world.

Maybe that’s why I kept my OCD hidden for almost a decade.

People don’t realize that OCD goes way beyond an obsession with cleanliness. I erase entire sentences when I think one letter doesn’t look perfect...or if it just didn’t feel right when I wrote it down. I reread full paragraphs, sections, and pages of books if something about the way I look at a word is off in some way. I pick up an item and put it down again three times if the first time isn’t quite perfect. I have spent hours, days, months, possibly even years of my life rewriting, rereading, readjusting, repeating, repeating, repeating anything and everything that I do or else the itch in my brain will never leave me alone. If I try to ignore a “tick”, it feels as though my mind is slowly attacking itself, scraping away at my conscience until I act.

To quote Fletcher Wortmann, an author who suffers from OCD himself, “Imagine the worst thing in the world. Picture it. Construct it, carefully and deliberately in your mind. Be careful not to omit anything. Imagine it happening to you, to the people you love. Imagine the worst thing in the world. Now try not to think about it.”

That is what OCD feels like every single day.

I was more embarrassed about it than I can ever put into words. I didn’t want anyone to know that I had this problem and so I found ways to hide it. I became impressively skilled at making my ticks look like I was simply stretching or readjusting for comfort. In actuality I was acting on a thought that crossed my mind. If I didn’t, who knew what might happen?

If I didn’t tap my right foot over my left foot halfway down on the far side and then bring it back just so while whispering a little chant in my head three times each...maybe someone would get hurt. If I didn’t flip my light switch on and off 3 times...no...5 times...no...9 times...15...25...50...maybe someone would get hurt.
If I noticed I was comfortable and content in the sleeping position I was in...and I didn’t move to a less comfortable position...was I being selfish? Yes.

Maybe someone would get hurt.

So I would tap my right foot over my left foot halfway down on the far side while I whispered my chant three times and I would flip my light switch 3, 5, 9, 15, 25, 50 times, and I would move from my comfortable sleeping position to avoid being selfish...all because...what if I didn’t?

These thoughts don’t cross my mind once or twice a day, not even once or twice an hour...no...nearly every waking moment is consumed by the briefest of thoughts that I have to turn into action. Maybe that’s why my sleeping patterns are so messed up. Going to sleep is hard. I know how many things I’ll have to do before I can finally sleep. I have to tap the wall behind me five times, the wall to my side five times, and the corner 25 times. I have to repeat until it feels right...but only if I repeat it a “good” number of times. When I close my eyes I try my best to think happy thoughts. Sometimes I can, but occasionally horrible images flash across my mind and I have to stay up longer to counteract these thoughts tapping and tapping however many times until I feel better.

Maybe I stay up until 7 in the morning so I tire myself out so much that I will just be able to sleep after I do this all one time instead of multiple. Maybe I sleep until 5pm so that I don’t have to be awake and thinking about my obsessions and acting on my compulsions.

Maybe I want to stop but I can’t because maybe someone will get hurt.

I understand that this isn’t logical. Honestly, I promise that I do. I can acknowledge both out loud and to myself that these thoughts are entirely irrational. I tell myself that there are millions of people in the world who don’t do what I do and bad things don’t happen to those that they love. But to me...I would much rather personally suffer than possibly cause someone else pain. I would rather face my obsessions and my compulsions every day than risk the “what if”.

I knew that my family must have thought I was being lazy when it came to certain household chores that I desperately avoided. I realized that putting away dishes would take five times as long as it would take my sister and so I would simply leave them untouched until she gave up and did them herself. My room was in a constant state of disarray because cleaning was such a daunting task. For years I
had built up a façade of normalcy that I didn’t want to shatter. I played myself off as a lazy teenager instead of a broken girl.

I was 17 years old when I finally told my parents. I was tired of hiding such a huge part of myself. I was sick of being grounded for skipping chores when all I was really doing was saving myself from hours of personal torture.

Finally telling my family was one of the most terrifying and most liberating feelings. I had kept a secret for almost ten years and finally letting it go was unbelievably freeing...but it meant that I had to truly face it. Now that the words had been said I could no longer pretend they didn’t exist. I knew that I couldn’t continue pretending that it was a little quirk of mine anymore. The problem was – I knew my family still had to love me when they found out, but no one else did.

I told one of my roommates freshman year just so that she would know why I might tap my desk in a certain pattern every few minutes. She was fine with it. She didn’t make fun of me. Instead she would smile understandingly and nod when she saw me do it.

I told my best friend that I had these uncontrollable urges that I was embarrassed to tell anyone else. He was fine with it. He didn’t make fun of me. Instead he asked me dozens of questions and did all he could to learn about what I was going through.

I told my boyfriend that I had all these weird ticks and quirks. He was fine with it. He didn’t make fun of me. Instead he kisses me in intervals of 3, 5, 9, 15, 25, and 50 and tells me he loves me. All of me. My OCD included.

I am far less ashamed than I was when I told my family four years ago. The handful of people I have confided in have, for the most part, made me feel less alone, less embarrassed. I struggle daily when deciding whether I should continue to conceal my habits or if I should take that extra layer of burden off my shoulders.

I can’t imagine a life without the constant tugging at my brain that my OCD causes. I can’t picture a single day going by without the tapping, the repeating, and the discomfort that my obsessions and compulsions force. However, I also can’t imagine what it would be like if I hadn’t told anyone or if I was still doing this all alone like I did when I was a kid who just didn’t understand. I don’t think my life will ever be perfect – and I don’t think my obsessions and compulsions will ever truly go away – but I have started an irreversible chapter for myself by finally telling others about my hidden world and I couldn’t be happier.
This is not a love letter, but it is a hard letter to write. Her name is Xandra. Her name is not actually Xandra, but her name on this paper is Xandra because I know her too well; she wouldn’t want me to give out her real name. She has dark blonde hair, which she decides to dye when she gets bored. She ties it in a bun whenever she’s tired of it, and she frequently vocalizes her annoyance towards it. When you’d first look at her, you might not see how many things she’s carrying. But she’s carrying them all at once. Because Xandra’s pockets run deep, and they’re not just in the short-shorts she likes to wear, they’re in her mind, her chest, and her ribcage. She carries these medications in her backpack, the ones that keep her up at night and keep her sleeping in the day. She carries this guitar on her back that she strums to see if she can impress herself. She has these memories in her head, the ones that give her nightmares and tell her she isn’t good enough. She carries her sister to bed, or at least she would, but her sister has gotten taller and now only needs a hand to hold. She carries drumsticks; the worst thing any person could carry.

I don’t know what domestic violence is to you. If it’s just that one in four people will experience domestic assault in their lifetime, then you’re looking at numbers. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, but when you start labeling a person as a number you start taking away their name. Xandra is not a number, she is a person. She’s not just any person; she’s an extremely important person. That’s all subjective to you and me, because you and I might never agree on what makes someone “important.” Important to me is that she wakes up every morning, having lost sleep from the night before because she has dreams of a person who is now long gone; dreams of someone throwing things at her, smashing glass, hitting her in the chest and head and heart.

Important to me is that she knows what it means to be human. Her sister was born with severe autism, compounded with mental retardation and an anxiety disorder that often leaves her shaking in public. Her sister is more human than most other people I know. That’s not because her sister has autism, and like most things, it’s purely subjective. But it’s because she loves, and loves and never stops loving. And Xandra knows this, feels proud, but then feels sad. Sad that her sister cannot enjoy the things that we take for granted, sad that
her sister has been given a situation she has no control over, and sad that her sister may never experience what we experience on a daily basis. To be human is not to be born perfect, with perfect genes, a perfect face, perfect health; that is impossible. To be human is to be so intrinsically beautiful, to be so genuine, to be so dedicated to being one’s self that it touches anyone who it comes into contact with.

Important to me is that Xandra knows how to forgive and pardon, even when she does not know how to do it for herself. Because when I knock over a candle on what was supposed to be a nice picnic blanket, she doesn’t scold me for burning a hole in it. She just laughs and says it made the day more memorable. So life can become something of a fairy tale, instead of a hellhole. So that things can end in “happily ever after” instead of just “forever after.”

There are millions of words to use, but none of them can really describe what it’s like to meet somebody so important. You look at yourself and wonder, and you wonder deeply, “Her life is so important that it has no room for any more things; I wonder how anyone would ever find room for me?” A horribly selfish thought. The worst sort of thought. Because she’s carrying so much. And it makes you want to carry her. So I carry her number in my phone. So I can hear her voice and carry her through dark and stormy nights. The same way she carries me through all of the day, every day until I can fall asleep.
CONTRIBUTORS

AUBREY ATKINSON is a sophomore Music Major with an English minor. She is a member of the UC Women's Rugby team, an International Ambassador and is tremendously excited to be published for a second year in The Lantern.

MAX BICKING has since switched to grapefruits.

MADISON BRADLEY is a freshman MCS and English major. She enjoys staying inside and watering her plant. Its name is Bud.

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ANGIER COOPER is an idealist who would happily live her life making art, traveling with friends, and practicing handstands.

KRISTEN COSTELLO is a Sophomore Media and Communications Studies major. She hopes to one day be a journalist and write novels. A lot of her writing is inspired by childhood memories or places she has traveled; her favorite place to visit is Kauai.

BRIAN COX loves to wear overalls but is afraid of the social implications.

EMILY DUFFY is a senior. %&/!

ISABELLA ESSER MUNERA is a double major in English and Psychology. She loves discovering people and the sound of their voices.

CAYLON FOWLKES is a sophomore majoring in Media & Communications. She clearly loves her nose ring and will smile at the mention of the name Jennifer Lawrence.

SOPHIA GAMBER is actually a very small white cat with a penchant for crosswords, post-it notes, blue pebbles, and seltzer water. She enjoys falling asleep in strange places and clawing at the carpet, and wishes to extend thanks to the Lantern and to her friends and family.
LAUREN GEIGER is a sophomore English major with a triple minor in Creative Writing, German, and Grilled Cheese.

QUINN GILMAN-FORLINI has accumulated four pages of possible Lantern bios over the past four years. For her last one, she chooses this.

ERICA GORENBERG wishes that writing a clever bio was as easy as organic chemistry.

SARAH GOW thinks everyone and everything has something beautiful about it. She also runs on oatmeal and almond milk to fuel her double major in English and Psychology and double minor in Spanish and Creative Writing.

ALBERT HAHN is a freshman majoring in English, with minors in Creative Writing and Gender and Women's Studies. He is not used to pleasant surprise.

MICHAEL HEIMBAUGH's previous written works include the Emmy® Award-winning TV series *Sports Night* and a five-star iTunes review for Genesis' 1986 album *Invisible Touch*. He lives in Pennsylvania and constant apprehension and dread.

JULIA RAE HODENFIELD is a Freshman English major and Creative Writing and French minor. Reading the Lantern is what made Julia Rae decide to attend Ursinus, so she is ecstatic to be published! She would like to give a special thanks to Ms. Ginsburg and Mr. Pavia, who inspired the story and sparked her creativity.

JOSH HOFFMAN is a junior Environmental Studies and Mathematics double major with a minor in Creative Writing. As he transitions into vegetarianism, joins a Jewish rebel movement, and has eaten dirt for an Environmental Studies class, he is curious to know how many other hippie college student archetypes he can fulfill.

MARY HOLMCRANS is enamored by the feelings in colors, people, and language. She is quite happy to be nestled into this vibrant book.

ELIANA KATZ loves singing, speaking Spanish, exploring nature, and learning about different ways of living and being. She’s also curious about her roots as a Jew. As a senior Spanish and Biology double major, she hopes to pursue her passions by becoming a medical interpreter and a physician’s assistant.
DANA KLUCHINSKI is a Biology and Environmental Studies double major with a minor in French. She enjoys bird watching, playing piano, and sleeping.

DOMINICK KNOWLES is a senior English major with minors in Creative Writing and Philosophy. The existential implications of Lufthansa airline's slogan, "Nonstop you," fill him with unutterable dread.


BLAISE LARAMEE: LOWFAT MILK WITH VITAMIN A PALMITATE AND VITAMIN D3 ADDED, SUGAR, LESS THAN 2% OF CALCIUM CARBONATE, CELLULOSE GEL, ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS, CARRAGEENAN, CELLULOSE GUM, CITRIC ACID, SALT, RED 3.

BRIAN LEIPOLD is a sophomore English major pursuing teaching certification as well as minors in German and Theater.

MARY LOBO is a senior Media & Communications major with a minor in German.

LAUREN MARANO pays tribute to the candy aisle in Giant for her successes and blames God for her follies. Nothing can take away her pride except a pot of spaghetti.

KEVIN MOORE is a sophomore English/MCS major. When he's not too busy bear wrestling or defending the streets of Gotham, he enjoys long strolls on the beach with his true love (Chill E. Dahgs) and saying pure nonsense. His favorite color is basketball.

BRIANA MULLAN is probably barefoot and wandering. She would like to thank her beautiful friends, our Great Mother, and Jon Volkmer.

ARTHUR ROBINSON is actually Nicolas Cage studying for his role as a moody, over-the-top sophomore theater major. He’d like to dedicate his piece to abuse victims across the globe. You are not alone and you are loved.

ANNIE RUS is an otherworldly abomination that enjoys sunsets, long walks on the beach, and casually disregarding Euclidean geometry.
EMILY SHUE is a freshman. She was interested in pursuing a major in English and Creative Writing. However, she has given up writing in order to study the squirrels of Ursinus in their natural habitat until she is eventually able to assimilate herself to their way of living.

MICHELE SNEAD is an English major, with minors in Creative Writing, Film Studies, and Secondary Education. She will be graduating this year, and then her cat and her are going to travel the world as a ghost hunting team. You can find him at pooterandfriends.tumblr.com.

AMANDA SIERZEGA is a junior English major and Secondary Education minor who is also a member of the cross country and track and field teams and works in Career Services. She would like to give a shout out to the ex-boyfriend she wrote her poem about. "Thanks dude!"

NORA STERNLOF is an English major with a Creative Writing minor. She is active in Ursinus's literary society. She hopes someday to be caught in a rain of frogs, ideally while walking to or from a WaWa.

COLLIN TAKITA is a math major who enjoys words more than numbers.

BRIAN THOMAS has got more rhymes than Jamaica's got mangoes.

ANDREW TRAN is a junior Media and Communications major. His note book is filled with the half-written story ideas of ages past.

KARA TRAVIS is a freshman English Major pursuing Secondary Ed certification as well as minors in French and Creative Writing. She spends her days on campus, her nights teaching dance, and her in-betweens singing loudly (and out of tune) in her car.

SOLANA WARNER is an esoteric individual who spends her time drinking tea and talking to statues, because "that's what the bohemians do." She writes poetry during dark, moist midnights.

HENRY WILLSHIRE consulted a thesaurus for fancy words to use here, but gave up. He's a Junior English major who thanks his friends, family, and fraternity for their support.
Postscript

This issue marks a Golden Anniversary for me—not in years but in issues. This is the 50th consecutive The Lantern for which I have served as Faculty Advisor—two issues per year for my first 22 years, and an annual issue since 2010. It has been a great privilege to work with so many capable and devoted editors. Along with their editorial and production staff members, these editors labored tirelessly to showcase the writing and artistic talents of Ursinus students in this wonderful literary journal.

The back page of this issue features a list of the editors of the Lantern with whom I’ve had the pleasure to work.

To all, I say thanks. It’s a great Ursinus tradition and a great Ursinus magazine.

-Jon Volkmer, Faculty Advisor
Editors of *The Lantern*, 1987-2015

1987-88  MARIA D’ARCANGELO
1988-89  ERIKA ROHRBACH
1989-90  MICHELLE GRANDE
         & MATTHEW KNOLL
1990-91  KEIR LEWIS
1991-92  BOB LANE
1992-93  KATHRIN PHILLIPS
1993-94  JENNIFER WOODBURY
1994-95  ERIN GORMAN
1995-96  HEATHER MEAD
         & SONNY REGELMAN
1996-97  JIM MAYNARD
1997-98  JESSICA DEMURS
1998-99  JENNIFER HERBST
1999-00  OANA NECHITA
2000-01  JEFF CHURCH
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2011-12  SARAH SCHWOLSKY
2012-13  JENNIFER BEIGEL
2013-14  JULIA KELLY
2014-15  RACHEL BONNER