



Snow Island Review

The Lost Issues
2009-2010

This volume consists of the lost issues of *The Snow Island Review*, three or perhaps four issues that, owing to budget constraints and other problems beyond our control, weren't published when they were supposed to be. The editors and staff members listed herein do most sincerely apologize for the delay and for any submissions that may have been lost along the way, but hope you enjoy this better-late-than-never issue.

We also wish to acknowledge Michaela Moore, layout and arts editor, without whose patience, vision and talent this book never would have existed at all.

Thanks, Michaela.

The Snow Island Review is the literary and art journal at Francis Marion University and is, in theory, published each fall and spring semester. Working with faculty advisors, student editors and staff members select the works that appear here. These works do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, the student editors, the student staff members, or the faculty advisors. *The Snow Island Review* welcomes submissions regardless of major but does not guarantee publication. All submitted material becomes property of *The Snow Island Review*. Anonymous submissions or works submitted under pseudonyms will not be considered.

More information regarding our submission policies and procedures may be found on a bulletin board located outside of the Francis Marion University Writing Center, or in the Writing Center located in Founder's Hall room 114-C. Please contact snowislandreview@yahoo.com with questions.

Cover: "Fly by Night," by Michaela Moore.

(SIR)

2009



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(12-27-07)

Ben Daniel

We push, we push, this day of life,
through blood and pain and prayer.
You cry from the sight of the sterile knife,
I hold my heart, my breath, and stare.
The room is painted red and I,
I am painted green.
“Just one more” says the man in white,
such pain I’ve never seen.
He cuts through screams, through blood and fear
to let the light come through.
then quiet . . . for seconds, years,
‘til we hear our prayers come true.
All heaven converged and gave pause to the world,
as we first laid eyes on our little girl.

Melissa Turner

Yesterday on the street, wind blew an
edge of your scent through the crowds
of people shopping downtown.
For two traffic lights I stood at the corner,
ignoring the walk sign, people flowing past.
I linger, waiting for you to join my walk.

I dream of our porch mornings-
pancake platters and orange juice
in green-tinted glasses.
Almost midnite now, I still wait,
paying homage to memory-
pancake making again.

Sunrise Buttermilk Pancakes

- 2 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- Jazz on the radio
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- Your chipped blue-enamel skillet
- 2 ½ cups flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- My yellow flowered stool
- Sunrays from the window on our back

Egg shells crack, syncopating rhythms with Miles, Ella,
the Duke as I measure and prepare batter.
Egg yolks swirl in patterns,
colliding with beaters, churning the milk.

Staring in the bowl, I see your kitchen counters
covered in flour, my white hands
the culprit, giggling, making powdered
prints on your checkered apron.
On my counter your worn recipe card lies face down,
the lines written in my head in your smudged script.

Heat pulsing in the pan, sizzling the pancake batter,
criticizing the fresh mixture, searing off the flaws.
The first pancake never browns,
just cooks to a blotchy tan color,
not stunning but at its height of possibility.

I want perfect pancakes, so I erase you,
forgetting memory, focusing,
guarding the batter, peeking beneath, watching
the bubbled evolution from cream to golden,
flipping it the instant it turns caramel-brown
then resuming guard for the other side.
Momentarily consumed by the current task:



constructing an absolute composition.

Sitting down with my plate, pancakes steaming
covered in syrup, orange juice on the side,
I smile. You always write yourself back in.
I should never expect anything else, remembering
our first bites, the true test of pancake quality,
laughing at syrup on your chin. Tonight, mine
melts on my tongue. I lick the sticky maple flavor
from my lip. They taste like I remember.

(Azarias)

Kimberly Turner

“Lonely and tired, crushed by the separation and sorrows of Earth,
we feel the need of calling to you...”

- Catholic prayer

They carry their burdens like tithes -
Allocating, on weary Sabbath mornings,
A bit for themselves, a bit for God,
And a few pennies here and there
For the most desperate souls.

Of Michael and all his Angels,
I walked among them;
I, breathing and sleeping and eating
Their human indifference,
Suffered under the blister of Egyptian sun.

Sweet Sarah, kindred to their souls,
With tender, torturous touch
I rid your heart of nightmares,
And gave to a blind man
The tainted, tarnished world.

I wonder, on somnolent sighs, if there are
Any happy meetings left to arrange.
What of the blind, the travelers, the lovers,
The bright-eyed, cherry-lipped lovers?
I think they are faded to hallowed phantoms.

(Constellations)

Crystalyn Watford

The seven brothers of the big dipper
scoop up the smaller stars
as Orion brandishes his sword
and the blue sun rises.

Scooping up the smaller stars
the mighty Taurus gallops across the heavens
and the blue sun rises
while Cetus swims through the clouds.

The mighty Taurus gallops across the heavens
and the graceful swan visits Cassiopeia
while Cetus swims through the clouds
to see Hercules battle the lion.

The graceful swan visits Cassiopeia
as the Hydra slithers past the moon
to see Hercules battle the lion
while Andromeda sleeps in a bed of stars.

As the Hydra slithers past the moon
the great dragon guards the golden apples
while Andromeda sleeps in a bed of stars
and the twin brothers travel to Troy.

The great dragon guards the golden apples
while Orpheus plays the lyre
and the twin brothers travel to Troy
when the red sun rises.

While Orpheus plays the lyre
his sweet music can be heard on earth.
When the red sun rises
they all disappear to wait for the moon's return.

(Conventions and Lovers [Or A Study in Forgetfulness])

Kimberly Turner

All melting, though our drops this difference bore:
His poisoned me, and mine did him restore.
- "A Lover's Complaint", William Shakespeare

With the scent of almonds comes
A bitter lover's complaint:
We are Venus and Adonis,
You and I,
Only I am no lusty goddess,
Just as you are no slave to my affection.

So I will be Prufrock in our poem,
And you my worried obsession.
Do I dare, estimado,
Or have you noticed my sweating brow?
And will you recognize, in my eyes,
The moments lost to fevered self-awareness?
I should like to melt away into the walls.

But, in the shadows I will hide,
Half-sick with a love so violent
I should gladly row a thousand boats
To meet my frigid, watery death
That I might better look upon your burning face.

Imagine a moment the tables turned:
You would be an Opera Ghost, perhaps,
And I, your soaring songstress,
As perfect as a woman dead.
Yet as you wept, my Angel,
I would kiss your head so gently,
And leave you to drown in chords of the blackest despair.

Still, the poplars do remind
We are Mariana and Angelo,
You and I,
You whisked far away by golden call,
And I a captive, even to my dreams.

(The Death of a Cheerleader)

Ashley Rivers

"We rise on stepping stones of our dead selves."

-Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Her smile begs for attention
behind the other pictures
on the bulletin board.

Her hair is in two little buns
with sprigs sticking up,
and red ribbons sprouting
out in neat bows.

Everything else is glued
to her body by the rain.
Like Venus rising from the ocean,
she was born fully formed
as a goddess in short skirts.

She rubs her hands together
watching for her Hercules
who is huddled among
the other kneeling bodies.

Heat rises from their heads.
She fades into the sea
of red and blue uniforms,
mothers in grey sweatshirts,
and girlfriends
in ponchos and heels.
She fades behind the slippery
seats and packed parking lot.

She disappears from the chatter
into the silence of thought
where she lays tied to a rock
as the eagle meticulously

destroys her lungs
She is left speechless
and red as her uniform.
She gasps and wheezes until

Hermes orders her away
to make way for the new souls.

(Elegy for Snow)

Melissa Turner

Silent homes greet my boots,
crunching on snowy steps,
still soaked from last night,
a remnant of the moon rising.
Cold wind pumped in our blood.
Snowflakes fell on your hat,
my scarf, then our tongues.

Sunrise now graces the horizon,
snow melts on the ground.
Salt trucks and snow ploughs
long gone, leaving slushy piles of
dirty snow by my car.
The latch clicks, heat from
the fire in the hearth gone,
echoes through sleeping houses.

I see five years down your road,
hollow voices on the phone
rounds of shallow conversation
of weather, weekends for our son.
I'll pretend happiness, you'll hope
for a morning without tears.

I hop on bare patches of brown grass
towards my car, regrets catching
my boot at the last step. I slip out
of your frozen drive while you lie
under warm blankets, oblivious
to ends, lines you drew on paper. Your name
promising only holidays, graduations, weddings.
Don't wake.
Sleep us off.
I'll drive to him,
icy cries pulling me
closer with each mile.
You sleep.
I dream.

(Fenced In)

Nikki Jones

The colts are in the field today,
kicking up clouds of dust as they clumsily frolic,
nipping at each other as if to trade insults.
I watch them carelessly tumble and buck.

Like four brown bolts of lightning,
they race, stopping only when
the fence's volts sting them.
Eventually, they will learn to mind the fence.

I crumble the sugar cube and hold out my hand,
clicking my teeth, to draw them near.
They gaze at me for a moment, flicking their ears,
and finally decide to gallop away instead.

I listen to the rumble of their hooves,
the awkward strides match the rhythm of my pulse.
They disappear back over the hill.
I guess they finally learned to mind the fence.

(Finding a Poem)

Ashley Rivers

is like finding a black baby bird
with turquoise spots
like a rare jewel
fallen from its nest
on an oak tree limb
into your driveway.
Once you pick it up,
nature won't take it back.

You cage it to keep it safe.
You give it a name,
but it never comes
when you call.

You must feed it
and clean its cage.
As it grows,
it screeches at night,
violently flaps its wings,
and pecks at your hands.

One day you come home
to the cage door open
and your calls undulate
through the silence.
It never came when you called.

(Flashing Lights)

Whit-France Kelley

send you into a spasm.
MS has wrestled your strength
and won the challenge.
I hold your legs down,
as you readjust yourself
turning towards the camera lens.

Three...

The rain beats against the salty
November ocean air. You dressed
in a crimson sweater accented
with diamond Christmas tree earrings,
and three dangly bracelets.
And the brooch we gave
last Christmas.

Two...

Squeezed in tight, against the black
background, we smile. Two Siamese twins
joined at the head. Red pours
against our chests. We cling to each other's stability.
Our first photo in three years,
I beam. You glow.

One...

Diminishing before my eyes,
without notice – the countdown began
for you and the photo.

Flash.

Wedge between my identification and my checks,
we are still holding each other. It has been seven years
since our last photo together.
Details of this day only remain in red and black.

As this picture begins to fade –
so do you.

A pungent dankness lay thick over our apartment, not so much smoke as a warm, citrus blanket we'd all curled up in like fiending infants. The four of us sat in the living room, though spread out in our own areas – Timmy and Cooper on the big couch, flanked by McGill and myself on the corners. I remember thinking how peaceful everyone looked, each man silently absorbed in his own brand of sublimity. Some minutes passed, an hour maybe. In truth, it cannot be said with certainty how much time elapsed from this first realization to the next, but when I came to notice McGill edging towards the window – amusingly deliberate – arm extending cautiously toward the blinds as if pulled by a fine, invisible string, it felt as if I had become a part of the chair in which I was sitting.

I was watching with curiosity now, how McGill seemed to be afraid of the blinds, so tentative was his touch. And then, I could hear his fingertips dusting the curved plastic, his thoughts issuing from murmuring lips.

"Aha!" he cried at last, yanking the blinds apart. Light flashed into the room instantly, striking me in the chest with full, magnanimous force. It had the immediate effect of lifting me to my feet. This had not been a conscious move, and for a time, I stood there pondering how I had come prone. I presently noticed McGill peering out the window in a manner reminiscent of Hunter S. Thompson, his head swiveling, cigarette dangling from loose lips. He looked at me, smiled, said nothing, and sat back in his seat. The other roommates remained seated – wholly unaffected – but they hadn't seen the light. I had experienced it! Inspiration, now with a brute grip on my collar, led me to the front door and unflinching, I flung it open, stepping onto the front stoop. I was at once hot, being clothed in jeans, long-sleeved shirt, plus jacket. I was wearing sunglasses as well and had been (all the while festering inside like some disaffected slob). Suddenly self-conscious, I removed them, winking in the sunlight. The outside world – with its' intense coloration, even in the sidewalks: a smear of pink chewing gum recently discarded, strung along by some hapless sole; the ranging, dry tentacles of a neighboring tree, twisted and barren, creeping over the brightest white-washed concrete wall before me – was beautiful in a way I had not remembered. I turned and waged a disapproving gander through the screen door, and while noting my roommates' motionless forms, I was struck by a sudden and comprehensive vision (a flash of picture opened and played for one second in my head); I knew then, as I knew nothing (maybe, one thing) before, that this day we were to make a trip to the beach.

Though Folly Beach was only fifteen minutes away, the afternoon was pushing three. I had to act quickly if I was going to make this happen. The troublesome part, I felt, would be getting my roommates in sync so that they might accompany me. Ordering them would not do. Nor could I nag them. Instead, with the front door still open, I began to gather things. I said no word to my roommates, but entered my room and retrieved a towel, flip-flops, a

Frisbee, and set them in the chair in which I had previously sat. I did not look at my companions, did not ask for nor (openly) invite their inquiries. I wanted to peak their interests, to let it be known that I had a plan and that I was sticking to it, with them or without. As I was carrying a cooler from the hallway closet to the kitchen, I finally received Cooper's attentions.

"What're you doing?"

I smiled at him as I spoke, unable at this slightest provocation to contain my joy. "We're going to the beach!" I exclaimed.

Some thirty minutes later, following "arrangements" that need not be elaborated upon here, we were smoking out my Ford Escort – Timmy, Cooper, McGill, and myself – pulling out of the driveway, on our way to the beach. Before we were far off – through a non-relative comment made by McGill, something concerning a leather belt he had misplaced – I realized we were without an American-style football. It was of the utmost importance to have a football at the beach, since in my earlier vision – that one which had visited me so clearly upon the front stoop – I had been merrily engaged in tossing one with Timmy. I amended this (dire) problem by taking a quick detour and driving to a friend's house nearby, procuring a nice one, of college regulation. We were ready. Restarting our journey, everything seemed more positively aligned, even the loose traffic submitting to the right, our earnest vehicle accepting the open left and skirting by appropriately.

To this point, I had been vaguely aware of something occurring, though not something expressly tangible, and thus, all the harder to pin down, but "something" nonetheless. This intuitive notion subsisted then, as a background element, a detail felt more easily than remarked upon and brought to attention. From that moment on the front stoop, I had been trying to get hold of the (underlying) significance of the situation, but it wasn't until we got onto the James Island connector that I fully grasped what was going on. And what was going on was something spectacular. The feather-light truth had been wafting listlessly down, only to alight in my lap at that moment, and I beamed. The day was gorgeous, we were young, we were stoned, and God damn it, we were on our way to the beach at what happened to be early March – the third, at that! I was the picture of bliss, and so were my roommates, each of us radiating exuberance. So fantastic were things! My mind swelled in the way a young idealist's does, so as to cloud any reason but to enhance the feelings (Pure, if misguided feelings). This kind of day—Oh, man, this kinda Day!

I could hardly contain myself. I was giddy from laughter inside, as if I had just shared a hilarious joke within the confines of my head. I caught my eyes in the rearview mirror, and the pale blues spoke to me. This is that kinda day!

–A perfect day.
–The kind of day you die.

What, so rapidly and inexplicably, had redirected my sentiments, I shall never know. To those with much stock in plausibility it may seem natural that my last thought would be quickly and dutifully dismissed, that the flash of terror felt upon this mental transgression would be just that, a flash, and nothing more. Alas, I have never been much acquainted with the succinct reason of those things plausible, and in that mind space of morbidity, I was seized by the stifling claws of death perceived. To say I was alarmed is an understatement. My whole demeanor transformed instantly, my smile vanquished to a forgotten place. My jaw clenched hatefully, my arms, back – indeed, my whole body tightened uncomfortably. I scarcely knew why, but of this I was sure: I was about to die. We were about to die. My mood had shifted, metamorphosed into an entirely new shape: panic. I couldn't show the other guys how I felt; to mention our plight would merely be an acknowledgement of its existence. Besides, I would only panic them, and surely there was no need for that? Or had my companions' demeanors undergone a similar transformation? I perceived no smile on board, no snicker, but instead a particular quickness of the eye. Each, to a man, were as terrified as myself. Were they? I wanted to look around more fully at everyone, but I was driving, and my heart beating so rapidly, I was scared to exert myself in any significant way other than my present position. Likewise, the veins in my temples were pulsing fitfully, pumping blood with great effort to my spastic brain. People die every day! Sometimes – for no reason – peoples' brains explode, their hearts just lock up and stop beating. Why was I any different? I knew I was not, and I entertained visions of myself passing out at the wheel, and with no one to correct the sharp cut of the steering column, I could see us flipping over the side of the bridge, tumbling.

I'd read somewhere that coughing may prevent some heart-attacks, and best I could, I coughed, as much to prevent an attack, but as little so as not to arouse the suspicions of my roommates. I could not let them know the truth. As we were then approaching the end of the bridge, I felt my life returning, my rationale stealing back in. Turning onto Folly Road, the beating grew less and less visible from under my t-shirt until I didn't notice it any more. And then I heard something from Cooper in the back, something about "death."

"What did you say?" I asked him.
"Nothing, man."
Why was he lying?

I looked up at Cooper through the rearview, and he was smiling.

I suddenly got it. He had felt it, too! We were already dead! My panic danced over me like a thousand darting needles, my head swelling painfully

again. But I was laughing now, laughing at being scared. I grabbed the radio dial and cranked it heedlessly. I am a madman! The whole car could feel it. They knew that this was the death day. Music shouted from the radio. We are all dead. We are just a dream. We are about to wake up. The music urged,

“WAAAAAAke uuuuup!”

I could feel my head brimming, on the verge of explosion. I was about to see, I was going to experience that very moment, the moment in which— McGill had leaned over at that time and unceremoniously clicked the stereo off.

I eyed my fellow passenger with not a small amount of gratitude and curiosity.

“You felt it, too?”

. . . .
At the beach finally, we all remarked just how brilliant it was outside. Taking my perch in the sand, I marveled at the sights before me, my eyes shining proudly over the gleaming expanse of sea. Had my shades been drawn away, a passerby who strode in front of me at that moment – her eyeballs briefly in-line with my own – may have later remarked at the ferocity of my gaze. I presently became aware of these thoughts and their sudden encumbrance.

“Timmy,” I blurted at once. “Football?”

“Let’s go,” he said.

Timmy and I walked down to where the tide was failing. We began to throw the football, our toes squishing in the soft and wet sand. I am self-conscious, yet extremely confident as we throw. This is fun. I am irresistible.

(Impressionable)

Jessica Upchurch

The night was heavy and lay like a thick shroud upon my world. The contrasting chill in the air pierced through my clothes and combed my hair. The dim light from lanterns and street lamps cast magic shadows, and I felt like a hunted species, an inferior race. Beyond the smoke, wild eyes seemed to follow me. Eyes that saw what wasn't there and what eventually would be. Laughing eyes and crafty hands existed in that veil that hid corners of reality.

But hardly could I dwell on such matters. I was jolted forward to match a tripping pace. One of the women looked back at me and laughed. The other kept a firm hand wrapped around my wrist. I wondered at the cruel strength of such a porcelain hand.

We ran. The wraiths before me seemed to communicate with glinting teeth and twinkle eyes, so I knew not our destination.

My mind was frenzied as I felt foreign, embroidered silk tease my arm and long black tresses whip my cheek. I saw what I was to become: a creature with a white face jumping shadow to shadow. I would float down a dream, the sunset my prelude, and be just as evanescent.

(Leda, My Lovely)

Kimberly Turner

"You are maiden,/no woman,/ you are slender and
faultless and rare..."

- "Orestes Theme," Hilda Doolittle

On the mound of a cloudy river,
She stopped under an apple tree,
Ignorant to my floating sentinel.
Among the fruit she stood, erect and bare,
At once naked to my eyes,
As she had been so many times before.

She kneeled to the untouched soil,
Limbs and earth joined in ancient meeting.
The fiery tips of her tangled locks
Spread to palm her thighs,
A veil of a flaming purity.
From watery post, I watched my Leda.

There's nothing so tempting as innocence.

(The “Mexican Issue”)

Amanda Morales

(The following should be read as a response to a blog regarding illegal aliens on a small town website)

I know that what I am about to write will anger some of you, even people that I love and care about in this community. I have lived here all of my life. I grew up here, I attended school here, I work here, and I one day I hope to teach here. I graduated from high school here and am continuing my education at college; my goal is to one day become a teacher. That being said, I would like to give my view on what you all have labeled as the “Mexican Issue,” especially since I recently read an editorial in a local newspaper (written by someone who is also a member of our community) that stated that illegal aliens should be handled with, among other things, “a shoot to kill” attitude.

When I was in elementary school I remember learning about how this great country was settled. I learned about the Revolutionary War and Patrick Henry’s famous words “Give me liberty or give me death.” Our forefathers migrated to this country to flee the holds of a tyrannous monarchy and its many restraints of our freedom. They believed in a cause and fought long and hard to achieve the ability to make this country what it is today. They created this magnificent democratic society that many take for granted.

One of the greatest of all the civil liberties that we as Americans are entitled to, at least I believe, is the freedom of speech. In some countries, one might be jailed or even killed for speaking against the government, like some have done on this message board; but this is one of the very things that make our country so great. Everyone can say what he or she wants. Everyone can believe in what makes him or her happy. This being said, I ask you only to read my comments. I don’t want to change anyone’s opinions or what they believe in. I just want you all to know about one of the Mexicans with whom we share our community. I don’t ask for amnesty, for I, too, believe that it is not the right answer. I only ask for a few moments of your time and for your respect of my freedom of speech.

My husband is Hispanic and originally from southeastern Mexico. He came (somewhat forced by his family) to this country when he was only sixteen years old. He has been working here and paying taxes (about 4-6 thousand a year) for five years and has never received any of the taxes that he has paid into the system. He also pays car insurance and taxes like everyone else. He works 40-60 hours a week, but never receives overtime pay. He cannot receive health insurance or benefits through the company by which he is employed.

Almost all the money that he makes (about four hundred dollars a week, depending on the amount of hours he receives) is spent in our town. He is a frequent customer of the Piggly Wiggly, the Dollar General, Tiffany’s, Country Mart, Exxon, House of Pizza, The Movie Shack, Big A, EZ Mart, Shell Station, and other businesses throughout this county. He donates to causes; whenever he sees a donation jar he drops a few dollars. He supports events

within the schools when I tell him about them, like the ROTC car wash the other week, and often remarks about how he would like our future children to be in a program like that.

He has shared our Friday night football games, our festivals, our Christmas programs, and other happy events. He has even shared our hard times, like the mill fire, by which he and I were very personally affected. We live very close to the mill (within fifty yards) and, along with many of you, were also evacuated from our home for over a week when it burned down. He worked at the plastic recycling part of the old mill for over two and a half years. As we stood watching his place of employment go up in flames, I saw tears in his eyes, something that I had never seen before or since. Many woke up that morning to an awful fire and charred memories; we awoke with no livelihood. But, like everyone else, we made it through with the support of our family and friends within the community.

I realize and believe that people who enter our country illegally must respect our laws. I also believe that if they don't they should be penalized. Aside from this, however, there are millions of illegal immigrants living here, and as much as some people would like to see them "all shipped back to Mexico or wherever they came from," it realistically is not possible. We need to contact our elected officials and coerce them into creating a solution that will deal with the problem at hand. The most important way that we can do this is to vote in every election, be it on a federal, state, county, or town level. Voting is one of our greatest privileges and responsibilities as American citizens. Write to your congressman, and keep posting your views and speaking your mind. Have faith in our government and do everything that is possible to make your voice heard.

I guess what I want everyone to get out of this narrative is that not all Mexicans are flag burners, not all Mexicans avoid paying taxes, not all Mexicans abuse the welfare system, and not all Mexicans send their money back to Mexico, like you all seem to think. Those that do are a small minority. Many of the Hispanics and other immigrants that are here are just working for the same things that many of us are; house payments, money for food and gas, money to support their families, and everything that comes with all of these facets of life. They are also working for respect and the same civil liberties that we all are already entitled to, rights that I believe should belong not only to Americans, but to every person on earth.

(Michelangelo De'Chauvet)

Chase Mcqueeney

They stumble out from dark caverns
The first of all men
Imagining a world more devious
And even then Cavemen drew on walls

Then came alphabets
Men had learned to write
Papyrus caves with drawings on the walls
A chance to give the future records

Then there was the Parthenon
Cavemen would have drawn on it, if it had walls
The worlds most perfect building
But it had pillars, aligned with precision

Drawn, like cavemen, on the walls
Michaelangelo's pious frescoes
They adorn the Sistine Chapel
For the glory of God

Howard Carter dug in Egypt
He found the tomb of a god
And marveled at man's power
Inside a cave, drawings on the walls

And when the aliens came to visit
They left their marks in fields
Because even cavemen drew on walls
The cosmic one-up

The birds sing
Their rendition of drawings on walls
Because they lack opposable thumbs
Making drawing difficult

"Hank wuz here," drawn on the wall
Old Turner Field was a cave
Full of club carrying cavemen
They did amazing things

The children of the future
Will use laser crayons
Futuristic parents will wonder why
They draw, like cavemen, on walls

We press these plastic keys down
And symbols appear on the screen
Still just cavemen, drawing on the wall
Because we must.

(Preserves)

Kimberly Turner

In the wake of the glowing summer sun,
I long to bottle up my sins,
As though they were preserves,
And I were preparing
For a long, frigid winter.

From the first summer heat,
When sweat dripped languidly
From the roots of my knotted hair,
I dreamed of a winter snow so white and pure
My faults would freeze
Like water on a rippling pond.

As my transgressions became transparent,
I would strap on my skates,
And skid away on their glassy surface.
Yet everyday it rises and hangs,
The sweltering orb that never fails to remind me
That your crimes are still crawling with life.

(Purification)

Alex Bohm

Verse 1

Welcome to the party in my brain
Where it rains, and it rains, and rains
Monsoons of the strange.
Invitations to drown and derange, and derange, and... derange

...Education in a cesspool...

Pre

Lyricaly subliminal,
If intellect's criminal,
My mind is a cesspool

Chorus

...and hey, baby, I'm nobody's fool!
Not for anybody,
And I won't be for you!
Another cheap fuck is all that ensues...

Verse 2

Why do you think your living is pain,
Then complain, and complain, and complain,
About the funeral arranged?
You were my beloved, girl, but you changed, but you changed, but you... changed.

...Complication in a cesspool...

...yet she pursues...

Alternate verse 1

We've got the muse
To abuse.
There's a cozy bed
In my sleepy head
Where you lie spread
Dreaming sweetly, then wake up by my side... dead.
Remember it's never too late
To mutilate!

(Pre & chorus)

...yet she pursues...

...It's time she pay her dues...
Muted beauty, tell me are you deaf?
I decomposed your dirge, and devoured the clef.
Of our relationship, there's nothing left.

...There's nothing left within;
My insides burnt to ashes.
Our world's come to an end.
We're so hollow, and the system crashes...

...all our common sense was spent
On an orgy from which we refused to repent.

...Our love holocaust our lives;
We're broke and severed from the mortal coil.
The past is forgotten;
Today we're too numb to live,
And tomorrow comes a future... nothing survives...

...So we just close our eyes
And open our mouths in protest
Only to taste the bittersweet soil...

...Narcotic-induced coma, eternal euphoria...

...We finally rest in peace
Now that the cesspool has drained.
We wash away our filth
And swim in an absence of pain;
Our tainted love is purified,
So with reincarnated virginity,
We are allowed to play once more...

...Our souls are but flower children,
Playing Ring around the Rosy,
Holding the hands of lovely Matron Death.
Sunshine waltzes upon my beloved's wind-blown,
Aweburning hair,
And I embrace her warmly, softly;
My ecstasy...
We kiss our old world,
Your world,
Goodbye,
Forever.

(Retirement)

Nikki Jones

The sun has finally awakened,
signaling the day to begin,
spilling yellow and orange streaks
over the still sleepy treetops.
The cold, gray river currents
grasp the explosion of colors,
warming me this winter morning.

My hands work ferociously, cautiously
to capture nature's original picture.
I ease my brush's strokes
mimicking the sun's wispy rays.
The frosty air bites at
my worn and numbing hands.
Still, I continue to paint.

As quickly as it appeared,
nature's picture begins to fade,
its remnants streaking my canvas.
The bigger picture takes stage.

Soaking up the golden light
flooding from the sun-risen sky,
I admire the painted picture,
and the picture not painted.

(The Romance of Sorrow [Or A Busted Lip])

Kimberly Turner

I ached for the sort of sorrow
That drips lace,
The type I always imagined
Would bear a purple dignity,
Or even yield to la vie en rose;
The sort of sorrow
That would wear a cape
And avidly defend my blackened honour,
In my daydreams;
The sort of sorrow
That would inspire great
Novels and dramas and melodies,
Should I ever tell my tale;
The sort of sorrow
I burned for with such reckless despair
When I was shadowed by tainted innocence,
When I was covered with the ash of childhood.
Oh, yes. But Time taught me
There is no salvation in sorrow.

(The Scene)

Ashley Leamon

The bass thumped and the chords made
the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.
Someone was rifling through a cooler adorned
with every imaginable band sticker as the
bottles of Cobra inside clanked and clattered
Just inches from the man screaming into the mike,
a cluster stood captivated, thrusting their fists into
the air as they screamed along with the singer.
Their voices united as a cry in rebellion against
whatever cruel, corporate group or establishment
the buttons on their leather jackets protested.
One disciple of dance, moved by the music, thrust himself
backwards and forwards across the room, creating
a satisfying smack each time he pushed himself off of a wall.
Accomplishment shone in his face and
with each smack, he yelped like a banshee and
flung his body at a more dizzying speed.
People buzzed and spun around the hot sticky room
sweating, touching, singing, drinking, screaming,
moving like a well oiled, black clad machine.
Feet stomped on and off-beat against the concrete floor,
a hollow wallop punctuating each beat as it hit.
Night raged on, the energy swirled and built
even as the last chord faded into deafening cheers.
The room finally emptied but that electric, palpable energy
never faded, hanging on like the ringing in their ears.

(Squirrel Hunting in December)

TJ McKay

The sound of distant dogs
Gives way to the clean taste of silence,
Like water, trickling down the quiet brook
Bubbling white over smooth, brown stones.
I step on faded orange leaves,
The crackle echoing through the bare trees
Of the winter forest. I pull
The camo hood of my coat over my head
Gripping the cold of the morning tight
Against my chest not wanting to let go.
I can see the black of our dogs
Jumping at the edge of a leafless oak.
Half acorns fly from under their claws.
The smell of frost stabs my nose
And I lift my head shading
Against the pale rising sun. Tapping,
The sound of wood on wood, thick, clunk, clunk.
Then a shout from behind startles me,
I see the flash of gray
Darting over head and raise my gun.
The forest shatters in my mind
With the strike of a firing pin
And the sound of sour drops crashing on my tongue.

(Ten-Minute Monogamy)

Kimberly Turner

I've been kissed.
I feel the heat of it
Spread across my mouth,
Downward.
Skin to skin,
We two made a pact,
Spelling out the terms
For a ten-minute monogamy.

(Thought)

Zandra Kolwalski

I drifted lonely like a
cloud that sought to
reach the sun.

I sank into the sea
with anemones,
coral pink, and
butterfly fish.

I rolled across
the valleys like

A westward wind
wandering over
the naked stones
and ancient trees.

I lifted up the
flask to drink
but a flutter
rimmed the
trifled air.

(Turkey with Stuffing)

Daniel James

This story takes place in a single day, over the span of about three hours, and is almost entirely true.

I once read a story by Truman Capote in which he tells of being in an auto accident, how he was thrown from his car, through the windshield, and lay in a forming puddle of his own blood, reciting the names and telephone numbers of various friends so as not to lose consciousness. I think of this now, finding myself melted on a stretch of fiery black tar, numb, watching my blood spread thickly across and into the road, seeping, staining the white stripe beside my head. Someone should get a towel, I think, before remembering that the one common denominator among 86% of the murderers on death row is that they have tattoos. Capote said that, too...in *Playboy*, I believe. It sounds silly, but the articles in there are actually quite good...Good, though nobody buys it for the articles, honestly.

I want to lift my head and get a better look around, but I'm feeling tired now. Closing my eyes, a vaguely familiar rhythm bumbles in my brain. How's that song go? ... "Eight, six, seven, five, three, oh, nieceine..."

It is 12:27 p.m. and my stomach growls. It growls long and hard and makes a rumbling so startling I pause a moment, head cocked aside, ready for some ferocious beast to tear out of my belly. What kind of beast would it be? A wolverine? Definitely a devilish, prickly-haired wolverine sort with gnashing teeth and razor claws. I imagine him tearing into a log-sized piece of corn on the cob, kernels and pulp flying everywhere. This idea produces a smile, a full-toothed dreamy smile idiots wear, and I almost let slobber drip from the left corner of my mouth onto the desktop. Sucking it back in quickly, I am suddenly aware that I'm in Shakespearean Lit., and Mrs. Robbins' eyes are trained on me. Indeed, every eye in the classroom is turned my way, except Mary-Margaret's lame one. My eyes, two seconds prior unfocused, now blink back into reality. I try to gauge the situation. She has been looking at me for some time now, I wager. I try to return her gaze with confidence, but her laser eyes bore holes in my own and I can't keep from squirming.

The rest of the class sits quiet. Why doesn't she say something? Anybody? I try to open my mouth, but no words seem appropriate, so I do not speak and instead, detach my eyes from my teacher's and let them roam stupidly to her nose. She has the strangest nose, with that cleft in the middle. Reminds me of Molly Shannon. I wonder if her parent's noses were like that? Maybe her dad's... Pondering this, my mouth drops open and words tumble out, unintelligible and dumb. I shake my head to stop them, but it's too late.

"What was that?" Mrs. Robbins asks.

I'm dumbfounded. "Huh?"

"I asked you, dear, what you were saying."

I'm not sure and can't very well tell her what I was thinking, so I wing it.

"Well," I say, smiling foolishly. "I just don't know."

And that's when it hits, that raucous herd of laughter I felt peaking over the horizon, stampeding, gaining speed. Looking around the classroom, everyone has lost it, students in fits. Like some movie montage, the scene goes into slow motion. Watching these people, I hardly believe what I'm seeing. A handful bang their hands on desks, while some are slapping knees. A couple seats ahead, a guy is doubled over, and to my right, Josh Dickson has snotted himself. Seeing this, I can't withstand and am suddenly overtaken. I don't even know what I'm laughing at, but I can't help it. I laugh with such force my head tilts back, mouth howling, and my hands clutch my belly. This one's a doozy, I think.

"DOO-zie!" I yell as I spasm in my chair. Checking out Mrs. Robbins, she is grinning at me reluctantly. "Oh, you..." her eyes are saying. But she cannot be mad with such happiness in the world. I tell her this now, and she smiles openly, revealing her perfect white teeth. Hah! I have touched her! I can tell she is tickled, and I am pleased.¹ Congratulating myself with a mental note to eat some ice cream when I get home, I glance about the room and see that everyone is still wearing smiles. But, as the laughter subsides, Mrs. Robbins approaches my desk. She is now wearing her serious face.

"You have got to stop daydreaming and pay attention," she says. "It is rude to ignore other people when they are reading. Besides, Shakespeare is beautiful..." Blah, blah, blah, she continues. I tell her I will make it a priority but cross my fingers mentally. Muahhahaha. The lunch bell rings now, reminding me of my hunger, and everyone rises from their seats and files toward the door in the direction of the cafeteria. I am thinking gluttonous thoughts.

Lumbering through the lunch line, I hear Rob tell Brad how badly he wants to sex Lindsay Simms. Brad states a similar, yet more vulgar intent, and they both chuckle. However, I know that neither Rob nor Brad will ever sex her, and that makes me happy. Now, I – I would sex Lindsay the best. Better than her boyfriend even. Shit, come to think of it, I might sex her like no one could in the world, like some crazy stallion or lion or something. I'm sure hungry like a lion. No, like a wolf. Yes, the wolf (I'm brooding now). Oowwww, owww, owww, owww. I am a ravenous wolf, ready to devour the earth, the universe, all of everything. My hunger is an insatiable beast that...Fuck...turkey with stuffing today? Sheesh. Well, it could be worse, like tuna fish on lettuce or something. I ask the lunch lady to put extra gravy on my stuffing, regret it immediately, then ask her to hold the peas and feel good about it. I grab my "senior tea" (though I'm only a junior), pay my seventy cents, and beeline it towards my table. En route, I am waylaid. It is Rachel and just seeing her face, my day is ruined. I almost throw my tray at her and bolt but somehow refrain. She wants to talk about feelings, or something incomprehensible, so I tell her we'll talk about it later. Amazingly, this stall tactic works and Rachel recedes. Heading to my table, my brain is revolving. Stupid ex-girlfriends, always wanting to talk. She has invaded my thought process, and I want her to leave, so I shake my head hard, clearing the mess inside like an Etch-a-Sketch. Jason, who is sitting at my table, queries over my behavior.

"What're you doing?"

"I'm shaking the lice out," I say.

This response garners a laugh from around the table. Examining my peers, Rob, Jason, Bryan, and Louis, I see that Louis enjoyed my joke the most. Note to self: award 5 cool points to Louis. As I sit down, Bryan asks me what I was thinking about in Mrs. Robbins' class.

"It was sooo hilarious," he says. "She called your name, like five times before you snapped out of it."

I tell him, looking at Rob, that I was thinking of sexing Lindsay Simms. Everyone laughs heartily, and Jason knocks the underside of the table with his "erection" as a salute to the hotness of Lindsay. This banging on the bottom of the table is a compliment of the highest form, yet I feel the guys have been using it too often lately and accolading less than stellar candidates. This is not the case here, but on principle, I resent Jason's knock and stop laughing. On cue, my stomach groans and a light bulb flashes in my head. I am here to eat. Sheesh, I'm dumb, I think, and pick up my fork. Pretending I'm a wolf again, I inhale my food without uttering a word. I eat everything on the tray and even use my biscuit to mop up the remains of the gravy. Good call on those extras, afterall. Pushing away from the table, I sigh. I need a nap.

.....

I am sitting on a bench by a road in the city. Maybe New York City. There are so many cars on this road, and from where I sit, the street slopes gently down for so long, providing a view of the city's center. No, I decide, this isn't New York. Big city, though. Hot, too. Luckily, there is a building behind me that blocks most of the rays of sun. I turn around now and look at the building, starting at the base and following it to the top. Wow, it really looks as if it's leaning over me, like it might collapse at any moment. That would suck, being trapped under a building. Hey, who is that reading the newspaper beside me? Is that...? Holy shit...

"Eddie Murphy!" Ohmigod. I'm standing now. "Duuude, you're so badass. I've always thought so. So incredibly funny! Life, that may be my favorite. 'Cock-a-doodle-doo, motherfucker.'"

Gushing, I give him a bear hug. He is receptive and is laughing along with me. This is so crazy! "What? What's that?" Now Eddie's telling me we're on television. "No way." I don't believe it.

He is still laughing, assuring me that we are indeed on television. He shows me the newspaper he had been reading. On the front page, there is a picture of him and I sitting on the bench together, smiling. I look positively surprised. That's so awesome, I think. I have a picture with Eddie Murphy in the paper. I can't wait to tell all my friends. Of course they won't believe me, but I'll have the paper to show them. Ha! Wait...How did they get a picture of us on the

bench in the paper like that? The one he was reading? How the-? What... Am I...?

A spidery string of drool connects my lip to the desktop as I raise my head from slumber. My left leg is asleep and when I rub it about the knee, a tingle jitters up my groin. The teacher is droning on about something. Classmates around me stare ahead; I swear no one is listening. Well, maybe Kelly. She's taking notes. She's always taking notes. Everyone else's pencils lie still on their desks. Where's my pencil? Hmm. Now that it's on my mind, I want it in my possession. I shift in my seat, scanning the floor, seeing nothing. Under my desk, no pencil. My leg still tingles, so I pound it with my left hand, open fisted. Eureka! I look down to my left breast pocket and see my pencil sitting just where I thought it would. I take it out and examine it triumphantly. Stupid leg. I am stomping it on the floor now, slowly regaining feeling, causing a ruckus. Yet, no one seems to notice. Maybe I'm a ghost. I rub my belly to see if I still exist. It feels inflated, like someone (while I had slept) pumped a bunch of air in me. I decide that's evidence enough that I do, in fact, still exist. God, my stomach hurts. Is nothing right with the world? I want to shake my fist at the sky but don't want it mistaken for a raised hand. 3:08, just seven more minutes. My stomach groans for room in pants that have now become too tight. I feel queasy. Queasy and light-headed. Just a few more minutes...

The hallway is breezy and cool – refreshing really – the vents overhead pumping air noisily, refrigerating the herd that passes below. I am an anonymous piece in this throng of flesh, walking briskly and significantly more comfortable having loosened my belt and unfastened the button on my pants. I did this quickly, while seated in class before the bell rang. Such a maneuver can be tricky, not easily accomplished with eager eyes all around, all wanting to catch a private, embarrassing act, but I performed it seamlessly, having had a bit of practice in that area with the shift and tuck.²

Now, with more room for my angry tummy, I am confident in my ability to make it home, to my bed – or the toilet, whichever beckons more woefully. Yet, I am careful, taking easy strides – not jostling – and forsaking, in advance, the camaraderie of my friends, who every day congregate outside to discuss the days happenings and later events. In fact, I have managed to be so inconspicuous as to have not drawn eye contact from any person around my being, all the way from the door of my final class, to here, the hallway by the gym, right by the doors that lead outside. I cannot be stopped, I think. Today requires my unmitigated movement, and by golly, I shall have it. I quicken my pace now – so close – and burst through the exit doors.

Two steps outside, I encounter my first obstacle. It is the heat, immediate and oppressive. The cool and clear corridor a distant memory, I've stepped into the belly of a furnace, the scenery surrounding me orange and wispy. It is an 1000 degrees, the concrete under my feet sludge, gripping my shoes and slowing my steps. Meanwhile, students snap by, their conversations

muffled. They are oblivious. Only the sad, leafless tree behind the benches understands, hunched over, bending away from the sun. I feel for you, Tree, alone and immobile, but I cannot join you; I refuse to be wilted and shall continue marching, belly in hands. It is ridiculously round, my belly, expanding even as I hold it. I am gaining weight as I walk, stumbling, and I think of rolling over right here, at the edge of the parking lot, baking under the sun like a huge potato, my clothes tin foil, holding in moisture and plumping me nicely. I continue this image of a huge, human potato until I reach my car. Fidgeting to get the key in the lock, I am frustrated, furious at the world, until, ahh. Here we go. I'm in my car, settling in the seat, and closer.

On the highway now, I gun the engine to sixty-five. Well, "gun" may not be the right word. I shuffle up to sixty-five, which is unusually fast for me, unusualer for my '89 Chrysler New Yorker. Bullet with Butterfly Wings is on the radio. I approve, and turn up the volume in order to counter the sound of the wind blowing in from the passenger side window. My window, the driver's side, doesn't go down. There is a short in the button and my windows being of the power variety, I am stuck with it in the up position.

I find myself digging this song a lot and singing along with it. Passionately. I forget the heat and my stomach, and I sing. My fist pumps rhythmically, my facial expressions mirroring the emotions in the music. I am one with this song. I sing in perfect harmony, at my loudest volume, without being over-the-top. Any passersby who might look over at me in my vehicle would know immediately how much I love this song. They, in turn, would wonder about this passionate soul sharing the road with them and then, hope that they too might find a song on their dial to conjure up similar feelings in themselves. That, or they may just laugh at me. Either way, I would not acknowledge their presence because I would be enslaved to the music, to the feeling.

I glance in my rearview mirror to see if any cars are close. No one. Looking forward again, something happens. A moment of clarity. I know what is going to happen but am powerless to stop it. In cases such as this, there is little one can do. I think this as I turn my head to the right, opening my mouth and aiming for the passenger seat. When I open my eyes, bright yellow chunks of goop and brothly stew are splattered about my faux-leather seat. It is the most foul thing I've seen in some time, looking like nuclear chicken soup, all bubbly and toxic. It is enthralling, what has just come out of me, and I have trouble looking away, but something is nagging, pulling me back to reality. Instinctively, I turn back to the road.

I'm still driving...Oh, God, I'm still driving! "Holy Moly!" I wipe the tears from the corners of my eyes, trying to see the road clearly, but shit, I am barely recovered from the first blast, and it comes again. My head turned to the right, I am vomiting in the exact same fashion, like a man possessed, dumping another helping on top of the bowl of chunky soup in the passenger seat. Lingered over the bowl, strands of mucus and puke hang from my mouth. Ppbft-twah, I spit, and

I feel myself quivering. This one has shaken me. My neck and head tremble, my face burning red, and...Jesus Christ, what is that honking!?

As I lift my head from the bowl, I go deaf, like when I don't have my fan on as I'm trying to sleep. But I'm not trying to sleep, I think. Blinking away tears, I see that I've crossed the median and there is a car in my path – an off-white, Crown Vic cruiser with a shining silver bumper – but for some reason, I am not worried. My mind is occupied with other matters.

I think of how bad it's going to suck cleaning puke out of the passenger seat. Yet, I feel relieved, having just emptied the offending contents of my stomach. I really do feel better, I almost whisper.

All at once, I hear the wind whooshing in my car, the rush of music, loud and violent, can smell the warm, pee smell of the asphalt. And suddenly, I am loose. Like a pebble in a shoe. Damn, I think, a quick look down. My seatbelt is off.

(Under A Tree)

Kimberly Turner

Oh, you're dead?
Well, how fine.

I imagined,
Again and again and always,
The many ways you would die.
A pasty vessel – rigid –
Grey eyes staring expectantly
At the cross adorning your filthy walls.

Perhaps you died,
In a fit of blood, red spasms of death
Choking you into submission,
Your stolen breath gurgling,
Foaming at your lips,
While you whispered your final plea.

At your passing,
A congregation gathered,
A mass of morbid onlookers,
Shedding their commissioned tears.
When you died,
The earth groaned – pained –
As you forced entry
Inside her dark, silky depths.
Still, a host of gold-winged angels
Ushered your ascending soul far from
The world of ruins you left behind.

Even dead,
The stench of my rotting innocence
Lies in your wake.
But now you are gone,
Departed for Heaven, I'm sure,
Because you always did say your prayers.

Well, you're dead.
How fine, indeed.

(Untitled)

Alex Bohm

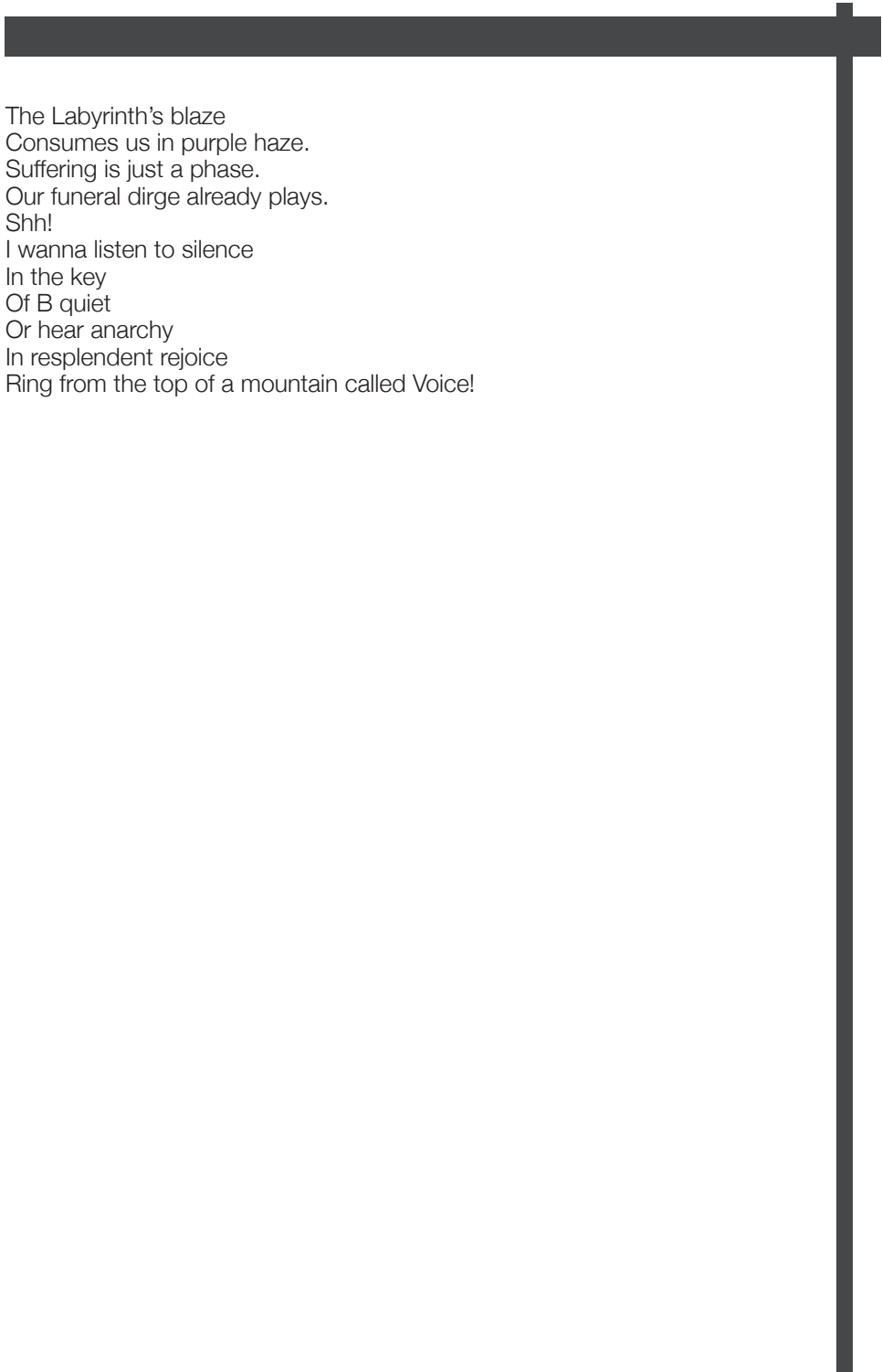
Look out for blind pedestrians. You never know who could be the best of friends,
The man who hands out the medicines. High on endorphins, fly with dolphin fins.
Balloons floating from a stoplight, waiting to break free & take flight.
Telephonin' serotonin, Rezonin', mindblowin'.
We demand more dopamine to expand our conscious stream
Before we succumb to this machine before human being becomes routine.

My method is crystalline. I'm the chaser of your wet dream.
Now smash your TV screen, unleash our primal scream.
The metropolis has a pulse. Pulsating sensations
Cultivates an ethereal impulse. The heartbeat of nations
Gives birth to union & harmony. What other reason do we need to be here in each other's arms tonight?
True lovers' insight holds the key to sweet delight. Don't be afraid to open the door to the morning light.
There they slumber on the floor, minds altered from the night before.
What does the dawn hold in store? Why do you await the coming day,
When we can create a better way? People flock to the nearest crosswalk.

Their cliché lives revolve around small talk. Life paints a panorama in-flux I stalk
My tongue lashes - Scalps like a tomahawk.
I bat my eyelashes & lightning flashes
As thunder crashes. They cower beneath the nearest precipice
& treat me like a terrorist because I encourage the nymphs of the metropolis
To take fingertips & hold wrists,
To lock lips & just kiss
Before the oncoming Apocalypse & experience transcendental bliss.

Our existence isn't merely accidental. It isn't that simple – we're more than coincidental.
Instead of 364 merry unbirthday parties –
Many make life a curse.
Mundane living is torture –
To take it lying down like whores
Or defend your right to make something more –
The choice is yours:
To make love or war.
To adore

Or abhor?
These are the keys
To Life's mysteries.
Now choose a door –
Quickly – enter before



The Labyrinth's blaze
Consumes us in purple haze.
Suffering is just a phase.
Our funeral dirge already plays.
Shh!
I wanna listen to silence
In the key
Of B quiet
Or hear anarchy
In resplendent rejoice
Ring from the top of a mountain called Voice!

(Vines)

TJ McKay

through the lifeless leafless trees
run thin streaks of wood on wood
they cling to others as if rooting
into the dead creates a new life
rising higher in the air snaking
sliding through branches draping
like a noose on a gallows
one on top of another slaves
in a ship of open air and cold sunlight
rooting in to the dead as if to say
i need this corpse for my own sake



(Church Steeple)

by Kimberly Turner



(Flüelen Villa)

by Kimberly Turner



(Fountain in Trafaglar Square)

by Kimberly Turner



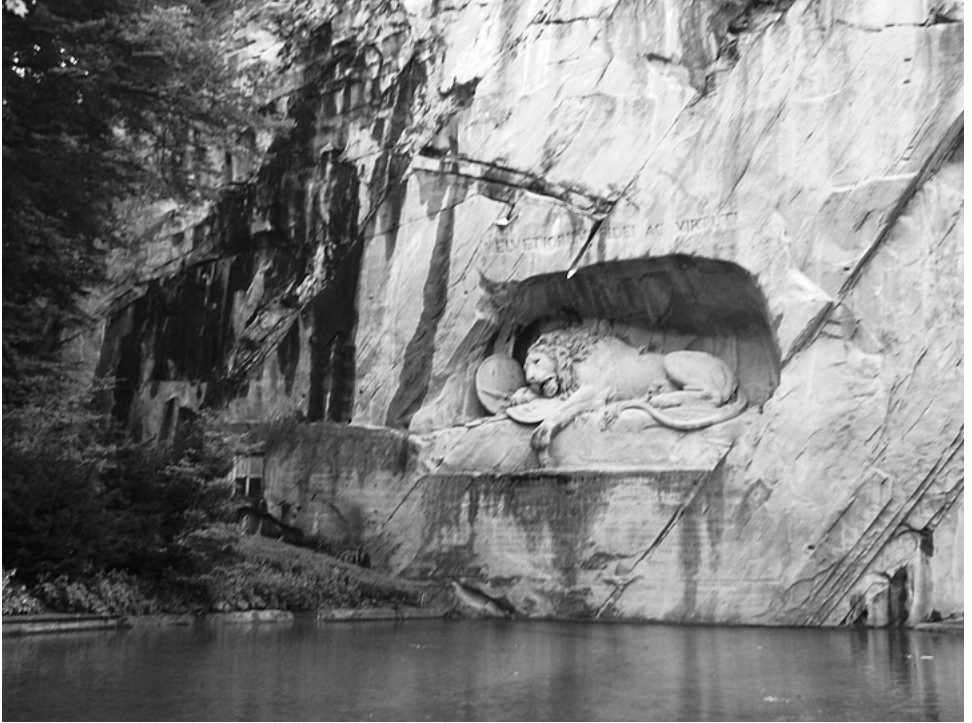
(Grace)

by Michaela Moore



(Home Grown)

by Jackie Snook



(Lion Monument, Lucerne)

by Kimberly Turner



(Magnify)

by Michaela Moore



(Montemarte Wall Painting)

by Kimberly Turner



(Stiff)

by Michaela Moore



(They Don't Play)

by Kimberly Turner



(A Carnival Town)

Kimberly Turner



(Cooper River Bridge)

Matthew Maynard



(Despair)

Ashley Leamon



(Freedom Florence)

Matthew Maynard



(French Church)

Jacqueline Snook



(Higher the Church, Closer to God)

Ashley Leamon



(Steppin' Out)

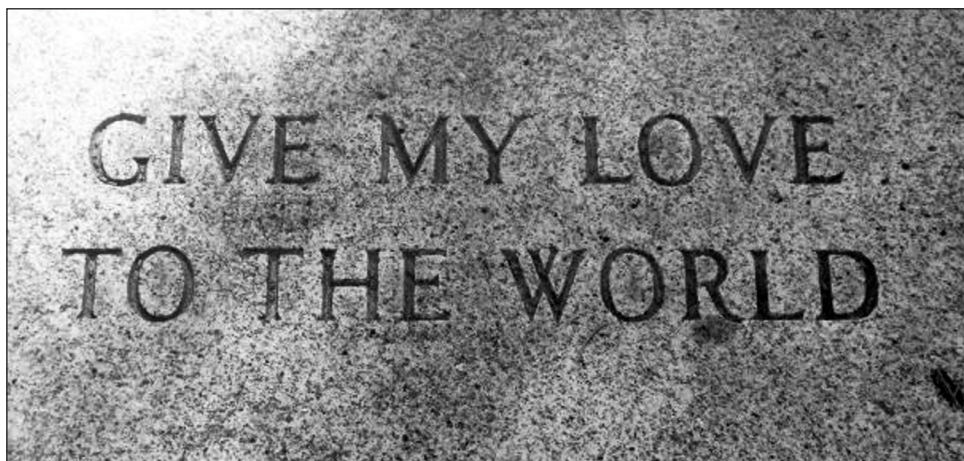
Katie Kelley

(2009):61



(Warning)

Matthew Maynard



(We'll Try)

Ashley Leamon

(Boustrophedon)

Ashley Rivers

some seeps into others.
.tourists timid off bounces Some
filtering into the room.
light the stains
where the glass
room a entering
They fall into a line,
.rail black curving the
as hands caress
stone grey the over
shuffling splashes
muffled A .window
through the stairway
creeps light of sliver A

(Boys with Guitars)

Jessica Upchurch

Bent over to consult with his love,
He supports her on firm knee.
Arms wrap her,
And I think she enjoys the feel of warm skin,
Such soft skin that heats her cold shell.
She is safe,
Because underneath the live flesh,
Muscles and tendons are poised.
They are schooled for firm caress.
And she, his faithful love,
Will not falter as he coaxes a heart song
Out of her metal strings.

(A Case of Do or Die)

Kimberly Turner

Danny Bright was taking in a twenty-two year old girl. Well, woman, he supposed. He could hardly call her a child anymore. She had surely grown up and out and all. She probably didn't wear her hair in pigtails these days. Still, he hadn't heard from her since she was just a kid. She used to be a chatty girl who always carried around a book and pencil; he just assumed she was writing in a diary or something. She was all elbow and knees in those days, but a pretty kid. He remembered how his wife loved to watch her smile. She said Posie's eyes shimmered like brand new pennies when she was excited. He thought she looked sort of sad sometimes, but figured she was trying to perfect the art like any other twelve-year-old. She had a cowlick right in the middle of her bangs then. And now he was supposed to keep tabs on her for the next few months. Anne called him in a panic. She wasn't screaming, or even really distraught. But her voice was too calm. Even if he hadn't spoken with her in a year, Danny knew the even keel of her voice was a bad sign. He asked her, after a few brief moments of small talk, if everything was alright. No, she said. Something was terribly wrong with Posie, something she couldn't fix. She couldn't take her to the doctor or get her a pill, she said. Posie needed something much more substantial. "Which is why I think she should come stay with you, Daniel," Anne said, after a pause.

"Me?" he said, taken aback. "What for?"

Anne sighed into the phone. The sound brought back so many of the childhood moments when she sighed in just the same way at his refusal to give up the remote or his irrational need to punch her whenever she entered a room. "Daniel. Don't make me explain it to you. She just needs a change of pace. And it wouldn't hurt for you to see a fresh face either."

He didn't know what he was supposed to do for Posie. Or if that was even the point. But Anne needed a favor, and she had asked so little of him for the last year. He supposed he owed her.

But how in the hell was he going to keep a twenty-two year old occupied? He wasn't exactly well-versed in pop culture. He didn't care about the smut on TV or on the radio. He had been too distracted for the last year to bother with much. Not that he had ever given much of an effort, but Sherry kept him from being a total curmudgeon. Now, he felt mildly terrified to go it alone.

He saw kids riding through town in their cars, blasting music he was sure would have given his old man a stroke. And if they weren't be-bopping to rap or pop what have you, they were wearing Led Zeppelin t-shirts like badges. They looked at him, a man in his forties, as if they warranted some measure of respect for deigning to listen to music from his generation. He shook his head at them. When had the music and events and literature that had shaped his existence become novelties? Granted, he had never joined any revolutions, but he was always mindful of change. He had always known wrong and right. And he hadn't needed any clothing store or band to lead the way. He had walked alongside the trends, picking up bits and pieces of them all.

Sherry used to hold his hand and laugh with him at the silliness of it all. She used to smile at him when he started sounding too much like his father, frown at him when he was just downright ornery, and tug on his hair to ground him when he was condescending. And, when he felt unsure, he knew her hand would nestle

quietly in his palm, soft and warm.

He missed the feel of her fingers twined with his.

Sometimes, when he was sure she was sufficiently preoccupied, he would look at her. He would look at her until her face was the only thing he could see, until everything in the room besides her face blurred. When he was younger, he felt her magnetism swell in his chest and wondered how anyone could resist the love song in her eyes. He used to shiver. But as he got older, the acuteness of their fingers curling around one another's struck him differently. He felt the weight like a blanket, and he ached to capture the fever of their moments.

They met at fifteen. She was a beautiful girl then – well, she was always beautiful. But her beauty was different then, almost ethereal. She was blond and smiling and heavenly. He remembered everything about the way her hair fell and her tinkling laugh and the black-rimmed glasses perched on her nose. He first saw her walking alongside her brother as they entered his parents' store, and he was too scared to say anything. But, by God, he wanted to. He followed her for the entire afternoon, aware of the obvious compulsiveness of his behavior and having little resolve to act otherwise. Still, they parted, never saying a word; he doubted that she even noticed him trailing after her. But he thought about her every night. The desire to see her again, to finally hear her say her name aloud, had been the greatest longing he had ever known. And then one day, by some brilliant stroke of luck, he had run into her in a little music shop. He thought, even then, that the store was the perfect place to come across one another. Something about the musty smell of the old records made the whole thing seem vintage, seem timeless.

Finally, several rounds of mental dispute later, he felt his feet carry him to her and plant themselves beside her. She was holding a vinyl in her hand, something with The Beatles on the cover. He loomed over her for a moment, unsure of what he could possibly say to seem interesting. He was breathless around her, and he felt foolish for it. But something about her doe-eyed looks was gripping him, and he was powerless. And then she looked up at him, her eyes earnest and new.

His heart had broken a little then. Of course, he had never told anyone about it, especially not her. But he felt as if he had lost her the very day he met her. After conversation he couldn't quite remember, he eventually worked up the nerve to ask her for coffee, and for rings, and for eternity. She had said yes to each proposal, and they had honestly lived happily together.

But, since her death, everyone thought he was idealizing her; he knew that. Everyone called him aloof, because he just wouldn't put her memory away. But, really, how could he? He had loved her like music for nearly thirty years. He couldn't possibly improve in death the person she had been in life.

Maybe it sounded sentimental or cliché. Maybe he spoke out of a romantic sense of tragedy. Maybe he thought like a middle-aged man suffering the death of a wife he had never imagined losing. He honestly didn't care.

She broke his heart the day they met. And thirty years later, with the remnants of her body buried deep under mounds of newly tilled earth, he felt as if he hardly had a heart left at all.

(Chai)

Ashley Rivers

You reach past me
into the glove compartment

to find a little blue box
hidden behind the napkins

and your copy of The Great Gatsby.
Inside, I find the Silver Star of David.

You flick my hair to the side
and clasp the necklace over my shirt.

The charm sits weightlessly on my chest
between the black scoop of my dress.

“Closer” by NIN comes on the radio—
I think about the time

you made me laugh so hard
I fell out of the hammock,

bruising my leg. My face pressed
against the cold glass,

I watch you mouth the words,
waiting to go inside. My stomach

rumbles irreverent to your moment
inside a blue Chevy Nova

littered with water bottles
and gym clothes singing

our favorite song. You laugh
at the disturbance. I grab

my gold purse and we stagger
into Al's upstairs for a late dinner.

(Chosen)

Michaela Wolf

One crisp, swift pass sparks the beginning
of the short lived journey. The head of the match
goes ablaze in a disorderly uproar,
confined, but out of control.

One among many, selected at random
from an unorganized chaotic box,
it had its opportunity to shine; a moment
of glory to be chosen above all others.

The steady orange glow provides heat
and rebellion as the light beams from
the hand of another posing a threat,
but clearly the one being controlled.

The blue tinted flame flickers, falters, fails,
as it struggles to find the oxygen
to keep burning. The blaze begins to diminish
as resources and opportunities begin to fade.

Once a bright powerful glow
overpowering the wood that lies beneath,
the flame is now unrecognizable and
a dark ashen scrap of what it was once before.

(Encroaching Winter)

Ashley Rivers

Flames from the fire
make shadows on the arms of a man
as he sits by the hearth in the late fall,
his fingers turning his ring,
sliding it off and replacing it. His shoes
are worn from years of dance.

The flecks of light from the flames dance
as he stares into the low burning fire.
There in the corner are the shoes
of the woman who left him for another man.
They are purple with a small ring
of gold on the edges. She would fall

down every time she wore them, fall
and stumble in the middle of a dance
sometimes. Maybe that's why she left the ring
and the shoes by the flickering fire
two weeks ago. If only the man
could recall the grace of her other shoes.

But all he can remember are the shoes
in corner and her ungraceful fall
into the hands of another man.
Out of the window he sees two birds dance
across the scattered leaves. They don't crave fire.
He watches the smoke rise one ring

at a time from a grey-haired passerby. A ring
of light flickers as this wanderer strikes flint, shoes
covered in mud and wanting a fire.
The air's cold bite reminds him it is fall,
time to go back to his studio to teach dance
to hoards who see him as just a old man.

He rises out of the chair and looks at the man
in the picture that use to himself. The ring
of the phone jars him. He doesn't want to dance
anymore, as he looks down again at the purple shoes
on the floor. He turns and stares at the fall
scene outside and wishes he could stay by the fire.

The fire glows bright in the man's eyes
as he thinks of her fall and his ring.
His shoes are worn from years of her dance.

(Hell No in the Nicest Possible Way)

Jacqueline Snook

A parody of Christina Rossetti's
"No, Thank You, John"

You want me to marry you?
What a nice surprise
All those nice things you did for me
Now I see where you were going with that

I never showed any interest in you
Yet you want me to marry you
How did you come to this conclusion?
And I said persistence was a good thing

I have heard about all those women that want you
They want to pay you to have sex with them
I'm sure that is something anyone would brag about
Because money is all you need to be on your good side

I have a big heart?
Well I give all my heart
When I give it to those I care about
It's a good feeling; you should check it out sometime

Let's forget all those wonderful things
That you have done for me in the past
That you are oh so fond of
Since I don't seem to remember them anyway

Oh, Of course you would treat me like a queen
How else would you treat me?
Like a little girl who wants a new toy
You think I'm not old enough to know what I want?

Yes I'm sure you could show me all the ropes
Because you are that much older than me
With wives to match the years
Let me assure you the experience shows

Let's not focus on this anymore
The conversation cannot progress
Why don't we be the friends we were
If you can be grateful for even that

Do give up this silly idea of yours
Marriage is not on the agenda
So you cannot confuse my answer
That's hell no, in the nicest possible way.

(SIR): 70

(In which I am Pessimistic about this Sudden Affair)

Jessica Upchurch

And no, we did not hold
Hands on the Playground.
I did not blush
When you did not give me a Dandelion
That expressed your complicated,
Adolescent feelings.

In fact, our first meeting was orchestrated
By Strangers and Strobe Lights.

You announced your Love from
The bed sheets as we died.
Not in the Traditional Sense, of course,
Because I would not die for you,
Nor you for me.

And here we are, Glowing at Breakfast
With promises in our eyes and
Thinking of Swing-sets and Rosy Cheeks.

This is doomed to end in tears.
And people won't approve of us Playing House.
But we will be Star-crossed Lovers for a time,
And proclaim, at the end of the day,
That we'll always have Verona.

(Insert Title Here)

Jessica Upchurch

I long to leave you breathless.

I wish to entice the two dimensional world,

Of pulp and ink,

To bleed into your sight

And cease the synaptic fire.

I wish to constrict your lungs,

Drown you in carbon dioxide,

And shock you with profound meaning

That unhinges your soul,

A soul that would cry out in redemption.

Lord help you.

But in purgatory you will remain,

Because the heart is not the master of the hand,

And I am no savior.

I am found wanting.

(A Merry War)

Kimberly Turner

“Charm ache with air and agony with words.”

- Much Ado About Nothing, William Shakespeare

Let's you and I
Sit under the night,
With no words or swords or jests,
And share of drop of moon.
Let's quiet our tongues for a moment,
And hear the slow-swirling buzz of twilight.
Lady Disdain, you called me once;
Yet, just for the night,
Let's feign a gentle reverie, you and I.

In the morning,
At the sun's behest,
You may restore again
The name night stole from you,
And play a jester once more.
Yet, perhaps when we wake,
I'll sigh no more,
And you might share a spot of sun with me.

As evening creeps into daylight,
You may boast of a harden heart
And dismiss love for scorn,
But I will note each rosy moment.
And, with a worn and weary heart,
I will dream you shared a piece of love with me.

(Pumpkin Pie)

Ashley Leamon

Steaming piles of fluffy potatoes and stuffing sat adorned with fall leaves and plates with painted trees and animals dripping with reds, browns, and golds. I stole a furtive taste of homemade pumpkin pie, hoping that God would not be angry that I didn't thank him first. Petey was outside, hip hopping along in his pen, dilly dallying and bunny nibbling among leftover greenery.

The crowning jewel of the meal revealed itself on a brown cornucopia tray. Dad stared at it with lustful, hungry eyes that only men reserve for a slab of dead animal. Hands joined for a stereotypical prayer of thanks but just before, we stole a glance at our Petey.

The sudden swoop of dirty brown feathers startled and our hands unclasped. My mother's blood-curdling scream replaced our thankful prayer. The next scream belonged to predator or pray; we never knew which. Only fur remained, floating listlessly in the cool November air.

The food remained on the table, untouched. Under my father's sorrowful eye, the turkey was wrapped and placed into the fridge, the attention, stolen by another bird. I hate pumpkin pie.

(A Response to Your Confession)

Jessica Upchurch

A heat wraps my waist,
And smoke fills my mouth.
I know its source-
You told me your eyes burn
With primitive motives
And dangerous passions.
If I were of a different mind,
I would tend that flame.
But I will not wish it.
If my nature were changed,
You may not have ignited.

(Rowing {Or A Study in Longing})

Kimberly Turner

Think, little lush;
Say we are
Tree and forest.
Tell sweetly of
Green weather towns
And hidden wisteria places.

Think, little orchard,
Of girls walking on tiptoes
Through ankle-deep puddles,
And of boys forging
Black asphalt rivers
Like Appalachian wildernesses.

Think, little soles,
Of stepping on schools
Of thin yellow and red starfish,
Shuffling along the bottom
Of concrete seas.

We have no truth
But the experiences
We carry in the palms
Of our hands.

(The Subjugation of Seven O'clock)

Kimberly Turner

Among the autumn clouds,
And the raining leaves,
On the wooden floors
Of childhood corridors,
I gave birth to myself.

And I felt it feeding at my toes,
Crawling from leg to leg,
First right, then left.
And I felt it climbing to my navel,
Spreading winter in its wake.

On a drizzly evening,
I sat, drenched in red nectar,
Gazing steadily
At the blue-stripped pattern
Plastered above my head.

And I watched, horrified,
As it ate me alive.

(A Sucker for Love)

Bernice Williams

Splashing swiftly through the water,
I wonder excitedly what is happening to me
as I feel myself being eagerly pulled in.
Not knowing I was hooked,
then sucked in, diving through the dying ripples,
life flashing before my eyes:
“keep going,”
says a little voice in my head:
“everything is fine,”
I feel as if I had seaweed floating
free and fiercely around in my stomach.
To the top of the current I go, grasping for air
wondering what’s next,
and how far could I go without breathing in and out at all.
Then out of the water and into a bucket, and
reeled in by love.
There on the shore I found myself, breathless.

(Times is Hard)

Jennifer Smith

Times is hard.
I ain't got no money.
I ain't got a job
but I still got my honey.

Sugar momma, sugar momma
give me some dough.
I got mad love for you.
You're my main squeeze, yo.

Yeah I'll watch your kids
while you're working at the Quickie Mart.
I don't love that girl you caught me with;
you know you got my heart.

I'm going to get a job,
I swear I'll look next week.
But until that happens
keep handing over the Benjamins, sweetcheeks.

Times is hard.

(Thunder and Lightning)

Nicole Vanadia

One down, two to go. Months that is. The remainder of my sentence on this desolate farm. You throw one chair and it cracks a wall; all of a sudden, you have anger problems your father just can't handle.

All I could see were the cows. The entire farm was visible from the one tiny window in my bedroom. Aunt Zelda was making her final rounds in the dairy farm. It was time to make breakfast.

The large window over the sink normally let in enormous amounts of sunlight. Today, the window was boarded over and the kitchen looked bleak and dreary. It was my own fault. I wasn't expecting the toaster to be so light. There was a little too much force behind me when I hurled it through the window. Mom would have pitched a fit and every bit of my allowance would have gone towards replacing it. Dad wouldn't have even noticed. Aunt Zelda just laughed.

"So what's for breakfast?" Aunt Zelda asked coming through the front door.

"Eggs and bacon," I said from the refrigerator.

"No toast?" she asked sitting at the table. "Don't worry; someone's coming by later to fix the window. Tomorrow the kitchen will be bright and sunny again."

I stayed silent and finished making breakfast. I ate as quickly as possible and cleared the tables. This was the normal routine for meals.

"Do you want me to buy you another toaster?" I asked while washing the dishes. I wasn't about to replace a whole window but I could afford a toaster.

"Don't worry about it. That toaster was old anyway," she replied waving a hand dismissing the issue.

I threw the soapy pan back down in the sink. "That isn't the point," I screamed at her.

"Then what is the point, Amy?" Aunt Zelda asked in her unruffled voice.

"I broke the damn toaster so I should have to pay for a new one. Aren't you supposed to be teaching me some kind of life's lessons? Isn't that why I'm here?" I asked.

"You're here because you needed a break. And with that reasoning, shouldn't you offer to replace the window too?"

"You know I can't afford to replace the whole window," I growled at her. Me and my big mouth.

"You could do farm chores until you make enough to pay for it. How is that for a deal?" she asked reasonable.

"This is bull."

"Isn't this what your mother would have done?" Aunt Zelda asked.

"You are not my mother," I shrieked at her.

"No, but I can still punish you like her. Finish cleaning the pan, we need to go check the mail." With her parting comments, she left me alone with my soapy dishes.

By the time I finished the breakfast mess, Aunt Zelda came back to the kitchen dressed in her normal fashion. Her long blue skirt covered her feet and the sleeves of her yellow top hung past her hands. A lime bandanna tied back long chestnut hair, so similar to mine. And to mom's.

"You ready?" she asked.

I just nodded and walked out the door with her. Our pace was slow and the earlier anger swirled down the drain with the morning's bubbles.

"You know, if you'd just let the mailman deliver to your door, you wouldn't have to make a mile trek just to get your mail."

"And what fun would that be?" Aunt Zelda asked. "Too much time in life is spent getting things done in a hurry. Nothing is appreciated anymore."

We picked up our pace slightly and continued our walk in silence. The air smelled faintly of rain and unmistakably of farm animals. It was so quiet that your mind had little else to do but wander aimlessly.

"Why did she have to die?" I stared intently ahead at the gravel driveway.

Aunt Zelda's pace didn't even falter. "Death is a part of life. A painful but necessary part. Growing up on this farm, I can't tell you how many animals I've seen born and die. I've even had to bury my own parents, and a sister. All much too early in my opinion. Being angry at the word won't bring her back. And it won't make you hurt any less."

"I don't know how to stop being angry at the world."

"You can start by not being angry at me."

I slowed my pace and allowed Aunt Zelda to pass me. I didn't have a reply for that. It wasn't her fault my mother was dead. Nor was it her fault I was stuck here. I raced back up to walk beside her.

"Is it any easier to look at me?" Aunt Zelda asked me.

"I just keep reminding myself that you are not her." Aside from sharing the same physical features, the women were as different as thunder and lightning.

We reached the mailbox only to find it empty. Again. Another wasted trip.

"If you want to keep walking to an empty mailbox, you can go alone," I snapped at her.

"I have a few things I need to take care of down the road," Aunt Zelda said completely ignoring my snide remark, "Why don't you head back to the house. I shouldn't be gone but a half an hour. You can go figure out what's for lunch."

"I'm not your slave," I yelled back at her.

I turned and power walked my frustrations all the way back to the house. When I hit the stairs, I stomped with all my force up them. I must have hit a loose board a little too hard, because it gave and my foot went straight through to the dirt.

"Damn it!" Now I was probably going to have to pay for the stairs.

My shin was throbbing, so I removed my hurt leg from the hole and hobbled up the stairs. The rocking chair was only a few feet. I painfully made my way to the chair and came up surprised to find a very large book inhabiting the seat. I lifted the book and plopped myself down. Opening the cover, I found a picture of two identical girls smiling up at me. This was not a book; it was a photo album.

I sat in that rocking chair and examined every picture closely; trying to determine which girl or woman was my mother. Their hairstyles, their clothes, and their expressions were identical. Not a thing was different. I flipped through; page after page, photo after photo and could not pick her out.

A creak on the step drew my attention away from the album. Aunt Zelda was inspecting her newly demolished porch step. When she looked up, she noticed what I was holding.

"How do you like it?" she asked.

"I can't tell you apart," I said quietly.

"We were identical twins," she joked.

"You are not the same. You are not her," I exploded coming to my feet. The shin I hurt coming up the stairs throbbed with pain. "Owwwww."

Aunt Zelda rushed up the stairs. "What is it? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," I said sitting back down and pulling away from her.

"No, Amy, I'm not her. I am still here and I'm the only link left you have to her, whether you like it or not. Taking your anger out on the fact that I'm alive and she's not, isn't helping anything," Aunt Zelda said using the sternest voice I'd ever heard her use.

"I don't want to be here," I stated, "I just want to go home and continue living my life."

"Anymore kitchen appliances you want to throw through a window. Or have we moved on to tables and sofas?"

"I told you I would pay for the toaster," I screamed.

"That isn't the point," Aunt Zelda yelled back.

I was so stunned I couldn't speak. Never in my whole life had I ever heard Aunt Zelda raise her voice, let alone yell. Aunt Zelda's shocked expression must have matched mine perfectly.

"That's what she used to say," I said in a quiet voice.

"We were sisters," she said equally quiet.

We both stayed on the porch not speaking, me just sitting in the rocking chair holding the photo album and her standing above me.

"I'm not mad that you're alive. I'm not even mad that I'm on the farm. I like the farm," I told her.

"I know, honey."

"It's not fair. I don't want to forget her."

"You could never do that. There is too much of her in you and me for that to happen," Aunt Zelda said.

"It just hurts," I said.

"I hurt too. This is why we need to help each other. How about we

go inside and have lunch? Afterward, I'll tell you anything you want to know about your mom," Aunt Zelda asked.

"That sounds good. But, you have to help me walk. Your stair tried to break my shin," I said.

Aunt Zelda helped me up and together we hobbled to the door.

"You know I'm going to add the stair to your tab," Aunt Zelda said.

"Then, my leg better heal quickly. I've got a lot to pay for," I said as Aunt Zelda shut the door behind us.

(Unfounded Anger)

Ashley Rivers

The growing bubble bursts inside her brain
releasing strands of words into her throat.
She starts to redden, face forced in pain
erases her dollish features. Words denote
her fear. Lost touch with reality, she floats
on rising verbs of hate—oh just get out.
He stays and words abuse him. They coat
his skin like bees on honeycombs. Words cut
his walls away so well. They jolt him, shouts
and insults steal his will. The echoes bound
off walls in empty rooms. She's left with doubt.
Alone she waits for shouts. They are not found.
Her eyes constrict. Water washes the mess
off cheeks she stained red. What was all the fuss?

(Watching You Go)

Ashley Leamon

But I'm thinking of what Sarah said, that "Love is watching someone die."
So who's going to watch you die?..—Death Cab for Cutie

The white walls would drive you crazy if
you had the consciousness to take them in.
You will lie there in those stiff, blue medicinal
sheets. That face I want to feel forever will
be just as stiff as the sheets as your soul
silently gives up and prepares to jump ship.
Your eyes will be glued shut by age and illness
while every breath may be the last
to fill your lungs to their feeble capacity.
Your skin will change over time to rough pine bark,
memories etched into the wrinkles.

The scar below your lip will remain unchanged
and I'll lightly trace it with the tip of my finger,
feeling the warmth of your final breaths
and dying to wrap myself up into you
before that wonderful heat fades.
I will struggle to remember the light in your
eyes and the weight of your body next to mine.
Your heart monitor will beep, beep, beep
And each time, I'll plead with whoever listens
for just a little more time: one more argument
ending in a bedroom entanglement, one more
Sunday morning with the smell of dryer sheets and
shaving gel lingering, one more something.

I will remember that distant place in that distant summer
when the Rhine glowed on our youth while we fell
into our hotel bed. I knew then that there was only you.
I will watch your chest rise and fall for the last time,
never letting go of those long, delicate fingers
that cupped my face as your lips brushed mine.
Our life together will crawl and disappear into that
loud red line, drawing you into its horizontal finality.

I hope I am the one to watch you go.

(SIR)

2010

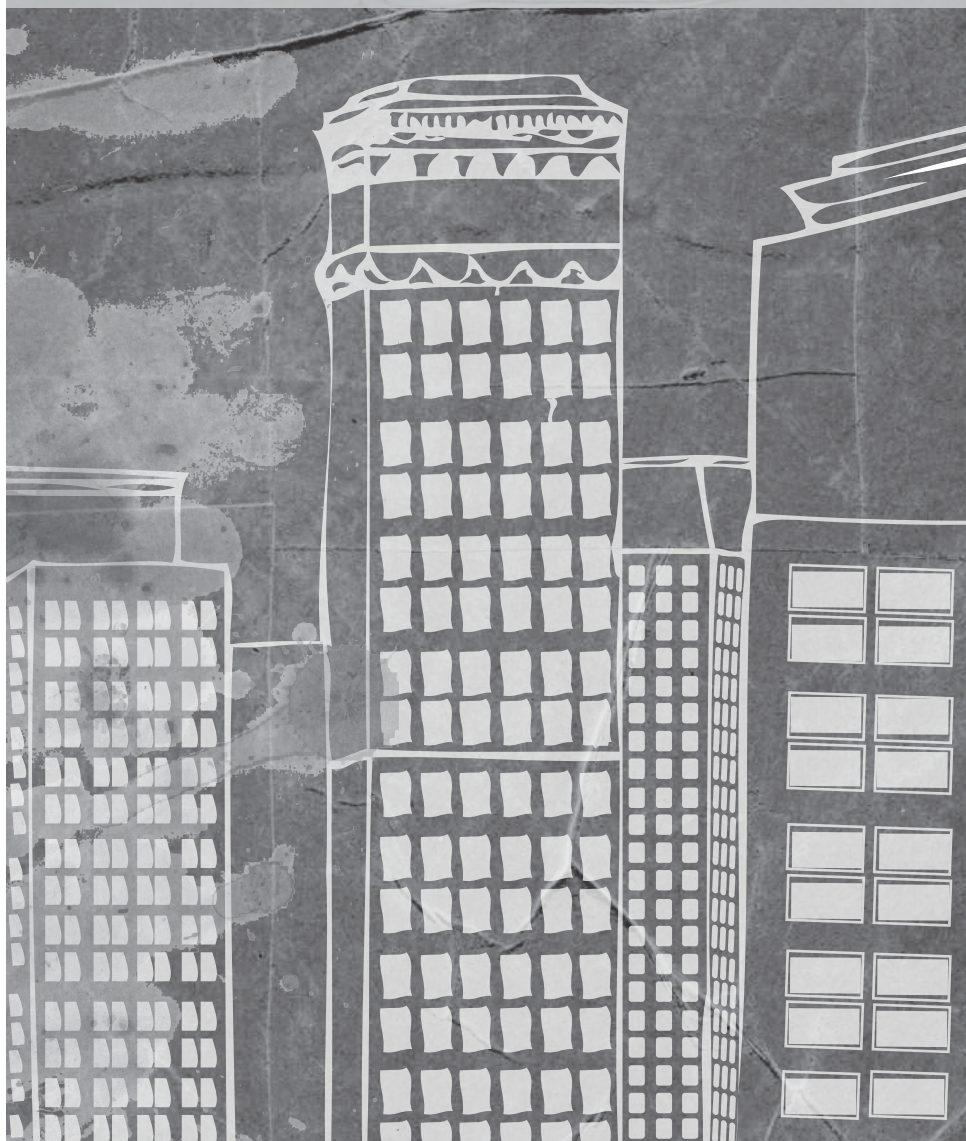


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Joanna Miller

He loved me first in the fall,
and each year, I remember.
I feel the prickle in my heart
when he leaned in close, and then closer.
He whispered secrets in the dark,
in the warmth of the sheets.
I feel the cold air,
and I remember

(A Letter Never Sent: Christmas)

Daniel James

December 14, 9:45 pm, on receipt of your Christmas card

Wow. I don't even know what to say. So many things come to mind...

I guess I'll start with those pictures of you and Chelsea—pretty hilarious. Seriously, good stuff. I really like the card; it's funny, and who doesn't like to get a Christmas card? But, really? Is that it? I mean, did your sister send this, or you? There's a space to write something on the back, but I don't see anything. Hah, I just thought about it, and it doesn't even say "Dawn" on the envelope. Just "PAIGE" - which makes it even more ambiguous. Wow. Even if you didn't consciously do that, that speaks volumes. Volumes. So impersonal. I mean, I can only hope you designed the card. That would mean a little more, yet still, the fact that I know that this card was sent to others, that there is not one identifiable mark on my card, no detail that might make my card discernible from any other you sent out, makes me... well, I don't even know, really. I hardly feel sad anymore, but damn. It does something. Makes me want to write this letter, I guess. I mean, why even send out a card to me if it's just an empty gesture?

I told you so long ago, almost two years ago now – on your 26th birthday (I was at Buffalo South shooting pool with some friends) – that I was making a CD for you, some songs that I thought you'd like, some that made me think of you, songs I felt would bring us closer somehow, but – I never followed through with it. I thought it too sappy, too obvious and see-through. All the songs were sad, or too emotional or too personal seeming. For me, just constructing a list of songs that I felt were a part of our relationship was a great exercise. It brought me pain, knowing how things had turned out, yet there was also a sense of joy, just remembering times and feeling the emotions that the songs bring out. I would seriously hear a song – usually randomly – and write it down as one that I should put on the disc. Finally, a few days ago, I sat down to do what I had planned to do for so long, to make you a CD worthy of our time together. I couldn't put it on one disc. I had too many songs. It required at least three discs and that is only because I was very discriminatory. Not just any song went on the list, which by the way, was fucking sweet. You would've enjoyed the songs thoroughly, I am sure. But now, I sit here, and I wonder... Why did I waste my time? There was a fact I was overlooking. And even though I had a vague notion of this fact beforehand, the pimp-hand of life is slapping me in the face right now with the cold, tingly truth. I made the CDs for me. You don't need the CDs, I do.

I wish I had something better to say. You haven't done anything wrong, and I hope I haven't insinuated that either. I know I am probably – no, definitely – being a little unfair, but I don't want to put any kind of guilt trip on you. I just feel – listen to me, always talking about how I feel. It's so old. I thought, when I traded messages with you the other day, when you asked me for my address, "What a nice gesture, she's sending me a Christ-

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mas card!" I knew, of course, that's why you were asking, and I thought it a good thing. But now, I realize, it was just a set-up. Not on your part, but on mine. Not that I expected anything extravagant, but you know, it doesn't matter what you had sent, I probably would have been disappointed... No, that's not true. The smallest hint of thoughtfulness or individuality would've made my day. But, this? I've received business's holiday cards that were more endearing. I can't believe you didn't write anything, not even signing your name. I mean, seriously? (Sigh) I'm sorry. But there's no way I can send you those CDs now. How emotionally over-the-top would that be, especially following my receipt of your card? I'd have to be a damned lunatic, I think. I mean, I want like hell to send you these CDs (especially since I've already burned them). But just as important – and what would make me a lunatic – is the paper telling you why I chose them. I thought often on how I would do it: what I would say about each song, how I would relate it to you, whether we listened to them together or if it was just one that I liked and instinctively felt you would too. I wrote all this down, edited, and typed it up, a list of tracks and their importance, their relevance to you...but I just don't see it now. Why should I send you this? Then again, why do I think I have the right to send this? I mean, this gift is the kind of thing you send somebody who really knows you – who you really know – but the card I received tonight was something between passing acquaintances.

Please excuse me if I sound bitter, for I realize I have no one to be angry with about anything that happened between us, except for myself. I can only imagine how you feel towards me, deep down, but right now, I really know that some shitty songs are not going to change anything. It's weird, because the same force in me that wanted to send you the CDs is the same force that (some time ago) wanted to send you all the cards you made me, all the letters you wrote, all the little trinkets that held special value for me concerning our past. I have these things, down to every little scribble you've made for me – dirty letters, funny mementos, even the bad items I would like to forget – in a box, taped up, that I'm sure I'll someday look at and think— God knows what, but...

I guess, like the box of stuff, I wanted these CDs to elicit a certain response from you. But I'm suddenly tired of having these ulterior motives. Would I like for you to have these songs? Yes, I would, along with the paper that goes with them. I know, that's selfish. I shouldn't want anything from it, but for you to like them, which I maintain, you would. But the thought is there, that I might make you feel some way, and that is...well, not worth mentioning anymore. I just don't know what to do now.

I do, seriously, wish you the best. I know you deserve so much. You are not a good person, but a great one. I don't doubt your heart was in the right place, but... But, fuck. In the end, I can say no bad about you. I can only imagine how I might feel in your position, and to speak negatively about you is merely an unneeded exercise of poor judgment. I can only say

that I have learned so much through our relationship, both past and present. I realize this has been long-winded, and I'll be honest, not well-intentioned from the start, but now, at the end, I hope the final message comes across clear. I care deeply about you, in my own emotional way, and know you are a great person. I guess, where my conflict comes in, is that I wish you felt that way about me. Or at least, if you do, that you could show it... Anyway, fuck it. I'm sending you some songs, sans explanatory papers; you can take what you will from them, and not from what I have to say about them. Merry Christmas.

Hopelessly yours,
jack

(A Love Letter to No One)

Kimberly Turner

We talked in the grass.
I was drunk on peppermint schnapps
and you were smoking your last cigarette,
although I never saw you smoke the first,
and I was so in love
I could barely hold my head up.
And I knew then,
when I was lying with you,
it would be just time between us.
My pulse was humming,
keeping time to the sounds of the crickets,
but you were as still
as the leaves cushioning our heads.
And after the cleansing,
we lay in the dewy blades
shifting as the world encased us
between thorns and a solid black sky.
You were holding my hand,
softly reassuring me
all would end well
but I was too owl-eyed
and too in love to hear you.
And now you and I and the grass
are nothing more than a laugh,
just a silly anecdote I tell
to amuse people I hardly know.

(A Poem about Autumn)

Kimberly Turner

I love this time of year
in the South Carolina plains
when the summer heat finally yields
to the slow, creeping air of Autumn,
when the smell of the trees
cords its way through my blood
and settles in my bones,
while the hushed rustle
of the late September leaves
pulses like music
between the strata of my skin.

(An Image Nil)

Jessica Upchurch

Every time I see your book, I see your picture.
The classic grays and your cropped image
enforce the kind of writer you are or want to appear to be.
Your mouth remains straight, unmoving, set in its ways,
and I could not ask a right question that would unlock the volume within.
I would not dwell on the question;
whatever you say would only be an untruth
to what your eyes and straight nose and careless hair whisper to me.
They give me everything that I need and don't want to know.

And what I know is the angled wit you place on a page.
With every broken block and jarred punctuation,
I conform to your thoughts
and glimpse life through layers of lilies.
The negative space surrounds me
as you push me off the cliff and let me plummet
through worlds and irises until I fall
like a speech from the mouth of a misinformed hero.

My eyes lift each word of each line;
I feel the midnight dark bleed into the muscles around my eyes
and work their way into tissues of my brain.
Each letter curves around my waist, my calves, my wrists,
drawing me into the loom,
holding me as if I am the sacrifice to an ancient god,
until all I see is ink and the layers of vivid colors that breath beneath.
I try to pull away, to see the finished design,
to see the masterpiece your mouth doesn't say you have threaded,
but I am stuck like a fly in a web,
like a bone under the ground.
You look at me, still no word uttered,
like an artist fixing a little detail
just before he steps back to study a dream.

(Another Lost Generation)

Matthew Porter

I lay in bed, stiff and on edge,
watching the face just across from mine.

That face at one time, long ago, was serene in sleep,
but now it's often strained, lips pressed pale thin, in struggle.

Under the heavy bearing of all he's faced,
what shelter could I hope to offer him?

His grin, last seen from the back of a military bus,
was lost somewhere along the way home.

It's long gone, stolen perhaps, left back over seas
and replaced now with that abnormality – that broken

smile – a weak pull of the lips to make me feel better.
I pain at it's absence - like some phantom limb in him for me.

He crossed over something somewhere. A Rubicon
that can only be experienced to understand.

Those cold, ruddy waters left their ruby
stains set deeper than his clothes.

One day, before this, back when we were out canoeing
at the lake, he caught my gaze,

the late day sun reflected in the green tinted waters,
intensifying the color of his eyes to a striking depth.

He told me, his hand on my knee, radiating that gentle assurance
only he could, as if he was sharing his strength with me,

that his unit status had changed.
He was being called up to active duty.

With that goofy grin and a wink, he got on the army bus,
but when he came home, it was with dark eyes and sunken shoulders.

Since his gleefully promised return, living has been lifeless – just uneasy
lingering – existing from moment to disturbed moment.

Waking up alone late one night, I found him in the
kitchen; standing at the sink. His demeanor

struck like a sullen specter against the moonlit window.
That night I removed a small knife from his hand.

One night later on, when his slumber couldn't withstand
the night terrors, I stayed up with him and talked.

I had been awake already, watching over him,
reading each haunting remnant: every scream,

plea, and explosion as they wrote themselves into
the lines across his face – a scrolling record of war.

I wished the inkwells of these revenants would run dry,
even if only briefly, allotting him some small peace.

He shared many secrets with me. The terrors hounding him;
at least the ones he could stand to bare aloud.

As he described them, each detail, every wretched
wraith sketched their form inside my mind.

Keeping a straight face, I tried to suppress these mental images of
what might have imprinted these phantoms in his subconscious.

Nights since then, like tonight and all the ones sure to be ahead,
I intend to just let him sleep. With his strong, often clenched

hand held within mine, I keep faithful watch,
like a sorrowing griffin to a lost seafarer.

(The Art of Stirring)

Kimberly Turner

I have stirred all of my life.
I have stirred dinner and laundry and ideas
in my brain.
Stirring and stirring,
my hands are calloused
from the toil.
I am a stirring woman,
and the blisters on the palms of my hands rub
a fresh pink,
but I am the soul of stirring.
The wood of ages splinters blood-soaked
into my skin,
but I stir like a woman.
I am a body of broken bones and
I am rough now.
I have heard the laughter of children,
of lovers in the dusk,
and of old ones,
and it rings all the same to me.
The children laugh in burnished jest,
that is true,
but the lovers' mirth is laced with loss,
and the old ones laugh because
they think they know.

(The Ashes She Collected)

Kimberly Turner

She burned you,
burned you to cinders
and watched you smolder
in front of her eyes.

She leaned back,
leaned back on her heels,
and lapped at the flames
as they lit up your face.

(Assimilation)

Jessica Upchurch

My veins stretch and wake and push
through the cracked skin of my heels.
They twist and curl, like moss to rest in the shade-
violent red yarn for a bird's nest.

Under the canopy I take refuge.
With closed eyes I cling
and try to align with you like water;
maybe you will inhale and take me in.

Never one to idle,
and of an enduring kinetic kind,
bark splinters and catches my hands
and climbs me to clouds

where my breaths are empty.
The stratus robs me of air.
I press to a chlorophyll lung
and breathe bottled sunshine.

I shift with you until cork and strata angle.
I fold into you until I am ingrained and timeless,
my body a subtle shift in your tissue's pattern.

(At Four and Twenty)

Thomas Moyer

One in Sixty, Sixty in One
The Wheel Keeps Spinning
On and On

At Four and Twenty, Twenty and Four
A Crash and Clang
Beside the Door

Another One in Sixty, Sixty in One
I Waited for Her
With my Gun

On the Fourth in Sixty, Sixty times Four
They Heard Her Scream
Blood on the Floor

Six in Sixty, Sixty times Six
My Smile Widened
Our Blood Mixed

(Beats of Dust)

Minette Gentry

The headlights bounce off white lines,
and the steady rushing of air beneath the car
swallows the sounds of fractured heartbeats;
 beats that push tiny fragments out to trail behind,
mingling with the dust from the road.

My foot hovers over the brake,
but I can't press the pedal.
I don't want to see what
is reflected in the tail lights.

One beat, two beats,
and more pieces break off, swept away
in the draft of my Chevy.

I can't check the mirrors.
I can't even turn the wheel.
Just keep driving, an empty highway ahead
and an empty highway behind.

(Beautiful End)

Sara Neil

I watch him, stumbling forward, ripped apart at the seams and bleeding pain and fear. His entire life has been stripped of all beauty and hope, yet he doesn't falter. He keeps his arms raised above his head, begging them not to shoot us where we stand. We don't have it, he screams, desperate for them to believe him. I'm too frightened to lift my arms, too frightened to move forward after my brother. I can't even say what I want to. I see them waving their guns, disguised by their ugly gas masks.

They look like aliens. It's what they said first. The people on the news. The people on the radio. They threw out hundreds of ridiculous theories. Maybe we had visitors from another world. It was they who infected us. It was the terrorists. It was the first sign of the apocalypse. It was pestilence. They had exhausted each and every theory until they were all too dead to do it anymore.

The disease didn't even have a name. They didn't have the time to give it one.

There it was; a red welt on your forearm or your inner thigh. It itched like the chicken pox. And then it spread. It spread like a wild fire covering your face and your stomach and infecting your organs one by one. The fever hit like a pile of bricks and you were hot and then you were cold and soon you were hot again. You began to hallucinate. Some said they saw God. Some said Lucifer. Some saw dead relatives. The pain was excruciating as it literally melted your organs into acidic, flowing juices. When there was nothing left of you to destroy, you dropped dead. They said if you could survive for 24 hours around someone infected, you had to be immune.

And my brother and I did it.

We watched our parents die first. It wasn't slow and tedious. It was quick and to the point. They were dead within hours of contracting the disease. My brother, strong and seemingly unaffected, burned their bodies in our backyard so dogs wouldn't scavenge their remains. I said a prayer, but he refused. He didn't want to believe in God anymore.

He told me we had to find Rachel. She was the love of his life once. We threw canned foods and bottles of water into the back of our mother's jetta and packed Boots, the family feline, into his carrier. I tried to cry, but my brother wouldn't let me. He grabbed my arm and shook me until I stopped. It was important that we hold it together. We weren't sick. It was important that we find Rachel. Even if she was.

I think we drove forever. We drove through burning suburbia. Neighbors we'd known and loved and even the ones we'd hated wailed in the street. We kept the windows rolled up. We didn't know if it was airborne. We couldn't risk it, my brother said. His voice never wavered. He didn't act afraid. He didn't act anything. It was because he knew she was dead.

I can't follow him now. I can't see anything but black smoke. I wonder if
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they're exterminating us—like insects. We're immune, he keeps shouting. I can hear him, I just can't see him. We've stayed alive for 24 hours. That's all you need to be "immune." I look down at my arm, feeling the familiar prick of a mosquito. It's getting so hot in this cloud of smoke. I think I hear the aliens getting closer. I think I can almost feel their antennae grazing my shoulders. My mosquito bite itches.

We ransacked Rachel's house just as we had ransacked our own. She wasn't there, but both of her parents were rotting on the kitchen floor. I couldn't get over the smell. I ran into the bathroom and got sick. My brother found a working radio and managed to pick up a signal from nearby Chicago. They warned the immune to run as far as they could and to try their best to locate army bases in each state.

Had it spread, he asked me rhetorically. Was it just here? Was it in Europe or in Russia or in New Zealand? He'd always hated humanity, he said. He'd always known we'd destroy ourselves. He'd always been on the fence and now he knew God couldn't exist. What kind of God would let this happen to us, he asked me. What kind of God would watch and do nothing?

I tried to pray again. I tried to pray for Rachel, who was lost. I tried to pray for my brother, who at seventeen couldn't find any beautiful thing left in the world. I tried to pray for me. I wasn't even sure God was listening over the sound of the static from the old radio. Before I knew it, my brother had grabbed my arm and pulled me back outside toward the jetta. We had to leave, he'd said. We had to get to the nearest base on half a tank of gas. We'd be safe there, he said reassuringly. I know he didn't believe it.

And now they see me amidst the darkness. The aliens have spotted me. I'm here and Boots is in the car, all alone and hungry. My brother is screaming at them to lower their guns, but I think they're going to shoot me anyway. I know they see what I see and I still can't say what I want to. My brother sees it too, but he won't believe it. She's only fourteen, he begs them. One of them kicks him out of the way and I see real blood draining into a pool around him where he fell. I think he hit a jagged rock. I think he's probably dead. Maybe it's better this way, I think. I can feel it spreading. It's only a matter of time before I realize that dying is my only answer to relieve the pain. An alien inches closer to me and tilts his head to the side. I think he's sad. I think he was hoping my brother was right. I think he was hoping I was immune. I don't think I ever was.

Hoping for immunity, I mean.
Everyone dies. Everyone is dying. All beauty is gone.

"It's spreading. See?" I hold up my arm to display the maroon welts climbing up my wrist towards my elbow. "It can't always be a beautiful ending," I say. The alien is remorseful, but he aims anyway.

(Bicycle)

Joshua Knight

I saw two wheels spinning
Over gravel and dirt
No trip's end or beginning
Pure, circular earth

And such balance is life
As skin from concrete
So easy, so simple
So close to defeat

(Black Girl Lost)

Jake F. Cox II

Shorty's only nineteen,
but her ways are trifling.
Lives her life by what she sees,
up upon the TV Screen.
Channel 33 be Black Entertainment.
Channel 35 be Music Television.
Through the scenes envisioned,
her brain becomes imprisoned,
to weak to fight,
so Shorty just gives in.
Shorty even has her own male checklist,
to see who qualifies as her next victim.
The checklist has "Gottas", but no needs.
Listen closely to how the checklist reads:

He Gotta have Jordans,
He Gotta have Nikes,
He Gotta have Gucci,
He Gotta have jewelry,
He Gotta wear Rocawear,
He Gotta wear Phatfarm,
He Gotta have a Rolex,
but only on his left arm.
He Gotta have a six-pack,
He Gotta have mad waves,
He Gotta have a skin tone,
darker than Flava Flav.
He Gotta have a Mercedes, never a Toyota.
The only way she settles, if it's a Land Rover.
He be handsome,
He Gotta be "Macking",
And most important overall,
He GOTTA be "Packing".

Attracted to the dudes that are young, hung, and flashy,
but bypasses the dudes that are respectable and classy.
Shorty's mind is only on material,
gateway for that is only through physical.
In order to receive, Shorty Gotta put out.
Shorty receives the fame but gives him, her blouse.
Shorty loves attention, constantly with a big head.
Later on at night, he has her legs behind her head.
Shorty was so beautiful, precious like a pearl,
now she's just a prism in a lightless world.
Shorty gained the riches, but only at what cost.
It's sad to say, she's just another black girl lost.

(Contentment in a Kia)

Shannon Pratt

Darkness threatens to consume my consciousness;
Where do the sky and landscape meet?
Riding in cars always makes me sleepy.
I lean back, let out a deep-reaching yawn,
And glance at you—you're so cute when you drive.

The radio volume is barely on;
I have to strain to hear what's playing.
The song is unrecognizable anyway because
Your taste in music still baffles me.

Realizing I've been quiet, caught up in my thoughts,
Words still escape me—"I love you" seems far too simple.
I settle with reaching for your hand, resting on the gear shift.
It's too dark to see, but I can sense that comforting smile.

I turn back to the window, focusing once again on the outside.
Putting my forehead against the cool glass
(Like I did as a kid on the school bus)
My peripheral follows the waxing moon,
And again I let out a yawn.

(The Current and the Shore)

Joshua Knight

"Oh! How long have I wondered the seas, Sick as I am hungry, blind as I am tired. How long have I searched for this light house; the shining beacon to lead me to the shore? Never once has even a glimmer of its light made it through these peering clouds, just pure sea and sky, a vast and unbearable token of monotony and shame!" The sailor wailed as his small schooner rocked quietly back and forth between the docile waves. The subtle moonlight washing over the vessel left the sailor's figure dark and indiscriminate; hiding age, attractiveness, and nationality, but still seemed to amplify the sound of his hopeless and beautiful voice, singing benignly into the vast sea.

He rested for a moment, as if taking in his surroundings, but his eyes still fluttered in an exasperated blindness. His silence grew as he stared into the ocean, and just as it seemed that his silence would lull the already subtle waves into complete static complacency, he began to wail again.

"Oh woe is me that creatures that stir beneath do not rise to swallow me whole! Making this poor sailor a hero! Immortalized in epic prose, cold, wet bones laid to rest with every other devoured sailor, renowned or unnamed alike. Yet, no beast has come to end my misery! No light shineth from a distant shore; just terrible mediocrity! Lit by nothing but failure and the pale light of the moon! How long am I cursed to this wretched existence; too decrepit to find shore and to cowardly to drive myself to the depths below me!"

The sailor lifted a large brown jug, his sole companion on his small ship, up to his mouth and tilted ravenously, like a man dying of thirst. When he drew it away from his lips the distant hint of a smile was visible through the bitter liquid dribbling down his chin. His body slouched momentarily, then he stood up straight again and continued his lament.

"Oh fire! Brimstone! All things terrible and unpleasant! Hic-up! What fate is worse than this? To be stranded, alone! Hic-up! No hope of ever finding the shore! Cursed to die a slow, meaningless death at the hands of fate and time! What terrible sins have I committed? What loathsome slurs have I uttered, hic-up, to deserve a fate such as this? Woe, I say! Woe is me..." The sailor's monologue began to crescendo and then recede back into the all consuming silence. Just as this silence was once again about to lull the ocean into placidity, it was broken. Between the sailor's wails, one could hear the sound of feet walking on water.

"Why do you holler so? You woke me from sleep in my house on the shore." The sailor shrieked at the sight of the man in the old brown evening robe. "Why do you drift and howl at the moon like a wild animal?"

The man was short and round with a hoarse, irritated voice. He carried a dimly shining lantern that illuminated the water-drenched bottom of his flowing robe.

The Sailor turned away from the old man and tilted his head back in tragic, heavenly song. "Oh, Sweet treachery of the mind ! Oh violent and tragic mirage, drifting above the infinite fathoms beneath. Be gone from me, oh taunting ghost of my failure!"

The old man's voice took on an air of kindness when he saw the nature of this poor, lost sailor. "I assure you sir, I am no mirage. And the water on which you float is hardly ankle high, I would ask that if you must lament, you could at least do it quietly? Oh, you poor fool. Why don't you simply get out and walk away?"

The Sailor looked as if he could not comprehend the old man's words, and his confusion slowly blossomed into hysteria. Thunder was audible in the distance as his eyes flashed with anger and his forehead beaded with cold sweat. He opened his mouth again, this time a booming and venomous trumpet of hate. As he began to croon, the sea itself rose with his voice, engaging the sky in terrible and wondrous storm. "Walk away? Walk away! Oh Demon, or angle, or phantom, or specter! why do you mock me so! Turning my sad fate into a mere pool of ankle high water! hic-up! Oh, foul revenant, I will make you bear the weight of your own ignorance!"

The wind was swirling madly now, exposing the old man's thin, hair-covered legs underneath his blown robe. With each thunderous crash of lightening his face seemed more confused and terrified.

"Please calm down, I mean no harm! What you do is your business sir, I was merely...ah, this weather is turning badly. I must go inside!" The man responded, his voice full of fear now.

"There is nowhere to go but back to the hell from whence you came!"

The Sailor screamed in a revelatory operatic boom. As he did so, he reached into his ruffled jacket and pulled out a pistol. In what seemed to be a split second, he drew the pistol, aimed it directly at the old man's forehead, and pulled the trigger. Before the man could interject, he was blown to lay dead, on his back, in the water; his astounded face still peeking through the surface, exposed and seemingly gasping for air. With one final flash of lighting, the storm died down.

"Woe is me!" The sailor sang in calmer rhythm.

Off in the distance, a lighthouse was visible, spinning lifeless, sterile circles.

(Dead Shark)

Ashley Leamon

"A relationship, I think, is like a shark. You know? It has to constantly move forward or it dies. And I think what we got on our hands is a dead shark."

--Annie Hall

I used to tangle up with you, my head lifted up and down
by your breathing, gazing at you,
desperately needing a stare or glance
or anything that showed a spark of something, anything.
The wall you placed around your heart
was impermeable to even the most heartfelt attacks.
We were not a dead end as much as a cul de sac,
spinning round and round and continuously
ending up at the same place we started.

Deep down I've accepted that
you will never be that guy for me.
The guy that can turn my world electric with one touch
or tell me anything I'd ever need to hear with his eyes.
I want, need, crave to be so twisted up in love with someone
that I can barely breathe, and that is so not you.
My head knows to let you go,
but my heart wants to hold on to the hope
that one day, you will be capable of loving me
softly, hotly, with no holds barred,
the way I wish you would.

Love glows fiercely in those that feel it
And it was never lit in your eyes.

(Dixie Cups)

Minette Gentry

A cup of chocolate raisins, dark and sweet
had more love than any toy you ever bought;
and the rough texture of worn shag carpet
rubbed against my tummy warmly.
Every afternoon, lawyers became my heroes.
Perry Mason and Matlock solved their cases
within that golden hour, as we waited,
breathless, for the confessions of the misguided.
Half of a hug, a kiss on the cheek, perhaps a small smile—
never a word of fondness, for you or to me.
Still, I raise a cup to my lips and let
the tart sugar of dried grapes fall over my tongue.

(The Epic of Gilgamesh And Those That Bring Grievance upon Him)

Shannon Pratt

Tablet 1: the Harlot

The trapper came to me, saying, "Shamhat, come with me.

Mighty Gilgamesh wishes you to come with me."

Anything to appease King Gilgamesh, Bull of Uruk-Haven.

I followed him there unto the appointed place,

in the wilderness to the watering hole.

Two days we watched at the watering hole.

The animals drank, the wild beasts drank,

And still we waited for the wild man of Aruru.

Then there he was—a savage, who is neither man nor beast.

He drank from the watering hole, his long woman's hair spread around his face.

I stared upon that beastly man, fixed my eyes upon his form,
until the trapper called me out of my reverie.

"Go to him Shamhat! Expose your womanly form
and entice him with your natural curves.

Let him lie with you, let him know you, as is woman's lot in life.

Make him forget his animal past and allow his lust to overtake you."

I knew what my duty was, and I knew I must fulfill it
for Gilgamesh, son of Ninsun, Mighty Bull of Uruk-Haven.

So I did not hold myself back—I exposed my breasts, revealed the jewels of
my womanhood, and beckoned the primitive to see my curves.

He looked at me voraciously, the wild beast within him unleashed.

I took him by the hand, we laid upon the ground, and I let him
overtake me—a woman's lot in life.

He ravished me for seven nights, never allowing me sleep or food.

I felt as if I would collapse from the fatigue and the pain.

And the days seemed to change him, he whose name is Enkidu.

The animals which he loved no longer flocked to him,

The animals which he loved seemed frightened of him,

The animals which he loved were disgusted by him.

I had made strong, mighty Enkidu, meteorite of Anu, something less.

I had made mighty Enkidu something more of a man, and I looked
upon him fondly, with an amorous eye.

He was suddenly beautiful in my eyes, as he became wiser.

And yet, I wept to see such a beautifully wild man become so tamed.

His essence had been diminished.

Could I possibly love one who, before, was mostly beast?

Still, I knew the task that Gilgamesh, King of Uruk-Haven,

had enlisted me to do. I knew my unhappy job.

I held his face in my hands and said to him:

"Lovely Enkidu, come with me.

Come with me, mighty Enkidu,

to Uruk-Haven, that Holy place of Gilgamesh.

Follow me to the city, and indulge in all the fine things of people."

He consented to go, that beautiful man, and my love for him erupted—

I succumbed to him, time and again, and, for the first time,
we made love.

Against my feelings and better judgment,
I led Mighty Enkidu into the city and offered him worldly things.
His destiny was intertwined with the King,
so it was he whom I began to blame.
Gilgamesh, it is you who wished my Enkidu be tamed.
King Gilgamesh, it is you who defiled my Enkidu's wild innocence.
Cursed Son of Ninsun, it is you who must take my Enkidu from my side.
The two of them met, Enkidu in a rage, and yet, for reasons
only known to the Gods, the two became friends.
And then, he took my Enkidu away as I called to him:
"Enkidu the Mighty,
Enkidu the Beautiful,
Enkidu the meteorite of Anu.
Return to me, my lover, you who drank with the wild beasts!"
But the Gods must have had another plan—Enkidu the Mighty left me,
choosing a foolhardy journey with the Bull of Uruk.

Each day from that day I dream and long for a time when I can freely,
without penalty from Shamash, rage at wicked Gilgamesh and say:
"Fool! It is you who wished my Enkidu be tamed.
It is you who defiled my Enkidu's wild innocence.
Son of Ninsun, it is you who took my Enkidu from my side."

So I left Enkidu's side that day, he embarking on his destined trek,
and I returned to perform woman's lot in life.
Many men have I lain with since that time, but none shall I ever hold so
dear as beautiful Enkidu.

I, who was formed by Enlil, who must do his bidding."
The mortal then cowered in fear,
which was no surprise.
But then, a terrible thing happened—the world grew dark,
The ground split, and Shamash gave Gilgamesh many winds
To torment and frighten me.
And I knew this man was like a god.
He was ordained by Shamash.
He is Most Mighty, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk-Haven.
Enlil could not save me, so I begged—I begged for my very life.
I begged to remain and carry out Holy Enlil's wishes.

But that Gilgamesh, Bull of Uruk-Haven, had no mercy.
He and that wicked Enkidu slaughtered me,
They desecrated my body, removing my entrails.
I looked on now from another place, a place of Death.

And I called out to Enlil:

“Why did you leave me to die, Master Enlil?

I did nothing more than carry out your wishes, and you left me to die.”

Then I cursed wicked Gilgamesh:

“You, slayer of Humbaba, one who is ordained by Shamash.

A curse be to you and your kin for killing Humbaba, when I only

Carried out the wishes of Enlil.

A curse be to you and your kin, Gilgamesh!”

No one heard my pleas, no one heard my curses, and I watches from the
Place of Death as Gilgamesh and Enkidu destroyed my Cedar.

And now, my fate is tied to something most egregious:

To be kept as a bauble in the pocket and tomb of mortals—

Guarding them from things of the Dead.

A curse be to Gilgamesh and his kin for slaying me and my glory.

(From Orsino's Diary)

Staci Poston

Forsooth! Homosexual I am not!
My fancy for Cesario is fine!
No wonder that very tall he is not—
A woman in man's clothes has plagued my mind!
Oh, wonder of all wonders—can it be?
Viola is Cesario's real name
For he that I love is actually "she"
Quickly, to this beauty I must lay claim!
Hence to the church forthwith to see a priest
Let everyone know of our newfound love
And invite them all to the marriage feast
Oh, how I thank great Jupiter above
This love can be proclaimed throughout the land,
So screw Olivia and Sebastian.

(From Rosaline)

Staci Poston

Oh Romeo, why did thou forsake me
And turn thy attentions to that young wretch?
I only tried to act most coyly—
Too thinly was your patience with me stretched?
Forsooth, I beg thee for another chance
To prove that I return the love you swore
And try to rekindle our lost romance.
Young Juliet, I truly do abhor
For acting so wantonly towards my love.
Right from my grasp, she snatched thee, Romeo.
I swear I love thee more than she, by Jove!
I pray thee, do not be so base and low.
Remember the troth thou gave Rosaline;
Return to me the love that once was mine.

(Generation Network)

Brad Shives-Shirley

For Timothy

I see your page
Again today

I see your smiling face
Again. Always knew
Your viable choice

Would come
At pistol's tip.

How playful pictures
tell the tale,
They darken out
Your eyes.

I leave a post
About the one
And wait for a
Reply. I spend more time

With you the dead.
I hated you alive.

(Hermia to Helena)

Staci Poston

You wretch! You did steal my beloved's love!
While strove I to retain my chastity,
Thou didst give him what I denied him of,
And wooed him on your back beneath a tree!
If only I had let him sleep nearby
Instead of forcing him off in the woods,
I wouldn't be so lonely I could cry,
Though then I would be viewed as tainted goods.
Oh, Lysander, did thou forget thy vow
To love me for all the days of your life?
How can you dote upon Helena now
When you just swore that I would be your wife?
I may be short, but she won't be so fair
When I have raked her eyes and pulled her hair!

(How to Leave a Man)

Minnette Gentry

"Keep walking," that's what they tell me.

"Walk until your feet bleed."

So that's what I do.

I walk even as my eyes burn.

I walk till the wind feel cold,
biting through the hole in my chest.
The highway stretches out before me,
as the stars blow out like busted light bulbs;
bits of broken glass slice through my brown curls.

I walk until the rain beats down the road,
making the asphalt billow steam
that cools the heat of blistered tears.
The steel heels of my boots click against the white line,
igniting a trail of dead weeds behind me.

The suitcase hangs open,
and I let the bruised memories fall on black concrete.
Once a bag of brittle and broken bones,
I'm a dead woman walking;
Dead women can't feel a damned thing.

Mary Epps

I've seen the face of God in you
your fingers move across that old guitar
tip-toeing around frets
walking the surface of grass painted blue
I hold you in my heart
the way silence holds the best part of your song
unspoken but strong
And more real than words could give justice too

(In Color)

Ashley Leamon

Autumn brings that delicious melancholy that
grips me and doesn't let me go until well past November.
I don't know why.

Maybe because I don't come alive
until the leaves turn to art, spinning in the wind,
drenched in colors.

Maybe because that cool, airy bite trips me,
makes me fall for a love that will
send me spinning in color.
Maybe because I always give my heart away in the fall,
only to receive it back in pieces.

Or maybe this year I'll shrivel up brown
and hide from the colors, falling flatly on the ground,
ending up as a crunch underneath someone's shoe.

But oh, how I'd rather be in color...

(Insufferable Bastard)

Daniel James

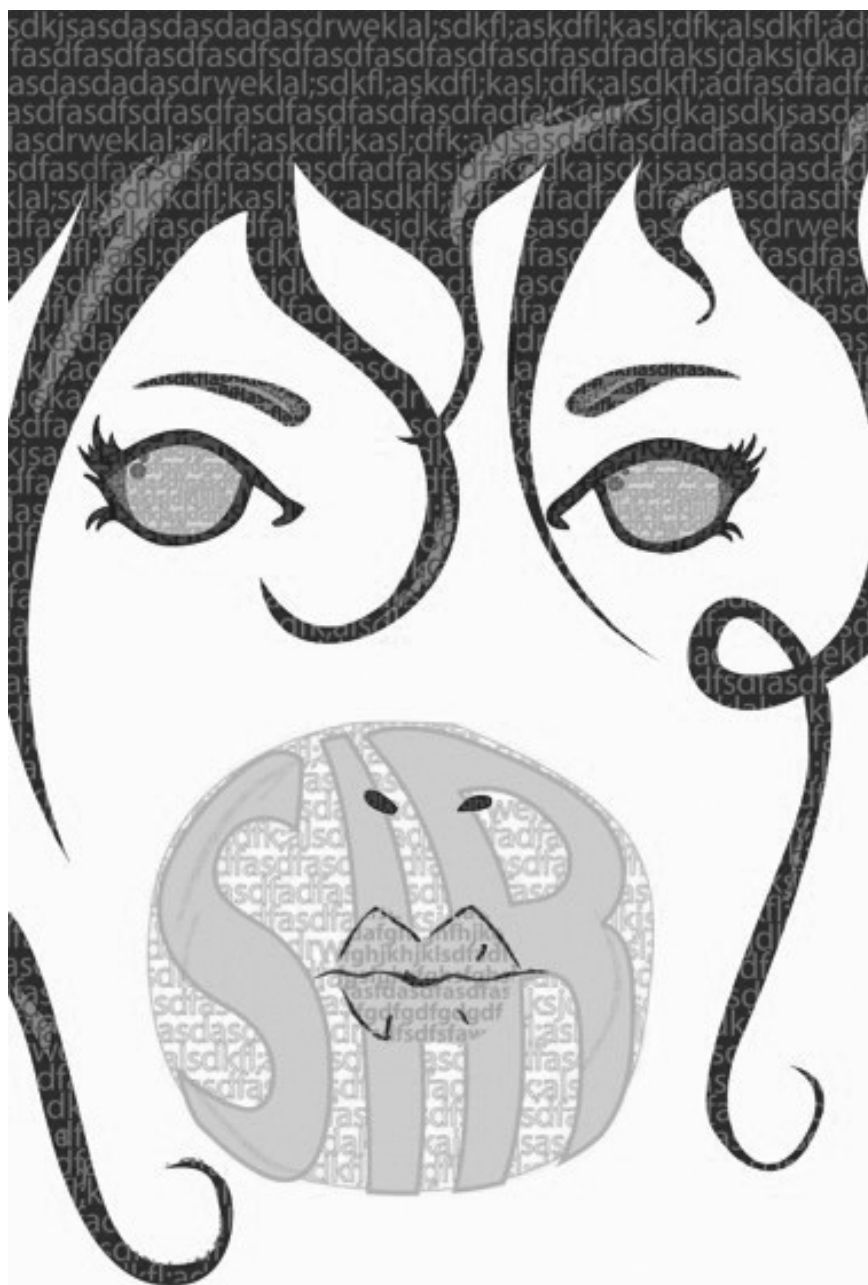
I work some mojo, flash an honest grin.
It takes a while,
But then it takes.
And it's always alarming
How smooth I am in the close.
Not smooth at all:
Like at night, on a soft, jostling road
With the heat on high;
A song pulls you down,
Slightly amusing and safe.

But past the wool, there are claws
And mean.
I flash these teasingly,
Though smiles assure.
I love to see the effect.
Yet it's always a surprise
When that Moment comes,
And we are both left to wonder
If my intentions really were so base.
Or I do.



(A Little Secret)

Kimberly Turner



(Blow Pop)

Jessica Upchurch



(Closer Than They Appear)

Jessica Upchurch



(Companions)

Alexander Turner and Angela Collins



(Electric)

Ashley Leamon



(Heads Up)

Kimberly Turner



(Hello Mr. Blue Sky)

Michaela Moore



(Illumination Hybrid)

Andrew Bates

JANE
& Thor
god of
thunder

RECEIVING



Hey, look up
this music video
and tell me
what you think
TO: JANE
FROM: THOR

RECEIVING...



I'm at my aunt's.
She doesn't have
internet.
TO: THOR
FROM: JANE

O.O HOW DO YOU
LIVE! okay... okay...
There are plenty of non-
internetal things to do
... um ... um ... Have
you tried self-mutilation?

TO: JANE
FROM: THOR

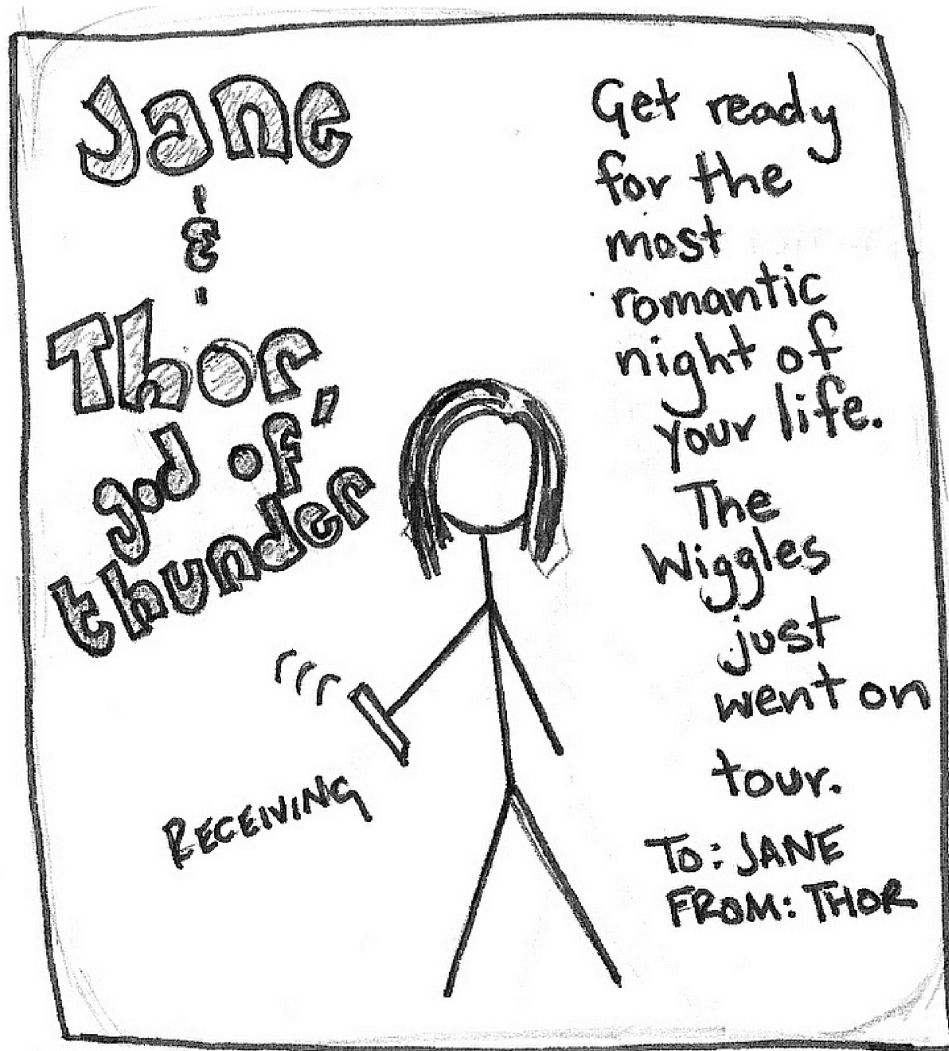
Chill. I'm about to go
to the library. They've
got internet.

TO: THOR
FROM: JANE

And I'll be at the hospital
hitting the morphine
until I forget there are
still places in this
world without broadband.

TO: JANE
FROM: THOR

(Jane and Thor: Morphine)



(Jane and Thor: Romance)

Jessica Upchurch



(Love, War, and Snow)

Alexander Turner and Angela Collins



(NYC Girl)

Jessica Upchurch



(Pebbles)

Jessica Upchurch



(Playa)

Ashley Leamon



(Shakespeare's House)

Lindsey McInville



(Snatched)

Joanna Miller



(Snowman's Scarf)

Andrew Bates



(Solitude)

Kimberly Turner



(West Coast Sunshine)

Jessica Upchurch



(Universal Born)

Cameron McKenzie

(Intentions)

Brandi Hodge

I had every intention
Of walking away—
Of never looking back.

Somewhere in translation,
Those intentions lost meaning.

Whether my confidence faded
Or my heart stopped beating,
Somehow, I stayed.

Let me be the one to say...
Regret is a powerful feeling.

(Interstate)

Joshua Knight

I stood breathless at the gaping mouth of the interstate;
the massive grey tide spilling relentlessly onto a shore of parking lots and shopping centers,
all lit up by towering florescent lights so bright that they mimicked the sun.
The noise of cars rushing by roared and then receded;
creating a constant hum that ebbed and flowed in likeness of the sea.

I closed my eyes and tried to see what I was hearing, to feel the salt breeze,
But my mind was just as conquered and unnatural as the affected landscape.

Instead of seeing my sun drenched shore,
my mind's eye envisioned the interstate,
like a thick black vein of humanity, twisting across the landscape,
feeding and draining towns simultaneously in its path;
carrying with it both sustenance and contamination; life and death.
In place of the breeze, I felt the sick stench of car exhaust fill up my nostrils
and creep steadily down my throat.

I tried to envision the countless lives being carried like blood
through that man-made artery at 70 miles an hour.
All of the families on their way home from vacation,
all the truckers driving tirelessly to their next stop,
and, of course, the thousand pounds of drugs creeping silently along the
industrial corridor, snugly hidden in secret compartments, awaiting their
next secret hand off.

I opened my eyes to see a vagabond, thumbing down cars like a desperate
surfer,
waiting for a wave to ride home.

He stood under one of the fluorescent lights,
but his ragged appearance remained caliginous under its manufactured
gaze;
as if the light refused to shine on a sight so desolate.

He looked at me and held his sign at angle that seemed to hurt his arm,
in order to force the light to shine on it.
It read: "Home is where the heart is."

At that moment, all the traffic and fluorescent lighting began pulsing in sequence –
the whole world began to compose a steady, lumbering beat;
as if it were all born and bound by one rigid, internal rhythm.
I caught my breath.

(Katharina's Sonnet)

Staci Poston

Oh spite! Oh hell! That cad doth beat the door!
I'll put an end to father's business deal
I won't come out; I'll sit here on the floor.
Or bite and scratch and spit and fight and squeal.
I hope his hand falls off from knocking there.
I sha'nt spare him even the slightest glance.
He would do better to go wash his hair,
Then maybe with a maid he'd have a chance.
That smirk of his I cannot stand to bear.
Give him my hand in marriage? I shall not.
Though I suppose a suitor is quite rare,
For harshly judged, I am, by all this lot.
Perhaps I misjudged him as they did me;
Outwards I venture, and we soon shall see...

(La Vida de Bohemia)

Jessica Upchurch

She lives like she dreams
her grandmother would have.
Wrapped in los colores del paraje,
she races with el chico and follows
the branches of the country,
the cracks that run through bricks,
cups and brown skin.
He grins and shouts,
Poesía eres tú!
Poesía eres tú!

Her hot-blue skirt melts
when she jumps into fountains
and flies around her legs
when she plays tag con la policía.
She trades pepper-red scarves
for crafted beads with las muchachas,
and she is thankful for her hair
that reflects the sun when she dances
to church bells on Sunday.

Every afternoon,
los amantes find themselves basking in light,
outside of the covers like two iguanas.
Her pores breath the dust of fiestas,
and sherry coats her tongue.
Old love letters litter the floor
and beads trace the pulse in her neck.
The wind carries on it soft sighs of a siesta.
Mi corazón, mi corazón.

(Letters)

Jessica Upchurch

I choose my words carefully,
writing in small, neat script,
hoping to appear calm and collected.

Honestly, I want these words to jump off the page,
shake you by your shirt collar,
make your head spin
and leave a ringing in your ears.

You're lovely.

But you will only read these words and smile,
then crumple the paper and stow it away,
while I beg you to feel something more.

(Light Sex)

Minette Gentry

Why turn off the light?

What does the dark hide that you can't show me?

Your fingertips swirl round my body,

rainy exhaust clouds outside the car

but the leather seat, cool and smooth, has no give.

Making love between cold sheets on the trailer floor,
the stink of moldy carpet stains the sweeter memory.

Then, the bed begins to sway like curvy hips

while frustration pours out in salty furrows,

even as the heated night blossoms.

My cheek is against my hand

and I can hear the slap of skin against skin,

pounding like the sea against the shore.

I can smell your warmth,

but the spiders dance and crawl in my brain.

They spin thick, dusty cobwebs and I am the fly;

trapped in silky threads where I can't reach out to you.

(Love-shyness)

Kimberly Turner

I dream of a lover never born,
of a swollen, bloody heart
cupped in the palm of a hand
weathered by the world
and cured with the salt of the earth.

I dream of a lover never aged,
of shadowed eyes bleeding
with the burn of my image,
wet with my truth,
and dripping with the color of my skin.

I dream of a lover never seen,
of a ragged hand clinging
to the splinters of a broken bow,
slick fingers slipping
under the weight of an icy hull.

And I dream of a lover never known,
of strange and secret lips,
plump with a ruby faith,
gasping on an endless arch,
and dying by the rush of my silence.

What a shame we never met,
before when I would have loved you.

(The Man in Black)

Joshua Knight

As we finally neared our destination, humming violently along in our vintage, not to say dilapidated, 1975 firebird, the sun was just rising over the Louisiana wilderness, splitting its rays through the swamp-moss covered foliage around us, creating the façade of a prehistoric prison. The serene yet menacing weather made it difficult to believe that we were just sixty-six miles from New Orleans, the pure nature seeming almost unnatural and forced when held so closely to the all-too-human debauchery we had experienced on Bourbon Street the preceding night.

It was indeed this all-too-human nature that led us, me and my brother, Leo, to that pristine but harrowing scene of wilderness. A few hours before Leo and I had been enjoying the all American comforts and festivities that Bourbon Street had to offer. Being musicians, we are naturally inclined to a more free spirited lifestyle, however, the extreme hunger for self destruction displayed on those few re-constructed streets stood on the precipice of discomfort for both Leo and myself. Still, we too had a hunger to satisfy.

After we finished playing our set, we loaded our equipment into the trunk of our car, and then we intended to enjoy our last night in Louisiana. I remember sitting at the bar and ordering a shot of makers mark, (complimentary for the performing musicians, I might add) and after that, I must admit, my recollection of the next few hours is, to say the least, fuzzy. However, I do remember a few key flashes from that last night I spent with my brother.

The first of them is the most inebriated of the evening, and is, in turn, extremely vague, but still, it seems important. I remember, at some point in the evening, Leo and I were walking down bourbon street, and we all the sudden came to a tiny lull in pedestrian traffic. In front of us, in the center of a tiny clearing, seemingly unnoticed by other passersby, was a little blue-dressed girl, only five or six, bawling her eyes out. Now, I remember this because she was looking me directly in the eye, with an intense sadness, one that superseded any emotion that a six year old should be able to feel; as if she was mourning the death of someone she loved dearly. I of course, was sober enough to panic and feel infuriated at the sight of this innocent little girl being exposed to this most explicit climax of human nature, alone. I first turned around to shout into the ubiquitous crowd of sinners, "Hey! There's a little girl here! Has anyone lost a little girl?" but no one seemed to hear me. On this last word I turned back around only to see that the little girl had wandered off. Leo hadn't seen her, and at first I tried to look for her, however, the alcohol in my system quickly turned anxiety to apathy, and apathy to euphoria.

The memories begin to kick in more steadily around three in the morning, when Leo and I had the revolutionary idea to visit a little voodoo shop nestled nicely in-between two bars on Bourbon Street. As we were walking the two blocks to the store, we passed a group of five or six holy rollers protesting in front of a strip club. They stood pious and ignorant, dressed in white robes, holding up signs littered with eschatological promises and crosses scribbled

in permanent marker. As my eyes met with the presumed leader of the group, a stoic and harsh looking man with a noticeably extended stomach, I couldn't help but smirk underneath his cold glare of condemnation; me and Leo were both raised to be religious, and I have no chosen grievance with the church, but I felt pretty certain when looking into that man's eyes, that out of all the drunken, Godless people loitering around that already once destroyed Sodom and Gomorra, you would find no heart more hateful, no tongue more judgmental, than in that cold eyed man, bearing a cross. Still, as I read his sign, which read: "Turn back now, lest your soul burn with your body," I couldn't help but feel that all too familiar sink in my stomach, the kind I used to get when the preacher would teach out of revelations.

We walked through the white vale of condemnation, and into hell itself. The outside of the voodoo shop was austere and primitive looking in the ever encroaching darkness. On the inside, however, it had a slight flare of tourism, with pointless and very loosely voodoo related knick knacks and souvenirs strewn across its shelves, but in the farthest corner of the room stood a shrine that was anything but artificial. It stood black and ominous, ornamented with treacherous looking skulls of creatures I had never seen before and strange beads and jewels, almost emitting an aura of evil. Still, being drunk, young, and stupid, I was strangely attracted to this roped off epitaph. Leo, who is two years younger than me, wanted absolutely nothing to do with the store or the shrine once we walked in, but stayed by my side regardless of his doubt. As I approached the shrine, I read the warning sign on my side of the rope: "DO NOT TOUCH, OR ELSE YOU WILL BE CURSED." I stared at the sign curiously for a few seconds and then turned to my brother, and stated, in the dim-witted confidence of a naysayer who is about to be annihilated, "Pshh!" and then stepped over the rope and grabbed a shimmering red gem from between the eyes of what appeared to be some sort of ram. "This will bring me voodoo luck," I said to my brother, sheepishly. Shortly after I stole the gem, the owner of the store, a dark-skinned, menacing woman, put her hand on my shoulder and offered me a free "reading." I had no idea what a reading was, but I accepted gladly, sloppy-drunk and full of pride for my debonair theft.

She took me to the back and looked me square in the eyes for a few seconds, she used no cards or palm readings. After an awkward and nervous silence she looked at me and said: "You thirst for fame, yes? You are a musician." I told her that yes, I was, and I did – alcohol can bring out caustic spurts of honesty. She then said that she had a friend who could help me, and my brother. "You've heard of the man in black, yes?" she asked me, I responded "No." She continued, "He is more than a man, he is a demy-god, and he can give you great fame, in the blink of an eye...but at a great price."

She went on to explain to me, in a long, drawn out vernacular, that the man in black was a servant of the devil, or something like that, and his job is to, essentially, grant fame and fortune in return for the souls of the recipient. Now, I didn't believe a word this woman said, but I still was extremely interested in it

all. I told her I was interested in meeting this man in black, and asked her how I could find him. She then handed me a small rusted compass, solid black and no markers for north or south, just a single blood-red arrow. She told me to follow the arrow until I got to "the crossroads," and he would be waiting there. I bid her farewell, walked out of the store, and she hastily shut the door and locked it behind me. Leo had been waiting outside smoking a cigarette. He looked at me with his eyes glazed over and sedated. I smiled back, with a newly swelling sobriety, and asked him if he wanted to take a drive.

When I told my brother about where we were going his first reaction was "hell no." However, as I assured him that it was all hocus pocus, and pressed upon him how interesting a journey into the Louisiana bayou would be, he eventually agreed to join me. He was so gentle and kind hearted; he always eventually gave in to my ill-fated, while most often well-intended, schemes. As we meandered down a winding sprawl of dirt roads, I noticed that the compass was not following any kind of directional logic, but instead contouring with each road to lead me in all kinds of different and obscure directions. The sight of the compass filled me with a sense of strange terror and sundered joy. I never showed the winding compass to Leo, I told him the woman gave me directions, because I knew if he saw its possessed, hands moving irrationally, not even the will of his older brother could have kept him moving forward. The world was dead around us; no birds, deer, or any kind of animal at all; life was still and stagnant. The compass led us around for what seemed to be hours, until finally, as the sun began to peek over the trees, we saw the crossroads.

The crossroads was nestled in a small clearing and was beginning to fill with a slight fog. In between a fork of the two adjoining roads stood an old, beaten down house. The house looked like your typical southern home, with a rap around porch and neatly slanted roof, but it carried an extra weight of what looked like over one hundred years of desertion. However, on its dilapidated porch sat an old man, strumming an even older guitar. His skin was darker than dark, as was his ragged old suit. His hair was a pristine white that seemed brilliant but overpowered against his dark complexion. When we pulled into the drive way, he looked me directly in the eyes and smiled a warming, yet haunting smile that will remain engraved in my brain until I'm buried and gone.

"Let's turn around, we're going back. I'm not going in there!" my brother spouted, full of nervous energy. I remained calm and tried to talk him down. At this point I knew the woman in the store was not lying, the look on that man's face and the quiet death surrounding us assured me of that, but I was more drawn to that house than ever...still, I couldn't leave my brother behind. I finally convinced him that this was probably just a lonely old man, probably a retired blues musician, who probably just wanted some company. I knew this was a lie, and I think Leo did too, but he agreed to follow me anyway.

As we stepped out of the car, the morning air was thick and humid around us. We heard an old record player sounding off from the rap around

porch, crackling out a nearly ancient rendition of "Get Back Jordan," as the old man plucked dissonantly along with the song in a stubborn but exact rhythm. We took careful, planned steps towards the rickety wooden steps meeting the porch. The old man kept playing his guitar, only half acknowledging us, until we got about three feet from the steps. At this point, he stood up and leaned his guitar against the arm of his chair, and smiled at us long and hard, but didn't say a word. Me and Leo exchanged an acute and worried glance, but I pushed onward; Leo followed. The man in black gestured into the house, telling us to go inside. I obliged.

Inside, the house was barren. Its walls were water stained and compromised with large holes and blemishes. Its floor was hidden by dust and dirt, only illuminated by precise beams of light creeping in from the holes in the roof. There were only two pieces of furniture in the room we were in: an old arm chair, and a table.

As we walked into the house, the old man followed. He walked towards the table and pulled from beneath it two shot glasses and what looked like a bottle of liquor. He sat the two glasses on the table and began to pour the contents from the un-labeled liquor bottle into them. The liquid coming from the curve-tipped bottle was not like anything I had ever seen; thick and black, with a slight glow. As he finished filling up the first glass the room filled with a pungent stink that made my lungs tighten up and my heart beat fast. I felt every inch of me being pulled towards that shot glass. When he finished pouring the second glass he gestured us towards the liquor and then took a seat in the dusty arm chair. The pull of the drink became stronger with each passing second. Thin lines of pitch-black fog began climbing out the of the glass closest to me, like long, dark fingers, reaching for me. It became nigh irresistible, to the point where I was struggling not run to the glass and suck it in like a man dying of thirst. In fact, the only reason I was holding myself was Leo. The liquid seemed to have the opposite effect on him. He squirmed uncomfortably and began to edge away from the table.

"This is too much, brother. We absolutely cannot go any further, you hear me! There is something seriously wrong here, and we need to leave!" He was frantic; I knew he saw the fog too.

I wasn't frantic though, I was calm. I had already made my choice. My body was still magnetically and insatiably pulled towards the drink, but my mind was still, almost sedated. I had to wonder why the liquid effected Leo so differently, so severely that he stood up to me – which had never happened before, and then I realized that was it. Leo didn't lead himself there, I did. He never wanted to be a musician or see the country, I did. Until that day, Leo had never made a decision or acted for himself, only me. He laid dormant and waited for his brother, the only thing I wasn't sure of is if it was love or fear that kept him by my side.

I was shocked to realize that my brother's attempts to stop me failed to

hinder my approach of the glass. I still crept mechanically toward the liquid, until those black fingers were caressing and pulling me in. With each step I took, Leo looked more terrified and angry.

"Stop! Please!" he shouted at me as he continued to edge his way towards the door. The black man continued to sit in his chair and smile innocently.

The next few pivotal moments happened so quickly that I could swear I was not in control of my actions. As soon as I was within a foot of the table, the fingers ceased to pull me towards the table and, instead, reached into me and pulled something out. I became manic and desperate; I was so thirsty for that black liquid I felt as if my lungs were about to dry up. Then suddenly I heard the booming silence stir beside me; Leo was charging towards me, his eyes full of pain and pity. He shouted something at me, but it sounded far away and I couldn't make it out. When he was within a few feet from me he finally leapt towards me in the form of a high-school football-tackle; I suppose it was all he knew to do. Before my mind could process the situation, my body spun around and my fist caught Leo's chest. Leo fell to the ground and looked up at me with a look of pure agony – never in our years together had I laid a hand on him. He stood up, his eyes cold, his spirit tangibly broken, and began to walk towards the door. Before opening the door and leaving me forever, he looked at me, tears in his eyes, and whispered: "So long, brother."

(Mind If I Smoke?) One Act

Brittany Nance

CHARCTERS:

MAN: early thirties, dressed in suit and tie.

WOMAN: early thirties, heavy French accent,
dressed

in trench coat, black dress, and stilettos, carrying a small purse with cigarettes, lighter.

WAITER: mid-forties, appropriate attire.

MAN 2: mid-twenties, glasses, professional
attire differing from MAN

SETTING:

Two compartments, back-to-back, on a train. Two benches face one another with a sliding door between. The window side of each compartment opens to audience

At rise: Man sits in alone train compartment
with two comfortable benches
opposite one another. Briefcase and
newspaper are beside him, along
with an empty glass. He types
heatedly on his typewriter. The
woman slides the compartment door
open, cigarette in hand, observing

WOMAN

(Heavy French accent)

Bonjour.

(MAN glances up briefly, quickly surveys WOMAN, and continues
typing.)

Do you mind if I have a seat?

(No answer. After a pause, WOMAN decidedly invites herself in,
sitting down. She stares at MAN while smoking her cigarette.)

The Waiter appears in the door frame after knocking.)

WAITER

Excuse me. Dinner will be served shortly. Have you had a chance to look at the menu?

WOMAN

I must have misplaced it. I'll take... a salad. No dressing.

(Pause. She and WAITER look expectantly at MAN. He
continues to type.)

Patrick will take a steak. Won't you, darling?

(MAN looks up.)

With a baked potato. But try not to drown it in butter... Patrick doesn't need all that

(SIR): 156

cholesterol.

(WOMAN pats MAN's knee affectionately.)

WAITER

Very good. Anything else?

MAN

Privacy.

WOMAN

(Simultaneously with MAN.)

Martini.

WAITER

I...

WOMAN

Dry.

MAN

(Glances up, annoyed, but continues typing.)

Another scotch, thanks.

WAITER

Very good. I'll take these out of your way...

(Picks up two glasses resting on the bench beside MAN.)

And be right back with your drinks.

(He Exits, sliding compartment door closed.)

MAN

I'm not hungry, you know.

WOMAN

You look like you haven't eaten in a while. Too... busy, perhaps?

(Pause.)

...What are you writing?

MAN

I attempting to write...

WOMAN

(Retrieving a cigarette from her purse.)

You don't look like you are having any problem. Do you have a light?

(MAN looks up and pulls lighter from pocket. He lights it.)

MAN

Interesting, how perception works.

WOMAN

Tell me, Patrick...

MAN

Pardon?

WOMAN

Hmm?

MAN

My name. It isn't Patrick.

WOMAN

Fred, darling! Don't be so argumentative.

(MAN glances up for a short pause, then resumes his writing.)

You know, I really don't see how you do it.

MAN

Do what?

WOMAN

(Gestures with her cigarette.)

Write.

MAN

Illiteracy does seem to be a growing problem. And here I thought obesity was our main concern...

WOMAN

I mean, without getting dizzy. Motion sickness, you know?

MAN

You get used to it.

WOMAN

Maybe for you it is easier.

(Pause. Finishing her cigarette, she puts it out and lights another.)

But why write to begin with if you don't enjoy it?

MAN

Excuse me?

WOMAN

You don't look like you enjoy it. Not at the moment.

MAN

I'm on a deadline.

WOMAN

Ah. So that's what you do. You are a writer, no?

MAN

Mhmm.

WOMAN

What kind?

MAN

Journalist.

WOMAN

You are working on an article, then.

MAN

No. I'm not.

WOMAN

Then why are you in such a hurry?

MAN

It's a book. Now, if you don't mind...

(He begins typing.)

WOMAN

Ha!

MAN

(Pauses, looks up.)

...Did you have something to say?

WOMAN

Moi? Non, nothing. Besides, you seem busy.

MAN

Really?

WOMAN

I won't keep you. Please...

(She gestures to his typewriter. Crosses legs.)

MAN

How considerate of you.

(Aggravated, he returns to typing. She takes a long draw of cigarette, crosses and uncrosses legs. Pause.)

WOMAN

What is it about?

MAN

(Slams a fist on the bench.)

Do you mind?!

(WAITER opens the door, after a brief knock, with their drinks. He picks up the empty glass beside MAN and distributes the martini and scotch.)

WAITER

Your food will be out shortly. Can I get you anything else?

WOMAN

Fred, dear?

(MAN glances angrily at her, then continues to type.)

I think we're fine. Thank you.

(WAITER exits. Pause. WOMAN smokes for a moment, takes a sip of her drink, readjusts her position.)

WOMAN

...It's just...

MAN

(Throwing hands up.)

What?! It's just... what?

WOMAN

You must have better things to do than sit around and...write a book.

MAN

What's wrong with that?

WOMAN

Oh, I don't know...

(Peers into audience as if looking through a window. Gestures with cigarette.)

We're on this gorgeous ride. Lots of trees, beautiful lakes, lush gardens...

MAN

(Without pause or looking up.)

All you're missing is the pretty portrait family, smiling for the lens.

WOMAN

A picture you would have missed out on, apparently.

MAN

I was the one in the corner, hunched over my notebook, attempting to make a living.

WOMAN

Is that so?

MAN

Indeed.

(Pause.)

WOMAN

...There's just so much more to do than sit around and write.... So why do it?

(MAN empties the contents of his glass.)

MAN

It's something my...

(Hesitates, then proceeds:)

...my psychiatrist has me doing.

WOMAN

That sounds like a crock of shit.

MAN

Look, I really don't have time to...

WOMAN

Why not? What is your hurry?

MAN

I'm on a deadline. Like I said.

WOMAN

Your psychiatrist sounds somewhat... impatient.

(She tilts her head and drags her teeth over her lower lip.)

MAN

I have an interview with his publisher. Tomorrow. It's supposed to be finished by now.

WOMAN

And you wait until the day before to start?

MAN

I didn't just start.

WOMAN

Why is it so important that you finish by tomorrow if it's just... treatment?

MAN

Well, there is a possibility that it'll be a hit... And I may or may not need the money.

WOMAN

Ah...I see. So how much do you have left to write?

MAN

A few chapters.

(Pause.)

I'm working on the ending. Why do you want to know?

WOMAN

Curiosity. I thought the ending was the easiest part.

MAN

(Pause.)

It's not.

WOMAN

I will help you, then.

MAN

Excuse me?

WOMAN

I will help you finish your ending.

MAN

It's not that simple.

WOMAN

Yes it is. You tell me what it is about, and I will tell you what should happen next.

MAN

It's not going to happen.

WOMAN

Why not? Is it a mysterious story? I am good with those.

MAN

No. No, it's not a mysterious story.

WOMAN

Then what is...

(Waves cigarette in thought:)

...le genre?

(The WAITER Enters with food, another round of drinks, and a small folding table. He arranges the plates and drinks.)

WAITER

Is there anything else I can get for you?

MAN

We're fine.

(WAITER exits. The WOMAN surveys the MAN.)

WOMAN

So. What is it?

MAN

(Glancing briefly at her plate.)

A...salad?

WOMAN

Your book. Is it a romantic one?

MAN

(Looking up.)

Why do you ask? Do I seem like a... a romantic to you?

WOMAN

Perhaps... I suppose you have the potential.

MAN

Potential, huh? It's because I'm oozing with the unbridled charm of a classically handsome, nineteenth century sex god, is that it?

WOMAN

Ah. So it's a fantasy novel.

MAN

Nice. Really funny.

WOMAN

You're really not going to tell me?

MAN

That depends. Are you analyzing me?

WOMAN

Perhaps. So what is it about?

(He looks curiously at her for a moment.)

MAN

...Guess.

WOMAN

Just tell me.

MAN

It's more interesting this way. Since you're hell-bent on distracting me it might as well be entertaining.

WOMAN

So this is what it comes down to...

MAN

(Glancing at his untouched steak.)

There's a steak in it for you if you guess right.

WOMAN

I'm a vegetarian.

MAN

That's not contagious, is it?

WOMAN

Tell me something else about your book.

MAN

Well I'm not quite...

WOMAN

Besides the fact that it's unfinished.

MAN

Ah. Well, then. There's a man in it...

WOMAN

The main character?

MAN

You could say that. He's got this fiancé but he's recently met another woman.

WOMAN

And...? Don't tell me that he "doesn't want to hurt her" by telling his fiancé the truth. It's a drama, is that it?

MAN

No, it's not. As I was saying, he loves his fiancé but there's just something about this other woman...

WOMAN

The sex.

MAN

Excuse me?

WOMAN

It's the sex. He likes it better when the other woman....

MAN

Has anyone ever told you how romantic you are?

WOMAN

It's true, Gregory. You're all in it for the fuck.

MAN

You know this because...? And for the last time, my name isn't...!

WOMAN

Why else would he leave the woman he loved for some... prostitute?

MAN

They might have more things in common, or are destined by fate, or...

WOMAN

You're leaving your fiancé for some... harlot.

(Takes a draw on cigarette.)

Classy, Mr. Romantic.

MAN

Excuse me? It's the character, not me! Not in real life. Have you always been this shallow in your generalizations?

WOMAN

You don't expect me to believe he is not based on you, do you?

MAN

But... I'm not engaged!

WOMAN

You're single?

(He finishes his drink, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.)

MAN

Well when you say it like that...

(Short pause. She inhales deeply on cigarette, surveying MAN.)

WOMAN

Does your girlfriend mind that you are an alcoholic?

MAN

Does your boyfriend mind that you're a chain smoker?

WOMAN

We all have our weaknesses, our little addictions.

MAN

Mmmm.

WOMAN

You agree?

MAN

I could have sworn that was my best noncommittal, uninterested, guttural reply.

WOMAN

But you agree, nonetheless.

(Pause. He turns the glass over in his hand.)

MAN

...I suppose.

WOMAN

Drinking isn't yours, though...

(She uncrosses and crosses her legs; his eyes follow them.)

MAN

Oh, really? How observant of you... You must invest a great deal in the subject.

(Lifts a shoulder and lets it fall. Finishes cigarette, lights another.)

WOMAN

So... what is wrong with Sarah?

MAN

Who?

WOMAN

Your girlfriend.

MAN

My character? Her name is Anna.

WOMAN

So what's wrong with her? Why do you want the other woman?

MAN

Who said I did?

WOMAN

You.

MAN

I said I was thinking about being with the other woman. My character, I mean.

WOMAN

Because of the sex.

(Pauses; he stares at her.)

MAN

...Yes. Because of the sex.

WOMAN

See? All men are alike.

MAN

In novels, maybe.

WOMAN

In real life.

(She inhales on cigarette.)

So it is a romance novel.

MAN

Not quite.

WOMAN

All men are the same. They see a woman and automatically they envision her naked. It is... a shame, I think. What happens next in your pornographic novel?

MAN

Pornographic...?

WOMAN

That is what a romance novel is, no? Literary porn?

MAN

(Grimaces.)

Something like that.

WOMAN

Aha! So that is your weakness.

MAN

Don't be ridiculous.

WOMAN

No, no, it is. That is why your psychiatrist asked you to write a romance novel... To take out your sexual inclinations in writing. A substitute for medication, non? I personally don't think you're getting your money's worth.

MAN

Because you're so knowledgeable in the field.

WOMAN

Well if you ever need... inspiration...

(She uncrosses her legs. His eyes linger on them.)

MAN

Ah, alright...

WOMAN

So what does Sarah think about this addiction?

MAN

To sex?

WOMAN

(Smirks.)

To writing.

MAN

(Jerking his eyes back to the typewriter.)

Do you make this a hobby of yours? Interrogating random strangers on trains?

(She smiles and stretches her arms, yawning.)

WOMAN

It feels like we've been riding for days.

MAN

Where are you going?

WOMAN

I'm posing.

MAN

You're a model?

WOMAN

Something like that.. I pose for art classes, mainly, but if they pay me well enough I'll do some... individual sessions.

MAN

You do this nude?

WOMAN

(Smiling, amused.)

Intrigued?

(Pause, she laughs lightly.)

I do whatever they pay me to do. Are you an artist, David?

(Pause.)

MAN

I... Are you always this... difficult?

WOMAN

I'm not easy if that's what you mean.

MAN

I wouldn't suggest that sort of thing.

WOMAN

No, no. You're too much of a gentleman for that.

MAN

So is that what you do for a living? That can't pay too well.

WOMAN

Oh darling...

(Waves cigarette:)

Life is too short too worry over such... petty things.

MAN

Like money and health? Lord, woman.

WOMAN

You've really got to loosen up, David. Learn to live a little.

MAN

You don't think I'm living?

WOMAN

I think you should start. Break some rules, cross a few lines... Fuck Rachel.

MAN

Who's Rachel?

WOMAN

Rachel. That woman you're seeing. You know, the one the side.

MAN

My character isn't seeing anyone on the side. He's thinking about it.

WOMAN

You call sex just "thinking about it"?

MAN

Sex is different from a relationship. And anyway, he'll probably stay with his love, Anna.

WOMAN

You don't know that yet. Rachel could add a little... drama to your story. You want her, so be with her instead.

MAN

Who says I want a Rachel?

(She takes a long draw of her cigarette.)

WOMAN

...I think you need one.

(He loosens his tie.)

(SIR): 170

MAN

Perhaps. You think it would make my story better?

WOMAN

Yes, I do. And really... the only way of truly conquering your little addiction is to give in to it.

(Pause. Pulls olive from drink. Drops cigarette into martini.)

Your psychiatrist isn't giving you any medication... Make it delectable.

(Slowly wraps lips around olive, savoring it. Notices MAN's discomfort.)

Make it...satisfying.

MAN

God... It's sweltering in here. And scotch on an empty stomach...

(Glancing at his untouched steak.)

Not the best idea, now that I think about it. Hmm... I could add a scene or two to make it more... colorful. But that still leaves the ending.

(Pause. He readjusts his seating position. WAITER enters.)

WAITER

Excuse me, but we will be entering a tunnel shortly. Please do not be alarmed. I will take these, if you are through...

(He receives a nod from MAN and gathers dishes and glasses.

Exits. The man runs a hand through his hair.)

MAN

Damn. How far are we away?

(Looks at his watch. Glances out to the audience, shakes head.

I must finish this before we stop. I can't do anything in the dark.

(The WOMAN stands, steps to MAN, her breasts near his head.

She leans in seductively toward his ear.)

WOMAN

Now that's not entirely true...

(The sound of train begins in a crescendo. WOMAN unknots MAN's tie and slips it from around his neck. She takes his hand and guides it up the outside of her thigh. Lights begin to flicker and train sound grows louder. Only flashes of set can be seen. The whistle blows.

Finally, the lights return and noise decrescendos as WOMAN tugs her dress down around her thighs, reapplies lipstick from her purse and gathers her coat.)

WOMAN

..A decent ending, non?

MAN

I... yes. Rachel is quite the ending.

(He Stands, wavering slightly, clothing in disarray. He steps forward and the two look at one another for a moment. WOMAN turns around and steps out of the compartment. The stage revolves as she exits so that she enters another compartment when she steps fully through the sliding door.

There, MAN 2 sleeps on a bench, feet crossed at the ankles on the
opposite bench, newspaper on chest and glasses askew.

WOMAN

hand to her bosom.)

smirks, fluffs her hair and presses her

WOMAN

(Heavy southern belle accent. Loudly.)

My goodness!

(MAN 2 wakes, startled, and adjusts himself, pushing up glasses
and removing his feet from the bench.)

I do declare that the sun and it's heat have made war against me! That tunnel was so dark and scary and... Why- this isn't even my compartment... I believe I've completely lost my way.

(She fans herself and braces against door.)

What does a lady have to do around here to get some refreshment? Oh, I'm so sorry! I've lost my manners! I'm Caroline. Caroline Dupree.

(Wide-eyed and upright, MAN 2 looks past WOMAN and signals
outside.)

MAN 2

Waiter!

WOMAN

I simply knew we were gon' be the best of friends!

(She steps to where window would be, hands on hips,
her back to MAN 2—then glances over her shoulder)

Mind if I smoke?

(End.)

(Month 12)

Arron Compton

We keep it cold as December
To disenchant ourselves from this place
But home is what it is, until the day it's not
And the bones that freeze
Can be warmed with a cover
So cuddle up buttercup, it's cold like December

(Neither Here nor There)

Jessica Upchurch

In the light of the day, I know what you know,
and I know myself.
I know my right and rank,
and I know that you are my friend.
I am aware of your truth.

But as night dawns,
I turn inward
and reach out to the clouds
and bend towards the roots
and I see you lie,
and I feel my heart,
a queer thing
that I want to embrace
and repel from myself.
My thoughts scatter
and it sees dewed thorns
and it knows wide eyes
and I am weightless
and not of this world,
and apart of everything in it.

I love you.
I hate you.

(On the Highway, Late at Night)

Jessica Upchurch

I am a deer who casually stands on the rise of a road.
You are a driver, speeding down the same lonely road.
Your bright lights blind me, and suddenly I feel that it will be best to
take the risk.
I hesitate and then leap with a God-given grace.
You swear to the same God as you plow into me.
You assess the damage; I silently thrash about a little before I die.
Your insurance ends up paying for the damage, thankfully.
I am left to bake under a happy sun.
I wish for my remains to serve as a warning for others and a caution-
ary tale to you.
And my carcass will be a flaw in an otherwise pretty landscape.

(Picaro)

Kimberly Turner

Tonight I will be brilliant.

We have not met,
but let me introduce myself:

Tonight I would write
a thousand lines
just to wake next to you
under a heaven of reigning sapphire
and watch your eyes open to me
in a hot and lovely flutter.

Tomorrow, when sunlight steals
beneath my window panes
and winds between my sheets,
and the glow of a new sun
wipes away any trace
of the measure of my affection,
a quick and ruthless brush
of my love to the floor,
we will be no more than
two hearts tethered together
by the shadows lovers cast
until the haze recedes
and we are no longer hidden
behind the promise of endless night;
do not worry for me, picaro,
I only intend to borrow your love a moment.

Tomorrow you are free,
an ivy climbing to the sun,
a stone plummeting
to the heart of a solid blue sea,
but tonight, tonight I will dazzle you,
take captive your eyes,
and inspire delight in you
because tonight I am an orchard
of cherry-colored glass;
tonight we will forget our bodies,
forget the tongues in our mouths,
forget our hair and eyes and hands,
forget the dim and hush of the evening,
and we will fill each other up.

Tonight we will fill
the hollows of our bones,
replace our marrow
with one another
and fill each other up
to the very brim.

(Rocking Out in the Dark)

Matthew Porter

A heavy rock song playing in the dark,
silhouetted bodies slink and gyrate enthralled.
Tensions wound tight as guitar strings,
a dangerous rhythm driven by the drums.

Shrouded wraiths writhe enthralled,
the tempo rises, lyrics and lust explode.
Savage rhythms pressed by the drums,
led by screaming guitars, fingers search the brink.

The tempo pulses, lusty lyrics exploding,
lines laid with each chorus, reverberations building deeply.
Led by the growling vocalist, skilled hands fight for the brink,
searching for that precipice of the soul-shaking anthem.

Dervishes quiver with reverberations rumbling deeply,
a rapturous clash of the symbols, the lyrics end breathlessly,
reaching the climax of the soul-shaking anthem,
heavy huffs erratically break up the music.

Raptured in collision, lyrics given to breathlessness.
Tensions broken like riled guitar strings,
heavy huffs slow as the music fades.
Laying rocked, a heavy song played out in the dark.

(Screw Freud, I Want My Mommy)

Arron Compton

Laying flat out
I look forward to the emptiness
Of a midday nap and bad television
The world seems inviting, but its fire outside
And my skin is sensitive
So I'll ignore the day and live in utero
Curled up and dreaming
Like the child home with mother

I think back
Standing in the light of the kitchen window
Watering flowers
Her hair is shining brilliant
Her love is my blanket and I miss it
I want to be naive and frail again
Forget responsibility and be held like a boy
The small, meek existence is all I yearn for

I need my puppy-dog blanket
Tattered from years of restless nights
I need my bunk beds stacked atop each other
With my brother sleeping soundly below
I need Mrs. Mills giving our class hot chocolate
And reading us Christmas stories
I need hide and seek in backyards
And nothing to fear besides the monsters from the movies.

Throw away my cell phone
Throw away my car keys
Sell my computer
Forget how to read
Move back home
And sleep soundly
Like a boy loved by his mother
Living each day free
Not knowing what it feels like
To be dying slowly

(Silence the Pianos)

Joanna Miller

Your death was not beautiful or romantic,
like I see in the movies.

It was blunt, final, irresolvable,
a blindsiding end without an end.

You are the one who died,
yet I am the one who is broken in half.
I am left to deal with this palpable emotion,
the weight of grief pressing into my chest,
pounding through my head,
and filling my lungs.

I don't know where you are now,
or what you do, or what you look like.
I don't know how long I will have to wait to see you again.
I'm not sure how I'll recognize you,
or if you will even remember me at all.

(Someone Else's Labor)

Kimberly Turner

Dancing and dancing,
glittering skirt swirling loosely
around my hips,
tulle netted around my knees,
the fabric of someone else's labor
tickling my calves.

I am crying now.
My body is stiff with fear.
Tears flow and burn
in arrows around the apples of my cheeks.
They mark a trail to my chin.
He rests between my legs.
I can feel his skin against my thigh.
But he only moves.
His eyes never leave mine.
He begs for silence.
He does not like when I cry.

Singing and singing,
humming the chords of songs
I heard as a child,
the sweet melodies
of coming autumns
and of a lost youth
curling quietly in my throat.

(Someplace Like Nowhere)

Kimberly Turner

I grew up
in someplace like nowhere
with no one and nothing
of any real consequence.
Those were the times
when we drove on back roads
and watched as grassy fields
and bales of hay
marked our passage.
We rode with our feet
propped on the dash,
and you sang softly off key
as I worked to match the pitch
over your warbled but heartfelt notes.
We were reverent then,
when we passed through the towns
of a white church generation,
listening hopeful
as folk songs filled our silences.
Yes, I am from
a place like nowhere,
where we spent the majority
of our young lives
trying our hardest
to drive away,
when the truth is
we will probably die here,
all the same.

(Snow)

Joanna Miller

We sit on the cold stone porch
looking out at the night-fallen snow.
Your face is covered in shadow —
the fire of your cigarette is the only proof of your existence.

I wonder what you're thinking
and long to be inside your head,
then desperately hope that this time,
maybe this time,
you'll spill your secrets.

You mention how different everything looks
in this strange world of white.
We slip back into silence as you sweep snowflakes from my eyelashes
and brush your lips across my cheek.

The most frightening thing in the world is loving you.

(Streetlights)

Kimberly Turner

I feel your sadness
like a song in my ear;
it is surrounding us
in my tiny little car
and it is buckling us in
and strapping us down
and fogging the windows.

And in my mind,
I am singing to you,
come softly, darling,
come softly, but you
are no longer with me;
you are wordless and
travelling the opposite lane.

(A Sympathetic Magic)

Kimberly Turner

Before religion, there was magic:
a simple thread winding reverently
through the stitches of a time undone,
a contagious thrum jumping wildly
from pulse to pulse,
a dusky, midnight air expanding
in ritual breath,
a slow and artless gravity melting
the skin from our bones.

(The Tattoo)

Joanna Miller

Your name covers my whole body in colors, shapes, lines,
and letters.

Every day I remember the pain and adrenaline it took to create it.

And every day I wonder why no one else can see it.

I sat perfectly still as you marked me.

My hands still shake when I remember your touch,

And my heart threatens to collapse like an over-injected vein.

You're gone now, and I try to understand why I let you leave
this imprint upon me,

Why I let you mark every aspect of my life with your name.

Your name, etched across my arms, is all that is left of you.

(That's Where I'll Always Love You)

Joanna Miller

The air is perfectly still.

There is no wind, no sound –

just minutes passing

through the unzipped windows of your Jeep.

You comment on the terrible play,

and we begin to chuckle to ourselves, remembering the bad British accents

and failed attempts at humor.

My high-heeled shoes have long been discarded in the back seat,

and you have loosened the noose of your tie.

You crumple the wrapper from your late night fast food

and invite me to crawl over the console,

squeezing myself between you and the steering wheel.

I find a place to rest my head in the crook of your shoulder.

When I've finally managed to fit myself into your puzzle,

you wrap your arms around me and bury your face in my hair.

It seems like a good time to turn on the radio, but we resist,

and sit quietly in the dark,

becoming an anonymous part of the night.

I wonder if I will remember this moment in twenty years.

(The Time Warp)

Ashley Leamon

You took my hand and made me get on.
“It’s just me and you, always has been,
always will. Trust me,” you said. You promised that
I wouldn’t fall to my death or have a heart attack.
My brains wouldn’t scramble up like breakfast
and seep out through my ears.
I got on and strapped in, but I refused
to open my eyes.

You held my hand, I squeezed yours so hard
that my nails made tiny crescents in your palm.
We inched forward, approaching the drop.
I still couldn’t open my eyes.
You whispered, “If you can’t see it, what’s the point?”
I didn’t need to see it; I didn’t even want to feel it
but you trapped me there, with no way out.

We paused just before the plunge.
You gently nudged me and kissed my shoulder.
I slowly opened my eyes and looked at you,
saw you, took all of you in. And I trusted.
Suddenly, we fell, quickly and stupidly,
with twists and turns that shook me until I fell apart.
And then, as rapidly as it began, it ended.
Trust turned to disgust as quickly as the
bruises darkened, creeping up my arms.

I sat, windblown and furious
trying to figure out what had happened:
why you swung, why I cried, why you left,
and why I’m still sitting here,
wishing that I had never opened my eyes.

(Tracks)

Jessica Upchurch

This is the beginning of a short story.

A gentleman sat against one wall, and stared out the windows opposite him. The dull grey and dirt-brown buildings bled together and blurred as the train raced down its designated path. The click-clack created a dull roar in the back of the man's mind, which was anywhere but on the train. And to any observer, the man would seem a mere statue. He sat stock-still; his posture was rigid and his spine an attachment to the back of his seat. His hands were folded neatly and rested atop the worn briefcase which perched on his lap. His legs angled with the edge of his seat, and his feet were firmly planted together on the linoleum floor. It seemed as though the man was in fact an extension of the train itself. As if perhaps the floor sprouted a pair of cracked leather shoes and a body followed. Maybe as a joke, one of the locomotive's passengers placed a hat on the fleshed growth, for indeed, the hat did not quite match the plain grey suit or the shabby brown over-coat that was in its early stages of death.

The natural light that danced in the windows was suddenly extinguished as the train raced into a tunnel. A sense of claustrophobia crept into the cars, but was only sensed by those who were not accustomed to this type of transportation. The gentleman who had been trapped by his thoughts since he could form them did not bat an eye at the shifting atmosphere. He was quite used to the hopeless feeling that came with knowing you were somewhere whimsically unsafe, a mercurial location that on any other day would sit dormant and serene, but would awaken and erupt upon your arrival. At least if the train derailed, about seventy percent of the passengers had an eighty-five percent chance of escaping unscathed. The passengers braced themselves as the train began to slow in anticipation of the next stop. The clacks turned into individual clicks and the whine of the train joints alerted everyone to its dated nature.

The familiar picture of electric blue graffiti that graced the station's walls entered the man's vision. It was rather illegible with all of its lack of spacing and loops and unnecessary flourishes; the man liked to pretend that, if he were to decode the babble, there would be philosophy underneath. But probably it was just a promotional message brought to you by the delinquents of a perpetual cycle. The train belched steam, and the man's musings were forgotten as the doors opened, and people rushed out as if the cars were being squeezed and its contents forced out to relieve pressure. To account for equilibrium, however, just as many people fought their way inside the waiting beast.

The man did not move. He did not even seem to have a passing thought of hesitation at staying on the train. He didn't check his watch to see if he would be on time; he didn't sigh and struggle against the wave of bodies. He didn't fidget or worry himself with the exhausting energy of his fellow human beings.

The doors closed and cut off the tide and a few moments later, the train resumed its journey. The new passengers quickly filled empty spaces. A woman adorned with bold green jewelry absently sat down next to the gentleman. Her perfume radiated off her body like a powerful aura. Like a French knock-off kind of aura. To anyone's surprise, the human extension of the train was not unaffected by the strong force that surrounded the lady, and in one fluid, habitual motion, the man pulled a kerchief from his pocket and sneezed violently.

The woman started and looked at the man as though seeing him for the first time. "Oh!" She huffed and, extremely flustered, she stood and walked into the adjoined car.

(Two Dollars and Three Words in the Hole)

Arron Compton

electricity
heat moving from you to me
fingers touch my trembling stomach
as you wrapped your legs around me
don't wanna leave
and right now i'd give anything
for one more second
in this spinning stillness
and one more heart beat
pounding in our chests
two more moments
to kiss both of your lips
and one last question
to ask what you meant

grass grows yellow in the light
from your glance
last words never spoken
leave me short my last chance
I wrote you a letter that I beg
you to forget
cause the real words written
were the ones never sent
and last year's token
was this month's rent
but we're still two dollars short
to pay off all we spent

I'd give everything
for one more second to dance uncontrollably
and I could grab you by the collar of your thrift-store tee.
just three last gasps
to spit out words I'll never mean
and you can laugh and sigh and squirm uncomfortably.

(Unbrotherly Love)

David Dugas

Nights of debauchery
So many hours
of sleep lost to
this day.
Our sisters in the
next room and
our parents still asleep.
A touch across
my waistline and
a second further down.
The feelings were
far from fitting
that of brothers.
My body arched
into his protective palm.
My childhood was shattered
And I never knew.
In the prime of my
life, I still seek
to replicate those sins.
A ghost of a touch
across a shoulder.
The corners of my
mouth shift up.

(Whisper the Last)

Daniel James

i need those around me who strive
And push. For on my own watch,
i develop a paunch,
Swallowing my hopes, some beers,
And insecurities.

i need eyes watching to impress and
Make laugh, a reason to get up
And have us a bath:
To scour the shame, the sloth,
And self-loathing.

Yes, left on my own i am lazy,
A waste. My indolence grows
At such a rapid pace—
But then,
i'm not sure i really care.

Indeed, i don't. i'm fine
Without you. So, if you please
i'll defer, and kindly bid thee
Adieu.

Just leave me be, i say,
Sigh,
And say farewell.

And left on my own i—
i'll fester and swell.

(WHO ARE YOU NOW?)

A play in one act

Sara Neil

At rise: Three young adults are sitting on an old sofa and an arm chair in a room covered with Bob Marley posters and psychedelic peace signs. Smoke created from dry ice is clouding the stage.

Daniel

(packing a substance into a blunt)

I sometimes think about her. I mean, it isn't often and it isn't out of guilt or even, you know...pity. I just wonder what would have happened.

Rich

(takes a long drag from his bowl)

You're so much better off. She was a whore.

Daniel

I know, right?

Ashley

I don't see what was so great about this chick to begin with.

Rich

Me neither.

Daniel

(sarcastic tone, starts to take a drag)

Right. Like you didn't jump at the chance to fuck around with her when I was done.

Ashley

(laughing)

Sloppy seconds, Rich? Follow the crowd much?

Rich

You don't even know what you're talking about, ok? I mean for fuck's sake, I was horny, she was willing...why not?

Ashley

(grabs a beer from a nearby mini fridge)

She was willing? She was hurt. Destroyed even.

Daniel

She was fine.

Ashley

(still laughing, sips her beer)

You broke her into a million pieces. She wasn't fine. Believe me. I'm a girl. I know these things.

Daniel

She said she was fine.

Ashley

She fucked around with him.

(points at Rich)

Rich

Hey! Fuck you! She always wanted me. Or at least she wondered what it was like to have me. That's all. And after Daniel got tired of her, she realized it was her chance and so she went for it. I obliged because, well...because

I'm a decent guy sometimes. I like to lend a helping hand.

Ashley

You weren't doing her any favors. She just wanted Daniel to know.

Daniel

(shrugs)

I didn't care. I gave him permission.

Ashley

You didn't care? Not even a little? Weren't you and her like, I don't know... best friends or some shit for years?

Daniel

Things change, I guess.

Ashley

So you fucked her and got bored?

Rich

(starts laughing, then begins coughing in a fit of smoke)

Fuck her? Naw, he didn't do that. Danny boy's waiting for marriage, aren't you buddy?

Ashley

You're a virgin?

Daniel

(takes a drag and lets out a cough)

Yeah? So what?

Ashley

(continues sipping her beer and giggles slightly)

Aren't you like...23 or something?

Daniel

I just always swore I'd wait until marriage, that's all.

Rich

Yeah, like he swore he'd never smoke weed or get completely trashed or...

Daniel

Rich, shut up. People change. I mean she did, right? Went off and lost it to the first guy she could find.

Ashley

Bitter much?

Daniel

I'm not bitter. I could care less what she does or who she does it with. I think it's a waste, but who am I to judge.

Ashley

Yeah, maybe. She's in college now, isn't she? English major or something? I heard she's thinking about grad school.

Daniel

Yeah, she was always harping on how important that shit was. What can you even do with a college degree these days? I work for my dad and get ten bucks an hour to sit on my ass pretty much. Besides, I have everything I need. I've got enough money for weed, good friends, and my mom cooks

every night. What more could a guy want?

Rich

Sounds like the life, man.

(long pause)

Ashley

So you said you wondered about what would have happened? What did you mean?

Daniel

Huh? Oh, you know. I guess I wonder how much my life would suck right now if I'd stayed with her. She loved me and everything, probably would have wanted to marry me. Can you imagine? Me...married? She even wanted me to go to school with her. Got me to apply. I was working full-time then. My boss said I could keep my job part time and go to class. Said something about moving up in the company, but I hated that job anyway. So what if assistant managers made like 60 grand a year? I'm happy. I don't need fancy things or some stupid slip of paper claiming I'm intelligent to be someone.

(another long pause ensues)

Rich

Yeah, man. I agree.

Ashley

(takes a big gulp of beer and finishes off the can. She tosses it to the side of the stage)

Sure.

Rich

So...who are you, anyway?

Daniel

(starts rolling another blunt but seems distracted)

Well, you know...

Rich

Yeah?

Daniel

(stops rolling and shrugs)

I'm whoever I want to be.

Ashley

We get that, yeah, but like...who is that?

Daniel

(starts to laugh)

Shit, we've been smoking way too much. This is getting a little too deep for me. Anyone see the latest Family Guy?

Rich

What if she was your soul mate, man?

Daniel

What?

Rich

What if you were supposed to do all that shit...what if you'd gone to school to be, well, I don't know, an engineer or some shit. What if you married her right out of school and moved to suburbia with a few dogs and an SUV? And

you got this kick ass job at some computer company and she didn't have to work because you made enough moolah so she just wrote bestselling novels. What if you could have been happier?

Daniel

That's ridiculous.

Rich

Yeah...I guess. Don't get me wrong. She's still a whore, but I think maybe she actually gave a damn about you. She always said she loved you since she was 12. I thought she was fucking weird at first, but I think she meant it now.

Daniel

(pauses, glances down at his unfinished blunt)

I told you. I've already got everything I could possibly want.

Ashley

Weed, good friends, and home cooking. You're right. Who needs love or soul mates? It happens all the time, anyway.

Daniel

Exactly. I'm sure if I change my mind; someone else will fall in love with me one of these days.

Ashley

Sure.

Rich

Yeah, I hear you man. There's always some dumb blonde out there ready to settle down and pop out a few puppies when you're ready.

Daniel

Sounds like a plan. Pass the 20 bag, man. The high is wearing off, I think. (snaps his fingers impatiently)

Ashley

And who will you be then?

Daniel

(pauses again)

When?

Ashley

Who will you be when the high wears off?

Daniel

Like I said, whoever I –

Ashley

Right, whoever you want to be.

Daniel

Seriously, Rich. Pass the fucking bag. (lights dim)

(Your Coffee)

Ashley Leamon

My finger almost dialed your number today.
It stopped one number short and bent back,
stretching out those wrinkles at my knuckle.
Your lips have been there; I remember when
I twisted my sheets from the chills.
I've gotten used to the silence of those sheets at night.
It's that crushing hush at dawn that kills me,
when I still expect to hear the chuckle
of the coffee machine and you singing Pink, baritone.
I can't find the hazelnut creamer you used.
I guess you took that with you, too.

Sometimes I go to crowded places so that
strangers will brush up against me.
I can't handle much more than a brush.
The only other contact I've felt lately
has been the wind from my window—
it tries to affectionately brush my hair back.
I tell it I'm not ready and slowly close the window.
I'll open it again, eventually,
maybe once the smell of your coffee fades.

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