Azure Lepidoptera

Carl Forrest

In my mother’s modest garden,
Yellow roses writhe in the Northern wind.
In my mother’s fragrant garden,
Fragile petals lie fervent throughout the ‘noon.
Healing ‘noon, thou art bless’d by the
docile flurry of butterfly wings,
as if waltzing upon the horizon,
in an open-toed stiletto.

In my mother’s ardent garden,
the meek, steadfast to noble dreams,
surrender to gracious sleep.
We sat incognito  
On her sodden benches,  
Adjacent to flowering waters.  
Photocopy generation, I seek out the Eight Noble Truths.  
Flower holding militants claiming to be angels sent from God,  
Born with dynamite sticks; but we provide the fuses that bust our chops  
My friend, an Ode to the oil rainbow, undulating atop the lively waves.  
My friend, have you not heard?  
Guess not.  
Faceless vanity smeared upon tragic noir films;  
“We don’t pay no mind to them platonic forms, misses.  
‘Cause we’re sittin’ in the back locked in conversation about  
Renoir and Bosch.  
That’s what we talk about,  
“That’s what we’s talkin’bout, darling.”
Moods

Anna Brown

I hear raindrops falling
On the tin roof of my porch
Sitting on the swing
My heels on the edge of the seat
And my arms hugging my knees
I see daffodils
Heads bent down low
They know how I feel
Those Lips

Tory Fox

I’m sure I will never find bees
making honey with sweetness to contend
with their supple hue;
or take in a horizon
holding a sunset with bend or brightness
quite as resplendent;
in the most pained places of my heart, I hold
that no Painted Gorge, no natural rock structure
eroded by the colored winds
into the stippled stones, canyons, or statues
can take the place of those etchings,
those miniscule indentures.
He was lucky to land her, of this he was sure. On the day that he met her, Albert wore his sharpest blue suit and impulsively purchased an eye-catching tie. So long ago it was that he has surely forgotten wooing sweet Jillian, sipping exotic drinks, initiating long-winded conversations. He was extremely attentive until he secured her. Then he brought out from the depth of his closet all of his dull suits and dreary sweaters, and carelessly tossed out that bold, tasteless tie forever.

What a shock to her system to feel his indifference, once the vows were made and the honeymoon at its end. Still she loved him dearly and chose to overlook his apathy. In doing so, she grew shorter day by day, so that he towered over her, although he hardly seemed to notice. In time, her previous life seemed nothing more than a dream. She forgot the thrill of a party, the fire in the eye. And thus began the fading away of Albert T. Grayson’s wonderfully passionate wife. Year by year, she grew all the more transparent. Did he notice? You can’t be serious! She served him willingly and tried hard not to make waves, until the day when the last tiny sliver of her faded away…
Erin loved fairy tales when she was younger. She’d always thought he’d died. He’d died in the version her father had read to her, and it explained everything. But in the old ones, he hadn’t. He’d been there all the time. She pushed Grimm’s away from her.

Erin turned and stared into the mirror, looking for something. Tilted her head left, then right. Tried several smiles. But she couldn’t find what she was looking for. She’d seen it once, in a window, as she and her best friend walked past– the face she hoped she had … the face she hoped others saw.

“Erin!” Her father’s voice carried all the way upstairs. “Dinner!” She quickly stepped away from the mirror, as if he’d actually seen her looking in it.

“Coming, Dad!” She began to run down the stairs, but stopped halfway and slowed to a walk. Eleven-year-olds didn’t run in the house. She continued, walking in the self-conscious way of girls her age– aware that her gait should curve and sway, but unable to master it yet.

The table was set for dinner. Erin was one of the few girls she knew whose family still had dinner together– her and her mom and her dad. Her father was already sitting down, face tight with concerns that he would not raise at the table. Her mother rested her hand on Erin’s shoulder as she set the chops on the table, and then sat down as well.

“How was school?” Her mother asked her that every day, but she meant it.

“Fine.” Erin glanced at her father.

“How did you do?” Her father asked her that every day, too.

“I think I did good. Ms. Grisham said it looked good,” she offered.

“Well,” her father corrected.

“… it looked well,” said Erin.

“No. You did well,” he pressed. “It looked good.”

“Okay.”

Her father started on his potato. Erin started on her beans. Her mother felt the silence stretch, so she filled it with another question.
“How was history?”
Her father moved on to his chops.
“I had to pick an essay topic,” Erin’s raised voice invited interest, 
“and I picked Braddock’s defeat.” It was a story her father had first told 
her. He always read history when he had time at home. “Mr. Willis 
thought it was a good idea. Said he’d never had a student pick that 
before.” She looked at her father. He spit out a piece of gristle.
Erin began the rest of her meal. After a minute, “Dad, maybe you 
can tell me more about Braddock?”
Her father paused until he found his place in the conversation— like 
a bookmark in a tome. “Sure. I’ll give you the book after dinner.”
Erin offered a fleeting half-smile. “Thanks.”
Her mom brushed Erin’s hair back understandingly. “Hon, maybe 
you could help Erin a bit. I’m sure it wouldn’t take long.”
“She’s a smart girl. She doesn’t need my help,” said her dad.
Erin’s mom didn’t reply. Eventually, she asked Erin’s dad how his 
day went. Erin let them talk. After a while, she turned to her mom.
“I’m finished now. Can I go upstairs?”
“Sure, sweetheart. Don’t worry about the dishes tonight.”
Erin ran upstairs.
She sat down on her bed and picked up Grimm’s again. Found 
Cinderella. Re-read the beginning. See, he lived. Cinderella’s father 
lived. He didn’t die before the wicked stepmother made Cinderella a 
servant. He just stopped seeing her.
She wondered how it had happened.
You have to help me. Please. But first, I have to tell you what happened, so you can appreciate my situation.

My name is Noah Riley Sissus. I’m a forty-three year old CEO of a major Fortune 500 company. I can’t tell you the name of the company because of secret negotiations we’re having with another big name corporation, but I work for a name you would recognize.

I am married to Jane, who used to work for me. But when she fell for me, I told her she had to quit because I couldn’t let her feelings jeopardize my position. What I was making would support both of us, anyway. She complained a little, but she finally saw that my point was clear.

We live in a quiet upscale neighborhood, not rich enough to be tacky, but exclusive enough to, well, exclude people who aren’t contributing to society, like I am. I don’t really know my neighbors, but I can tell you they don’t drive a car as nice as mine. Few people do.

Today started out like any other day. I woke up at 6 am and ran five miles on the treadmill (I still have my six-pack, thank you very much). I showered in the marble stall instead of the glass one, because Hestia never does clean that one well enough. When I came downstairs, I saw that Jane had left the lights on again when she went out. I’ve told her and told her that electricity isn’t free, but, hey, women, you know? Also, she has a habit of repeating the last thing I’ve said to her, like she’s hard of hearing, but other than that, she’s okay.

Anyway, the lights were on downstairs. I went over to the panel by the door to turn off the juice, but before I could, the bell rang. Since Hestia was off for some medical thing, I answered it myself. When I opened the door, I didn’t see anyone, but I heard the slam of the gate at the end of the walk. The sound of it lingered oddly in the quiet morning. I was about to go back inside, when I saw the box. It was white, about the size of a case of champagne, wrapped in red ribbon with a big bow on top. Well, the first thing I thought was the board was sending me a thank-you gift for helping out with the merger. I had been going
above the call of duty for them, so it was only fair that they showed their appreciation. It was strange that I didn’t have to sign for it, but I wasn’t going to let some incompetent delivery guy stop me from enjoying myself.

I picked up the box and almost fell over from the surprise of it weighing almost nothing at all. “What the hell is this?” I brought it inside, closing the stained glass door with my foot.

Since all the lights were still on, I walked to my study, where there was a glass-top desk big enough to sleep on if I wanted to. I placed the box on the desk, backed up, and just looked at how it fit in with the room itself. The image of having an impressive gift in such an impressive room was hard not to appreciate. I spend a lot of time in here, and I wanted the room to reflect the man who lived in it. I’ve got lots of framed magazine covers from when I used to be a model, and the dark wood paneling really makes the pictures stand out.

I couldn’t resist my curiosity any more, so I lifted the lid off the box. The sides fell out away from the center, exposing a nest of white tissue paper. I still wondered why the box had been so big, if the gift was going to be something so small and light. After I peeled away the paper, I saw a paperweight. A clear, round, glass paperweight, about the size of the palm of my hand. There was a faint red light coming from the center of it.

This was stupid. What idiot would give me a useless, unoriginal gift like this? Someone who had no sense of taste, of style. Other than the light, which gave the thing a sense of depth, it was the kind of cheap junk you could pick up at some office clearance sale.

I picked it up, and noticed it had a flaw in its surface. There was a depression on the bottom of it, smooth, like it was meant to be there. Naturally, my thumb went right to it, as if the thing was designed to be held. The red spark in the middle flared intensely, filling the thing with a dark red glow. The room got brighter, but it seemed as if the light was coming from behind me. I turned, and there was a silver rectangle, floating in the air in front of me. About eight feet on the long side, and six high. This was crazy, how could something just appear out of nowhere like that? The paperweight started getting warm in my hand, and I wanted to look down at it, but the screen suddenly filled with images, and I couldn’t look away.

* * *

That was a week ago. I’ve been sitting here that long. The screen has been showing me my life, over and over again, but not from my point of view. It’s been showing it to me through the eyes of everyone
I’ve ever come in contact with. The overweight kid in prep school I humiliated to make myself look better. The grandmother I walked past after seeing her grocery bags break apart on the rainswept sidewalk. Everyone who’s ever been laid off as a result of one of my business deals. I’ve been seeing myself through their eyes, the way I appeared to them. The way I appeared to my wife. I can’t bear this anymore, but it won’t stop. It just starts up again, from the age of ten, until I opened the box. I’ve tried letting go of the paperweight, but my hand won’t open. I can’t move, except to blink and breathe. All I can do is watch, and regret. You have to help me. You have to take this thing out of my hand for me, so it will let me go. I need it to stop, so I can fix things. So I can say I’m sorry. So I can try to make up for how I’ve used people to make my life look better. But I can’t. Not while this thing keeps me here. Please, take it out of my hand. Please, Jane.
I had a choice. I could turn into a bitter empty shell that would find any emotion difficult to bear, or I could become a stronger individual by learning how to love and live. We are given these choices when we are faced with personal tragedies. I choose to become stronger by learning how to love and live.

It was Sunday February 15, 1998. I was nine months pregnant and only ten days from my delivery due date. This was my second pregnancy. I had a daughter named Jesse who was two years old at the time. I was going to have a little boy, and he would be named Robert Gregory; Bobby for short.

Something was terribly wrong. I hadn’t felt the baby move recently and I couldn’t remember when I last felt him kick, turn, or hiccup. Was it Friday or Saturday? I just saw the doctor on Tuesday, and he said everything was great. I kept telling myself doctors know best. Denial is an incredible survival mechanism.

I finally decided to call the maternity ward at the hospital that Sunday afternoon, and I remember asking the nurse, “Babies don’t move as much the last week before they are born, right?” The nurse replied, “No, that’s actually a myth. Babies move a lot, especially after you eat, and even more so after eating something sweet.” Well, that blew the last of my denial right out the window. I had a big fat doughnut in my hand at that exact moment. I told the nurse I was coming to the hospital after I called the doctor. I paged the doctor who was on call that Sunday and he said, “Go to the hospital. We’ll find the heartbeat and you can go home.” He was very curt, and I got the distinct impression I had just interrupted his golf game or something else equally important. I left immediately, while my husband packed the diaper bag for Jesse. They would meet me at the hospital in a short while.

I arrived at the hospital and tried not to run to the maternity ward. I was not prepared for what came next. As the nurses desperately tried to find a heartbeat, I started to silently cry. The nurses refused to say much until the doctor arrived to confirm their findings, or the lack of, in
The doctor gave me the official news. My baby boy had died.

The doctor was astonished. He actually apologized to me for his behavior over the phone. The doctor proceeded to break my water, and he informed me that the baby had died either early Friday morning or Thursday night. How could this be? Today is Sunday! I am the mother! I should have known the instant it happened, and if I didn’t know, what kind of mother does that make me? What did I do wrong?

I cannot begin to describe the incredible emotions and thoughts that flooded my entire being. I begged the nurses for drugs to numb the pain in my heart, and they gladly gave them to me. A good friend came to pick up Jesse and keep her for the night, while my wonderful husband stayed by my side. My mother was on a plane and somehow managed to make it from Massachusetts to Virginia in six hours. My husband and I then had to endure six hours before I could deliver my baby, and they were the longest hours of my life. Denial and drugs offered me an oasis, and incredibly, I was able to joke around. However, once the actual delivery started to take place, I turned into a blubbering idiot. I felt like my life had ended, and I hoped I would never feel pain like that again, but if I never feel that pain again, have I loved?

My mother arrived at the hospital one half-hour after I delivered Bobby, and with her help, I was able to hold my baby in my arms and say goodbye. It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life, but I will never regret it. Bobby was wearing a beautiful hat and a blanket that some sweet older people knit especially for babies that do not survive. I still have that hat and blanket today. The hospital also gave us a wonderful memorial package, complete with a caster handprint in a shell. The nursing staff was absolutely the best. I guess what I’m trying to say is... it could have been worse.

Bobby, my darling baby boy who never drew a breath, taught me how to live and love. I now notice things around me I never noticed before. The trees are greener, the sky is a more vibrant blue and flowers smell sweeter. I tend to be more patient and forgiving. I cherish my family’s laughter and time together more than ever. The little bundle of joy that never happened taught me how to love and live, and for that, I will always be grateful.
From freshly husked walnuts
Permeate the air
Autumn in the Italian countryside
Tall vines
Graced with ripened grapes
Emanate an intoxicating fragrance
Overshadowing the last tomato plants
Hanging yet, tenuously to life
Late September rains
Awaken the sweet scents of nature
Bringing an alchemist’s dream to life
To be preserved forever
As the autumn of 1961
Black Satin

Yvonne de los Santos

She wormed in on Granby Street for the free bus fare.
All she possessed born in a torn duffel bag.
Her refinement unveiled in her rouge stained lips.
Worn-down Etienne Aigner loafers guarded her feet,
As specked- white gym socks lavished over them.
She wore slacks of black satin,
As black as her skin.
Faux diamond chandeliers hung on her ears.

Despite her glam,
Her cheeks displayed her nakedness.
It was a scar 5 inches long.
Letting all she was slip,
For anyone to see.
Yourself

Tutankhamun Geth

Turn your back on all that you’ve ever known,
Shrug the knowledge off your shoulder,
Spit your wit to the pavement,
Then sing the song of orthodox,
Crash your mind into the clouds,
Then walk to eternity,
Focus your eyes on their lids
Then understand when time begins
Lash out against machinery
Lacerate the skin of systems
To bleed out its deceit,
Drain it of iniquity and the unjust.
Freedom died at the birth of free will,
The more we learn, the more ignorant we become,
A zest of lustful living urges our youth
To get us down from what we’ve become.
Christ has died and you’ve had him do so in vain,
Through the torment and pain,
You take his blood for granted,
With out his name you live in panic,
Live righteous out of your conscious,
Destroy the being of your ego,
Live righteous believing
No heaven above or hell below,
Abide by the law of the land
No matter how harsh it becomes
The Earth is fruitful,
Time multiplies for your day to come.
Matty Man

Matt Cole

James Matthew Barrie
Got it right
When he chose a young child to
Never age-
Never die-
How romantic!
There is no glamour or luxury
In eternal adolescence.
I know this, because I am Matty Man:
Doomed to live behind
A facade of not-quite man/not-quite boy
Features-
Frail, awkward limbs;
Irresistible red strawberry sores on face;
Good ol’ Petey could
Think a happy thought
And soar off to
Never Never Land!
All Matty Man needs
Is an act of angst
And off he sinks into
Hopeless Hopeless Hell!
I don’t even like the name
Matty Man,
And I made it up!
How typical of me...
But I have learned to embrace this curse:
I’ve never had a Second Kiss-
Just Firsts.
I’ve never been to the Real World-
Just School.
I’ve never dealt with Consequence-
Just Grounded.
Do you remember all this when you look at me?
Take your time-
I’m not getting any younger...
I turn the corner. I try to hurry into the sunlight. My fingers get cold if I stay in the shade on these cold days. The sycamore has lost all of its leaves since I last walked here. From the sycamore I can see the old lady’s stand. The old lady named Maya sits behind rows of flowers. Sunflowers tower behind her small frame. Her wrinkled hands are grasping a cane of dark mahogany. The ivory handle clinks against her large rings.

“Hello, nice day isn’t it?” I ask.
“Yes,” she says. Her black eyes stare out at me as her wrinkles crease into a smile.

“Can I please have three sunflowers?”
“Certainly dear. Which three would you like?”
“That one in the corner, the one by itself in the yellow bucket and that baby one.”
“How would you like them,” she asks.
“With tissue,” I offer with a smile, “plain and simple for me.”

“Okay, simple it is.”
The old lady is very wise. I’ve talked to her before. She told me that her husband died on his way to the ice cream shop back in 1960. She talks about death like it’s no big deal. She doesn’t seem to be afraid of whatever it is that comes after we stop breathing.

I stroll away from the stand with a smile and three sunflowers. As I walk by a fire hydrant on Main and Cross streets, I see a dark little bird on the iron fence around one of many fichus. He flits up to the telephone wire as I walk by.

I’m headed north on Cross street now. There is an old black man on the bench with the chipping brown paint. He has both arms spread over the back of the bench. He looks at me as I walk by the bench.

“Mister, you got the time?”
“Three o’clock,” I answer.
The old man looks at his hands and then at the bus schedule on his lap. I wonder what he’s thinking about, what kind of shit he’s seen. He
must have grown up during the civil rights movement. I wonder how it makes him feel to see white people now. I wonder what it feels like to be a black person. Wish I had as much culture in my body as a black lady has when she laughs real loud.
Sycamore leaves are twirling down the street past me. Some of them still have green on them. I come to the corner of Franklin and Elizabeth streets. My hand is sweaty from gripping the tissue paper. Sunflowers aren’t as heavy as they look. You just have to carry them lightly.
I hate this corner. The pedestrian cross button doesn’t work. Alley is already waiting there.
“Hey Alley,” I say, coming up to stand next to her on the new handicap friendly corner.
“Sam, hey, what’s happening?”
“Not much, would you like a flower?” I ask.
“Yes I would!”
I look at Sam’s face. His cheeks are red. The tissue paper is wrinkled around the middle. He must have been carrying these for a while. These must be Farm Fresh flowers; why else would he give them to me? I haven’t gotten flowers from a guy in years. I wonder what he’s like in bed. He seems so young. I bet he thinks of nothing but sex. He probably gave me these flowers just to be nice though. I am going to be late for my appointment.
I glance down at her purse as she walks down toward the shopping district and see her book sticking out; The Universal Baby Name Book. Is Alley pregnant? Hmm.
Hope she likes her flowers, I think with a smile.
Eraser

Amy Blondell

Scrubbed until her skin was raw
red
wounded
disappointment’s angry sting
burning her flesh.
Suds cascading down her back
rinse away the scent;
forbidden memories linger.
Three hours of nothing yielding nothing
but regret.
i once stood adjacent to the brick wall in the alley
downtown where pain and misery hung heavy in the
thick june air. eternity embedded in the palms of the
children who needed nothing more than a Fearless Warrior
to defeat deafening sighs. but instead held white flags
above shattered bodies. taken furiously in the harsh storm.
battles fought with tears and won in bloody exhaustion.
tainted eyes found Clarity in Heaven’s sweet song. it was
there they found calming rivers and gentle breezes. it is
there the Sun shines down at the children who stand in that
dark alley, surrounded by walls as they cry out for Life.
Prison under Neptune

Tory Fox

don’t let your blood seep into the water
the Dolphin won’t protect you
dragged into an
  Abyss
chased by an assortment of fish
shark
  (to) ray
  (to) man
chained just beneath the surface
Bubbles are safety nets
  are traps
trace your path, strangle the current
  Just like building a Tidal wave
On the Beach at Night

Matt Cole

Clarity comes to me
Sitting
On the beach at night—
The cold quiet seems to fit
The sad settling of my soul—
Somewhere between the
Water’s ocean of disturbance
And the
Winds whispering regret,
I find a space in the sand and think:
“How far do I have
To Swim
To Find
Peace
On those uncertain shores?—
Do I save
Anything
For the swim back to
safety?—
Can I—Will I
Find
The Precipice of Peace?”
You say my name,
I feel uncomfortable,
as if you’ve slipped
through the cracks
and invaded my soul.
I am Mommy.
I am Honey.
I am ma’am.
No one calls me
by my name.
No one calls me
Jade.
Hearing my name
is almost like
an intimate
caress.
It leaves me
uncomfortable
and exposed.
I want to turn
and run away,
but I stay
from desire
to hear it again.
Alpine Flowers

Anna Brown

It is early spring in the Swiss Alps, and the towering granite-gray peaks are still covered with snow. A small clump of alpine poppies is wedged in the crevice between two boulders. The small greenish-brown buds are not quite ready to open up completely to become glorious red blossoms. The early morning sun is still lukewarm, not warm enough to melt the snow from the mighty mountains. The royal blue enzians and the gray edelweiss growing nearby feel entirely at home in the cool breeze. The small open petals resembling stars look up at the sky, as if looking for their home.

As the hours pass and the sun grows warmer, the melting snow begins to trickle down from the snowy peaks. The warmth turns a poppy-bud slowly toward the sun, opening it slightly, showing a glimpse of the beauty it will become. Just then, the water trickling down from the great heights penetrates the crevice between the boulders, reaching the small flowering cluster.

Come tomorrow, the greenish-brown buds will open to glorious red.
Two fish,
swimming
in opposite directions,
bonded together
by a single rope.
Constantly
turning in circles,
seeing the world
from the other's view.
They never get anywhere.
And I am the rope,
flowing along with them,
spinning around
my own emotional axis.
Losing all perspective,
all sense of location,
just spinning around
mindlessly.

Pisces

Jade Chandler-Haag
I am mother earth
My season’s ever changing
Spring makes way for summer
Summer rolls over to fall
When I’m not with you
My winter is barren and cold
Seeking your warmth
I beckon you
To enter my heart
Yourself

Tutankhamun Geth

Turn your back on all that you’ve ever known,
Shrug the knowledge off your shoulder,
Spit your wit to the pavement,
Then sing the song of orthodox,
Crash your mind into the clouds,
Then walk to eternity,
Focus your eyes on their lids
Then understand when time begins
Lash out against machinery
Lacerate the skin of systems
To bleed out its deceit,
Drain it of iniquity and the unjust.
Freedom died at the birth of free will,
The more we learn, the more ignorant we become,
A zest of lustful living urges our youth
To get us down from what we’ve become.
Christ has died and you’ve had him do so in vain,
Through the torment and pain,
You take his blood for granted,
With out his name you live in panic,
Live righteous out of your conscious,
Destroy the being of your ego,
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I turn the corner. I try to hurry into the sunlight. My fingers get cold
if I stay in the shade on these cold days. The sycamore has lost all of
its leaves since I last walked here. From the sycamore I can see the
old lady’s stand. The old lady named Maya sits behind rows of flow-
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grasping a cane of dark mahogany. The ivory handle clinks against her
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“Yes,” she says. Her black eyes stare out at me as her wrinkles crease
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“Certainly dear. Which three would you like?”
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I hate this corner. The pedestrian cross button doesn’t work. Alley is already waiting there.

“Hey Alley,” I say, coming up to stand next to her on the new handicap friendly corner.

“Sam, hey, what’s happening?”

“Not much, would you like a flower?” I ask.

“Yes I would!”

I look at Sam’s face. His cheeks are red. The tissue paper is wrinkled around the middle. He must have been carrying these for a while. These must be Farm Fresh flowers; why else would he give them to me? I haven’t gotten flowers from a guy in years. I wonder what he’s like in bed. He seems so young. I bet he thinks of nothing but sex. He probably gave me these flowers just to be nice though. I am going to be late for my appointment.

I glance down at her purse as she walks down toward the shopping district and see her book sticking out; The Universal Baby Name Book. Is Alley pregnant? Hmm.

Hope she likes her flowers, I think with a smile.
Eraser

Amy Blondell

Scrubbed until her skin was raw red
wounded
disappointment’s angry sting
burning her flesh.
Suds cascading down her back
rinse away the scent;
forbidden memories linger.
Three hours of nothing yielding nothing
but regret.
i once stood adjacent to the brick wall in the alley
downtown where pain and misery hung heavy in the
thick june air. eternity embedded in the palms of the
children who needed nothing more than a Fearless Warrior
to defeat deafening sighs. but instead held white flags
above shattered bodies. taken furiously in the harsh storm.
battles fought with tears and won in bloody exhaustion.
tainted eyes found Clarity in Heaven’s sweet song. it was
there they found calming rivers and gentle breezes. it is
there the Sun shines down at the children who stand in that
dark alley, surrounded by walls as they cry out for Life.
Prison under Neptune

Tory Fox

don’t let your blood seep into the water
the Dolphin won’t protect you
dragged into an
    Abyss
chased by an assortment of fish
shark
    (to) ray
    (to) man
chained just beneath the surface
Bubbles are safety nets
    are traps
trace your path, strangle the current
    Just like building a Tidal wave
On the Beach at Night

Matt Cole

Clarity comes to me
Sitting
On the beach at night—
The cold quiet seems to fit
The sad settling of my soul—
Somewhere between the
Water’s ocean of disturbance
And the
Winds whispering regret,
I find a space in the sand and think:
“How far do I have
To Swim
To Find
Peace
On those uncertain shores?—
Do I save
Anything
For the swim back to
safety?—
Can I—Will I
Find
The Precipice of Peace?”
You say my name,
I feel uncomfortable,
as if you’ve slipped
through the cracks
and invaded my soul.
I am Mommy.
I am Honey.
I am ma’am.
No one calls me
by my name.
No one calls me
Jade.
Hearing my name
is almost like
an intimate
caress.
It leaves me
uncomfortable
and exposed.
I want to turn
and run away,
but I stay
from desire
to hear it again.
Alpine Flowers

Anna Brown

It is early spring in the Swiss Alps, and the towering granite-gray peaks are still covered with snow. A small clump of alpine poppies is wedged in the crevice between two boulders. The small greenish-brown buds are not quite ready to open up completely to become glorious red blossoms. The early morning sun is still lukewarm, not warm enough to melt the snow from the mighty mountains. The royal blue enzians and the gray edelweiss growing nearby feel entirely at home in the cool breeze. The small open petals resembling stars look up at the sky, as if looking for their home.

As the hours pass and the sun grows warmer, the melting snow begins to trickle down from the snowy peaks. The warmth turns a poppy-bud slowly toward the sun, opening it slightly, showing a glimpse of the beauty it will become. Just then, the water trickling down from the great heights penetrates the crevice between the boulders, reaching the small flowering cluster.

Come tomorrow, the greenish-brown buds will open to glorious red.
Two fish,  
swimming  
in opposite directions,  
bound together  
by a single rope.  
Constantly  
turning in circles,  
seeing the world  
from the other’s view.  
They never get anywhere.  
And I am the rope,  
flowing along with them,  
spinning around  
my own emotional axis.  
Losing all perspective,  
all sense of location,  
just spinning around  
mindlessly.

Pisces

Jade Chandler-Haag
Yin & Yang

Miranda A. Williams

I am mother earth
My season’s ever changing
Spring makes way for summer
Summer rolls over to fall
When I’m not with you
My winter is barren and cold
Seeking your warmth
I beckon you
To enter my heart
My Blues

Miranda A. Williams

Will you wrap me in your arms
And sing a lullaby of love
Swaddle me like a newborn
Stroke my dark velvet skin
Slowly like Solomon must have caressed
Sheba’s queen
So long ago
Hum a hymn of rapture
Mend my broken spirit
Show me how to love again
Massage away the loneliness
Taking away the pain
My spirit is a desert in desperate need
Of your thunderous downpour
Come down on me like rain
He explodes out of the light, arms pinwheeling. He feels the impact of the ground on his knees, the small rocks biting into his closed fist as he vainly attempts to cushion his fall to earth. Then he knows only the frantic pounding in his ears—he is moving fast. Faster. Tendons shift and pull, muscles alternately pulling taut and loose, taught and loose, sliding back and forth underneath his skin. Cartilage pops and compresses under unexpected exertion. Each footfall sends thunder through his frame, threatening to tear one bone from the other in a mess of gristle and blood. He doesn’t—can’t—care. He needs to get away. He must be free.

He can’t even remember a time when he was not running. Nothing before the all encompassing song of adrenaline, pounding out its mad-dening, tribal rhythm on his heart. All he knows is the violence of own motion and a deep, searing pain he refuses to localize. Then he feels his body forcing passage through the air, the high grass bowing beneath his feet as he flows through the moonlight. He leaves the voices further and further behind—their commanding, searching, begging, and cajoling voices. They are what drive him forward in this darkness.

Trees lunge out of the darkness, given vicious mass by his desire for speed. Their low hanging branches strain for him, trying to catch and hold him. Angry roots are a tangle of hate, snapping out at his ankles. All this is secondary to the growing agony in his arm and the death he bears in his hand. It is cold, a cold that bites at him through the creeping numbness slowly spreading through his limbs. He cannot run any longer; his breath turns to bile, then blood. Pain and exhaustion steal from him his endurance. Earth rises up to greet him, but he knows nothing but a numbing blackness.

He opens his eyes and tastes vomit and dried leaves. It is a gray dawn, that brief colorless time when the night has fully retreated, yet before the sun paints the trees and grass with their customary colors. Shadows cling everywhere like a sullen fog, refusing to yield to the advance of day. In one of these diminishing pools of darkness, he raises
himself up against a tree, barely able to stand. Though his entire body aches, nothing hurts more than his left arm. It has swollen and blackened over the night. Some great fire had begun in his hand and slowly found a path through his flesh. Failing escape, the flames have passed through his veins and moved up and through his arm. Pools of flame still move in his blood, carrying the fire further with each passing second. He feels it now, a counter rhythm slithering surreptitiously around his heartbeat, muffling its once steady pounding. In truth, the fire has reached his heart, and it has lit his entire body ablaze with some quiet, looming madness.

And then, with a moan, he remembers the light, and all that had brought him to this gray land. White walls reflect the fluorescent lights back a thousand-fold. An invisible, all pervasive pulsing fills the room—driven by the rhythm of flesh on flesh, feet pounding the floor, and the voices of the faithful. The tiny church is alive with the rise and fall of the hymns; praise building in intensity and fervor with each new song. Belief is tangible: sweat, eyes, hair, voice. Then he sees them writhing through the hands of the believers. Father said the faithful can handle them without fear. He grasps one in wonder, feels the ecstasy of a living salvation. It is more than overwhelming, just like each time before this one. He ceases to exist, he moves with the faithful, he sings with the faithful: he is the faithful.

It coils around his arm and quivers sharply, almost like it is charged with some holy electric current piped straight from heaven’s own power plant. Then he is shot like a bullet back into his own skin as the pain of its fangs rips into his flesh. Music he had been buoyed on previously now consumes him, drowning him in the surreality of the moment. He is suffocating. He has to get out of this once familiar place which now seems so alien. Sprinting down the narrow aisle he leaves behind once familiar voices. His hand clenches tighter and tighter around the thing in his hand. Stretching up from hell to heaven itself, the beaten, wooden double doors of the church loom insanely large. Their scale makes his motion towards them seem slowed by a million invisible hands. He knows that if he crosses through those doors that there is no coming back. Father had been wrong. His shoulder hits the door like a locomotive.

The cold bark scratches his back as he slides down with a moan. He rips the thing from his hand with a scream, droplets of blood following its arc to rest on a bed of fallen leaves. He stands, then falls. He crawls towards it, every movement a symphony of agony. He barely hears his own screams as he drives the last of his energy behind his
blackened fist. It is useless even as a club now, and does mockingly lit-
tle damage to an already ruined instrument. Exhausted he falls, turning
himself to face the brightening sky. His back arches, his pupils shink.
His mouth is open in a silent scream at the empty sky. It is finished.
During a recent, albeit rare, girls’ night out, one of my companions laughed at the specificity of my food request. I ordered a house cheeseburger, and although the menu touted all the accoutrements accompanying their special cheeseburger, I needed to deviate from the special. “Can I have everything on the side?” I asked the waitress.

“Hmm hmmm.”

“Even the lettuce and tomato. And extra pickles.”
She nodded and scribbled.

“And—oh. No onions please.”

She snapped her little notebook shut and headed toward the kitchen where I knew she would pass my special requests on to the chef.

My friends, amused and curious, had to ask. Yes, I confirmed, I have always been a picky eater. No, I denied, I don’t make people “jump through hoops.” Yes, I affirmed, I am accustomed to getting my way, probably because (I did not reveal this) mother always made culinary accommodations for me: no sauce on my spaghetti, no mixed vegetables (corn on one side, lima beans on the other), and no rice of any color other than white.

Despite my specificity, my otherwise beautiful cheeseburger arrived adorned with three rings of raw, red onions. Seeing the grins appearing on the faces of my friends, I could hear their question forming: Will she send it back? Ordinarily, yes. This time, though, I held my nose, scraped the offensive spheres off my burger and onto an empty plate and handed them to the waitress as she left our table.

My friends continued laughing. What did I care? I’m not the only person who makes special requests. In fact, accommodation is a key to success in the hospitality field. But while many of us pay great attention to what we ask for when eating out, we fail to give the same kind of attention to an even more important issue: relationships.

I know women who have spent hours compiling lists of criteria for potential partners. They want someone employed or at least employable, drug, drama and disease free, educated, well spoken, well
groomed, independent, self sufficient, credit worthy, etc. Everyone’s list is different. My best friend for example puts money very close to the top of her list. My list, however, places more importance on intelligence. Now I won’t dismiss a man who incorrectly answers the final jeopardy question, but he should be able to get a fair amount of the answers right.

We should be flexible, though. Sometimes superficial issues can preoccupy us. Does he really need to drive a $50,000 sports car? Does it matter if he’s 5’7 and not 6’0? The short answer? No. I try and follow the advice I read years ago in a popular woman’s magazine and place more importance on things a man can control, like his waistline, than on things he can’t control, like his hairline. But the issue of choice is still of supreme value. When one walks into an ice cream shop with a taste for vanilla and the clerk comes back with rocky road, what does one do? Suck it up to bad luck and eat it anyway? Will it magically start to taste better after four or fives licks? I don’t think so. They will politely (or not so politely if they’re kind of cranky) inform the clerk that this was not what they requested and send it back.

So the next time Mr. Not-Quite-Right with three bankruptcies, two E felony convictions and a suspended driver’s license shows up on your plate, try to look past the beautiful eyes and captivating smile, the toned biceps and dreamy voice and remember that he wasn’t what you ordered. Send him back.
The Swimmer

Tory Fox

I am abandoned—adrift
clawing against the waves
tangled in seaweed nebulas.
Skim the surface—
nothing is as it seems
with fish that fly and
birds that swim.
Backstroke or
Butterfly—
all is useless against
such an aquatic vortex—
dreams spun by mermaids
nightmares of the present,
the ironically dry present.
Spit me out sirens
tear me from your dream land quilts
…this desert is no place for me.
I can recall my father tucking in my little brother at night. I could always hear the soft music playing through the thin drywall that separated his room from mine. I would lay in bed, stiff as a board, knowing what would happen next, preparing for it as I heard my father’s friendly but firm voice say, “Good night, sweet dreams.”

It has never been easy for me growing up. Not that it’s supposed to be, and actually a lot of problems I brought onto myself, but before my parents were divorced there were some secrets that I could not control.

My father was the parent that spoiled my brother and me. I got just about everything I ever wanted because I was daddy’s little princess. It seemed to me that he was the best looking, most fun-loving, generous dad there could possibly be. When I was about nine it would have made sense for him to have that tacky mug that reads “World’s #1 Dad.” My view of him in the beginning, though, was distorted and things in my life changed drastically over the next few years.

There was another side to my father that I didn’t know and now regret to have met. The person that I trusted with my life, that seemed to bring so much comfort, suddenly scared me. Unfortunately, I was in the path of a self-destructing, incapable parent. His first attempt to what I’m assuming he thought was sexual education was out of the blue and out of character for this clean cut, smooth talking business man, so I thought nothing of it and continued to love him and seek his approval. This wasn’t the last time.

What started off as something I ignored and considered normal turned into a situation I couldn’t avoid. It started happening more. It became a constant in my life, something I thought I just had to allow in order to receive my father’s affection. I didn’t want him to hate me.

Lying in bed at night, the light in the hall would unexpectedly flicker on and shine all through the cracks under and around the doorframe. I would hear the old brass doorknob turn and could see that familiar dark shadow abruptly sneaking in and shutting the door behind him. The only difference is that now it wasn’t familiar at all. He would walk
over and position himself on the bed next to me. After he took care of
his needs he would just leave without saying anything. I felt like a little
rag doll that had gotten played with, grown out of and then thrown out
for a measly quarter in the annual yard sale. This wasn’t the last time.

This kept happening over the course of several years. I couldn’t
keep the secret in anymore. After it happened one evening, I broke
down and started to cry. I ran to my room and hid in the closet. All
the lights were off. It was sinisterly dark, but it was cozy and I felt safe.
Even though I knew I wasn’t invisible, I had a convincing theory that
this might discourage him into leaving me alone. No such luck. I heard
him come in not many moments later. I tried to sniffle my running nose
soundlessly, but he found me almost without delay as if he knew where
I was going to hide beforehand. He pretended to be shocked, as if he
didn’t understand why I was so distraught.

He pulled me out of the closet so gently that for a split second I
could feel the warmth of a concerned father’s arms. I felt that sense of
protection even though he was the one I needed to be protected from.
The abuse probably would have continued had he not said what he did
to me at that instant. He asked if I was okay. Then in a tone that was
indistinct he said, “I’m sorry, but please don’t tell anyone because it will
split our family up.” I knew instantaneously that what had been hap-
pening to me did not occur in most typical American families. That was
the last time.

I got the courage to tell my mother about this horrific, never-end-
ing nightmare. As a result, my family did split and for a long time I
assumed it was my fault. I have not seen my father in many years, and
I can’t say that I miss him. I am grateful, though, for the bigger picture,
because daddy, in all actuality you have made me the strong, intelligent
and ambitious woman I am today. I know now that life does go on, and
it will only get better for me. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Our
lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
The terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 have bought an entirely new ethnicity into the public eye. In the time directly after the September 11th attacks, people were paranoid, and as such they sought a scapegoat. This scapegoat came in the form of Arabs and Arab-Americans. For a time there was this preconceived notion that every Arab was a terrorist, or had a direct link to terrorism. The year following the attacks saw the creation of many watchdog agencies specifically designed to protect America from an “inevitable” terrorist attack. This was not a problem until American citizens’ civil liberties were taken away. The animosity towards Arabs and Arab-Americans has, only on suspicion, led to the revocation of many people’s 4th and 6th amendment rights as guaranteed under the constitution of the United States.

It seems like all it takes now is a “good” American to say that an Arab-American has links to terrorism, and almost instantaneously there is a federal investigation. The 4th amendment guarantees Americans freedom from unreasonable search and seizure. These whimsical investigations seem in direct violation of this underlying ground rule.

Scarier than the 4th amendment violations are the 6th amendment violations. To illustrate this I only need mention the name Hamdi, an American citizen held for years without being officially charged and without being presented before a judge. The basis for his detainment was that he was a terrorist in the “war on terror.” Does this mean that a drug dealer can be held indefinitely and without being charged in the “war on drugs?”

America is a scary place to live. Not because of terrorists, but because of governmental actions arising from terrorist acts. It just seems to me like America is sliding backwards, back to a time where one’s social position was determined by the tint of one’s skin. Arabs are quickly filling the void left by African Americans in the 1960’s. With the ever broader definition of “war” and “enemy combatant,” I feel as though something needs to be done, and needs to be done now to correct the trend that our government and populace it taking. If not, it will surely lead to the oppression of good Americans.
BAG LADY

Lori Joyner

Hollowed out soul
Of disrepair
Heart’s
Shattered shelter
From pain
The mind
left lame
Lost, alone
Seeking shelter
Never home
Dragonflies

Melanie Bausch

Swallow, begin to see
Hyper colour dragonfly, floats on acid wings
Listen, ooh so carefully, to the song she sings
Breath down blues, yellows, fuchsias, feel the soft warm lights
Glittery reflecting trails, sensory’s delight.
Fall into the darkness of the
Black putrid turtle, loathing in his tree
He may let you pass, but for a daunting fee,
Keep your eyelids from falling, he’ll trick you he will. Run little child,
away from death’s hill.
Submit and find healing in the arms of a
Peace lily white crane, tadpoles at my feet.
With every lone night, mourning retreats,
Feathery silver neck, eyes held higher
Reality, life . . . alive and beautiful like fire.
Released back into the wind
Pastel flutter butterfly soft and so safe.
Never miss a morning kiss, upon the lips of grace.
And gaze into those eyes, full of dreams so bright
Dragonfly, crane and turtle have all since said goodnight
So farewell all my demon friends, now go along your way.
In my world of lilac love, is where I plan to stay.
Thank you for the sugar thoughts and trees so full of breath.
Thank you, friends, for saving me from my estuary of death.
Life and Love

Heath M. Lucas

Talking, touching, kissing, hugging,
Exploring, discovering, imagining, dreaming,
Minutes, hours, days and nights
Come and go, if only time would slow
Or pause...because...
Lovers are found, souls complete,
Hearts warmed and filled with joy.
Passion overflowing, expanding within and without
Like a river, ever flowing, no beginning, never ending.
Days, weeks, months and years
Come and go, if only time would slow
Or pause...because...
Leaving, parting, crying, hurting,
Missing, needing, longing, dreaming,
Miles apart, oceans away,
Minutes are hours, hours are days.
Days are lives, if only time would fly
Or skip...and then...
Talking, touching, kissing, hugging,
Loving, caring, forever sharing
Life and love.
In My Place

Noah Renn

You still have some stuff at my house,
You left it here not long ago,
And I know that I wanted you out,
And that you really did not want to go
It’s in the same place it was left,
I can’t rightfully throw it away,
I haven’t even touched it yet,
At least not since that one day
Regardless of all that’s unclear,
Just know I still want to be friends,
But while your stuff is still here,
It’s hard for someone to move in
Heart

Dennis L. Barnes Jr.

When you cry
--and you will
You will notice a kinder, gentler me
And those hands that move when I YELL
Will be on your back
Or my arms that swing fists against walls
will embrace you
When you cry
--and you will
You will notice that I will wash away
worry
And the fingers that stir ice into cold water
Will wipe saline from your cheeks
You will receive aid from my spirit
To kill your pain
To fill emptiness and shit like that
When you cry
--and you will
You will discover warmth
And stuff like that.
I am an endangered species,
A college-attending black young man
leading a life with a plan
Never held a gun in my hand
I do what I can to change the destiny
that society and statistics have set for me
I don’t watch BET or MTV to see
who it is in life I want to be
Listen to me speak, you hear no common sense
Mistake
Don’t see my dialect as ignorance
Don’t judge me by the music that I listen to
because I memorize the lyrics of knowledge
The rest are just beats that I listen to
Don’t you care about the clothes I wear when I go out
It only matters I look good when I enter God’s house
That let’s you know I don’t mimic rappers and pro athletes
It is He who is the only one I try to be
If anyone ever asks you my definition
You tell them Him, the beginning and the end
The reason why I live, the source of my strength
Don’t mind the absence of my father because my Father is here
He told me that he didn’t give me the spirit of fear
It is because of Him that I know the fight is fixed
And it’s because of Him that I exist
Love is like the fall of beautiful winter snow…
Because at first, the snow is absolutely gorgeous, so serene, so graceful
But as you stare, ideas waft through your head about the endless possibilities
of what’s in store,
Because at first,
Love is fun…
Filled with smiles and giggles,
Love seems so embracing, so overpowering, so…
Your hands begin to numb, like your feelings toward each other.
Then all of a sudden your feet are tingling, struggling to feel the blood flow.
Like your heart struggles to feel the beat of love;
The cold envelops your body like a blanket,
Shutting out all of your feelings, all of your emotions, all of you.
The snowflakes create a soft rustle, making it harder to hear around you,
Anything to silence the complaining, anything to deafen the silence;
A white environment develops, dividing you into what seems so simple,
Like the numerous arguments that we all thought were just straightforward;
Love, so much like a blanket to keep you warm, or more like smoother you.
Love, so much like a tingling genuine feeling, or more like a stiff aching pain.
Love, so much like those white picket fences, or more like divisions of our love.
Love, so much rustling, damn that loud silence.
Inside of this red box I see,  
One of a million paths dark and emptied,  
Most paths are taken by none,  
Rough terrain with no sight of sun,  
Alone on this one path,  
Which was the first path to see,  
Impossible to travel by air or water,  
Just the use of the ground beneath me,  
No campus  
No direction  
Yet I know where I have to go,  
My head is spinning around thrown obstacles,  
Like someone doesn’t want me to know,  
You see a new world every day  
When you jump through new layers of mind,  
Just to know in this life,  
No one gets out alive,  
We see today repeatedly,  
We must like it because we keep coming back,  
Don’t be surprised when we break each other down by, riding each other’s back,  
Then the more you know,  
The more ignorant you become,  
You will never have a true peace of mind,  
And it’s the same thing, every day,  
When you reveal the segments of time.
Dancing on Monticello Avenue

Carl Forrest

Monticello Avenue.
We rejoiced upon your eternal curbsides,
As Prophets awaiting dawn along empty streets.
We stood and gazed upon vagrants,
Cloaked in impermanent Modernism.

Arise mundane city. Awaken to hear our dreams!
Lo’! Boundless infidels, clerics, and worms!
Rais’d as children of language,
Fed by flashing colours and soft moonlight,
Joyous. We scampered into the infant night,
Dancing, on Monticello Avenue.
Faith

Miranda A. Williams

There was a time when I felt
I would be incapable
Of loving you
Until I felt you
Moving
Within my womb
And I wept
With joy
Small Hands Quiver

Adam Le Mere

Small hands quiver
White teeth anxious
Smeared Pink Lipstick on the cup
Calm as the lake with diamonds
Snapshots

Victoria Burdett

She sat on one of the shellac-coated, faux-Windsor chairs at the formica-topped, imitation-oak pedestal table in her parents’ eat-in kitchen. Her husband of just two years and their infant son had gone to bed early to avoid her alcoholic father who was due home any minute. Upstairs in the guest room, the two slept peacefully on the bed that had been her mother’s graduation gift, the bed she had been conceived on. Her mother sat next to her, waiting, as she flipped hungrily through stacks of old snapshots.

This was the best part of visiting her parents, this looking at the old family photographs. She had brought her new family to visit the last two summers. Before that, she might have seen her parents only three or four times in the fifteen years since she had run away to escape her father’s drinking, her mother’s inertia, and an atmosphere that sucked the life out of her and made her wake up screaming in the middle of the night.

The harsh light from the tole-painted Sears chandelier shone down onto the cardboard box, which contained her emotional lifeline. The pictures inside confirmed her earliest childhood memories, the only happy memories she possessed, except for the ones she was making now with her new husband and son. The oldest pictures, some from the early eighteen hundreds, substantiated her innermost beliefs. She came from nice people. Normal happy people. People who had led meaningful lives. Her parents must be mutations—unsightly kinks in their branch of the family tree.

She pored over the photographs, turning them to different angles to lose the glare from the obnoxious kitchen light. She knew she must commit them to memory because the images were so terribly important to her and she never knew when she would be able to see them again. Her mother wouldn’t let her keep any. The beloved faces in the photographs called out to her and gave her hope. Their likenesses seemed to nod and smile more broadly in the unnatural light, and she was glad she had risked seeing her father to stay up and look at them.
He came in the sliding glass door, cracking open a cold can of beer. He had already consumed a warm six-pack from his stash in the barn before he came up on the deck and slid the cold one out of the cooler he kept outside the kitchen door. He had emptied the can by the time he put his briefcase on the kitchen counter. As he made his way behind his daughter, she said hello, pleased to see that he was not too drunk yet. Her father ignored her as he reached into the refrigerator for another beer.

He sat down at the table and opened a paperback western. After a few minutes, she and her mother began to speak, carefully phrasing comments about this picture or that, careful not to give him anything to criticize or argue about. He didn’t say much. When he did, it was fairly pleasant, and she soon forgot the night before when he swore he’d never have her mother’s relatives back for a family reunion. He hated the kids, he said. Little bastards. And he didn’t like her youngest cousin either. That one and her friend were “funny.” Could tell by their shoes. People like that shouldn’t be allowed to live, by God. That was the last time he’d ever have them all to his house, God damn it.

The night before faded away like the morning mist from the cornfield across the road, and because her father was in still in the early stages of inebriation, she thought she saw the opportunity to make things right. She had read a story, weeks earlier, that so beautifully illustrated the misunderstanding that can result from lack of communication between a parent and child. She felt that her father had misunderstood his parents and been hurt by them. Maybe she had misunderstood him, too. Maybe he hadn’t meant to hurt her. She had planned to tear the story out of the magazine and mail it to him. But she hadn’t. And she had forgotten to bring it with her. Now was her chance. She would tell them both the story and they would understand!! Yes, they would see what they had done to her and apologize, begging her to know that they loved her and that it had all been a huge misunderstanding.

She began to tell the story, looking back and forth between her mother and father, looking for a reaction. Their faces grew slack and they shrunk back, as though their daughter were growing horns out of the top of her head. She spoke faster and faster, trying to get to the point before she lost them. Stay with me, stay with me, she prayed as she whirled on through the story, but the dead fish look in their eyes told her it was already too late. Straight to the end she raced desperately, hoping it would snap them out of their trance-like state. “And all his father really wanted to do was take the stitches out!” she cried to
them, and she felt her face crumple as the sight of her mother’s mouth sucking in air was washed away by her tears.

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed as her parents watched in stunned silence. She couldn’t even look at her father. They didn’t understand. The story hadn’t touched them at all. In fact, much worse, they thought she might be, well . . . funny somehow. She could feel their disapproval coming at her like huge waves of gelatin, invisible and suffocating.

Finally, to break the unbearable silence, she raised her head and pulled more pictures toward her. “Stories like that always make me cry,” she said with a forced laugh as she looked into her grandmother’s smiling face, very careful not to let her tears drop on the old yellowed snapshot.
Little Soot Boy

William Lloyd

In the rags of his trade
Are his misfortunes made,
For the master’s watchful eye
Seems always nearby.
The sooty footprints
Trudging through snow,
On the way to the stacks,
Of chimneys in rows.
“Climb up! Climb up!”
Yell the older boys down,
For the smaller are fitter,
To slide down the round.
A little bleak face stares
Down through the shaft,
The children of the household
Have beheld him and laughed.
“Why are you so dirty?” they
Crib and jibe, “Why you look
Like a ragamuffin scarcely alive!”
But down into black he must go to survive.
Carefully sliding down
The cold-mortared brick,
One foot then another,
That’s little John’s trick!
From the light at the end
The sweet laughter grows.
The others know naught,
But little John knows.
By the rocking horse’s head
And the small piles of blocks,
By the animals stuffed with
Goose feathers with soft golden locks.
By the hearth of the room
So varied and warm,
Is the laughter of children
Safe in their dorms
The sweeping now done
He climbs back to the top.
Where the older boys wait,
To go home to their flop.
“Climb up! Climb up!”
Yell the older boys down,
And reward his keen work
With a curse and a frown.
The December snow drifts down
And lands on his cheeks,
But none will wash off the black,
Save for two little streaks.
Then, the small sooty footprints
Trudge through snow,
Toward the next stacks
Of chimneys in rows.
I see perfect spheres of various colors and sizes, but none compare to my enormity. I hear the serene sound of silence as my surroundings operate in complete cooperation with only a few rare confrontations. I feel the evil power of darkness and never interact with the mysteries of the shadows. I touch everything and everyone in such a profound manner that their lives revolve around me. What am I?
Self Doubt

Deborah Yeng

Doubt is the natural brown stain on your blouse that, although faint, causes you to be self-conscious. Doubt tastes like the numerous seeds in a strawberry, an unavoidable obstacle that slows you down. Doubt sounds like crunching gravel behind you, making you hesitant and frightened. Doubt is like the unpleasantly lingering scent of cigars, difficult to eliminate and never completely gone. Doubt looks like your shadow, barely noticed but always there. Doubt makes me feel like a dying cancer victim, weakly fighting a battle I know I can not win.
History Repeated

Stephanie Lummus

It was supposed to be history. You weren’t supposed to be upset in history. You’re supposed to be bored and tired, repeatedly looking at your watch, at your schedule, at the triangles drawn across your notes. As I sat in my small desk, idly staring off into space, the professor began to assault my senses with atrocities that I would never forget. 60,000 people died at the Battle of the Somme in a matter of hours. They fought for their country. Some were afraid to die for their country, so they hid in the trenches and were executed as cowards. The terrible knot in my stomach grew. I would have been afraid too.

The skinny guy next to me ran a hand through his greasy hair and readjusted his book in order to lay his head down more comfortably. 60,000 people died in what was equivalent to the space of a class period at the local college, and the best this kid could do is roll over on his other side? Others jotted notes occasionally when the professor happened to mention a date or a place, while zeros burned a path across my mind.

The numbers grew. A staggering 2 MILLION Russians would be dead in the name of the cause. What cause? I can’t even remember the cause. All I remember is the number. In one irretrievable moment my grief for these people was overwhelming. I was the mother to a young man bound for the front. I was the sister who bravely handed him his snack for the train. I was the father fighting misgiving with pride. I was the lover who watched from a distance as she remembered the heated embrace of the night before. I embodied the grief of this family, but I was multiplied by 2 MILLION.

I reassured myself that I was just being overly emotional. I had to be. No one else seemed to be having a problem in the class. Feet shuffled under desks, while the professor droned on with his dates and facts. The numbers did not give him pause. No special inflection was given to this massive death and delusion. The skinny kid’s mouth had fallen open in his sleep, while his glasses slid off the end of his nose.

This period in history wasn’t finished with its onslaught of grief. I
swallowed bravely and resumed sketching my triangles. Decades disclosed their infestation, disease, revolt, misrepresentation and injustice. The great powers of the world reared up in indignation and fear.

A smaller number pricked my ears this time. It was 3000. It was a smaller number than earlier, but we were not discussing a war. Stalin had ordered the execution of private farmers. 3000 private farmers were shot. More were imprisoned. What had they done? I asked myself. They were farmers. The professor’s matter-of-fact voice implied that they happened to be in the way of the government’s plan to take over the agrarian economy. They were taken from their homes and shot. They were dispensable. What person, rich or poor, does not value their lives, or any life?

The injustice flamed up within me for those poor farmers. Confusion dampened the flames of ferocity, as I watched a short clip of the Russian people enthusiastically greeting their leader. They not only endorsed their leader, but the death of those innocent people as well. In the effort to take over the private farming industry, production was halted. 7 MILLION people starved to death. Another short clip accompanied this number. It was a woman who had watched her weak mother and father be taken away and buried alive. The girl’s father had warned her to hide. The gravediggers knew they were still alive according to the girl who was now an old woman approaching her late eighties.

More heads dropped to the small college desks as the video recounted more horrors and more numbers. More vicious atrocities committed against mankind in the name of . . . something. A cell phone rang, a girl gave her number to a kid in the back row, and the skinny guy had finally awakened. He built a paper plane and then a paper mouth that could mime along with the narrator of the documentary.

The narrator was not finished yet, but we were almost out of class time. The last number before the screen collapsed into darkness was 55 MILLION. Parents, children, and siblings would know death in the next war. Oh, and that included the 6 MILLION Jews that would die in concentration camps.

My head was reeling. I numbly gathered my books into a pile and aimed for the door of the class. Bright sunlight met me at the door as I vaguely remembered where I had parked my Jeep. My list of grievances and priorities seemed insignificant in the face of so much destruction. I wondered at my peers. Not one gasp, comment, or raised eyebrow at the enormous loss of life.

In an effort to follow their lead, I blasted Creed as loud as I could and felt the Jeep roar to life. It was in a hurry to forget those numbers,
Those numbers were hard to forget. I pulled into my driveway and turned off the engine still sad, angry, and confused. Why doesn’t anybody react to such awful numbers?

I tried the numbers out on my neighbor and his wife. They shook their heads in wonder and then asked me if I had taken my allergy medicine. Later on that evening, I related the events of the day to my husband. He began to regurgitate facts from the history channel mini-series on WWI. One hour later, my mother dropped by for a visit. As she poured herself some coffee, I mentioned the lecture and the disturbing video clips I had viewed that day. My mother exclaimed, “That’s too bad,” and bent down to wipe a spot off of my floor.

The numbers are smaller in today’s war. The CNN anchor carefully reports over a thousand casualties in the war in Iraq. That square screen continues to scream of death delivered between nations. The cause is still elusive. The mighty citizens of the twenty first century balk at conversation, and instead, grab their guns. It is as obscure as the sightless eyes of the dead men and women who have fought for their countries for centuries. Their sacrifice is the same. Their families still grieve. The methodology is questionable, but where are those who would question?
Without

Rosita Muniz

These days I will learn to live without . . .
without fear
without anxiety
without doubt
As of tomorrow I will learn to let things go . . .
without temper
without tantrums
without losing control
There maybe material things I will learn to live without . . .
without riches
without mansions
without gems and stocks
Today I will learn to be . . .
all that I am
all that I will be
be the best that I can be
Today I will no longer be concerned about what I am without . . .
Melted, Not Boiled

Pamela Overton

Add a pinch of white. Toss in a smidgen of black. Stir in a handful of red and don’t forget your sniff of yellow.

This was the idea America was to be based on, the melting pot. Different races, origins, backgrounds, beliefs, and religions thrown in and stirred up to melt into one huge conglomeration. The originator of this idea did not include a plan of action or events to incorporate all the different worlds into one world.

Hundreds of thousands of people came or were brought to America with the idea that they could have an equal chance at happiness and riches, a life free from struggle and worries. For this is truly the American dream.

The different people arrived but they did not merge. They were separated and made to feel different. The difference of one group was their dark skin and coarse hair texture. Another group had slanted, evil eyes. Still, another group was cast out because their lord carried a different name. Due to the non-acceptance, these people of different colors, cultures, and ways of living began to look to groups who identified with the same origin of the land from which they came.

From this, segregation was born. Segregation bore a powerful, hate-filled language. Not only were these words heard they were also felt, and these words hurt.

No, my people are not like the people of your kind.

Yes, we are separate, we do stand apart. My people are labeled dark and evil. You term me a lesser man because of the skin I’m in.

Because of the god I worship, I am evil. This makes me different from you.

But, I pray, just as you. I pray for a good life and a safe place in which to raise my children. I dream of a world where there is a bountiful harvest no crying is heard, no suffering is felt.

And, I hope, just as you. I hope we will recognize we are all of royal descent, from a crown of colorful jewels, white, black, red, or yellow, no matter the color.
No, we do not melt, but being individuals should not keep us from standing distinct, each in our own right.
The Runner’s high

M.L. Jones

Whether the air is thick,
From summer’s heat, or crisp
From the winter’s rigid cold,
A runner never withholds.
Wet pellets falling,
White powder drifting,
Harsh winds blowing,
A runner will endure.
From a rocky mountain trail,
To an asphalt river,
Or the grain of a secluded coast,
A runner finds a way.
Feet sore from pounding,
Heart rapidly beating,
Muscles aching from strain,
All a small price to pay,
For the prize the mind clearing
Runner’s high.
Creativity

Alden Landry

Creativity passes as a warm breeze
As mysterious as summer snow
Unimaginable, uncontrollable, and hidden
It is not a trait but an occasional gift
Schizophrenic—a whispered epiphany
With no explanation or origin
Original in each inhabitant
Passing like a possession of the mind
From person to person
Leaving its host drained and detoxified
Completely exposed in amazing forms
Poetry, art, music, moments
Passionate phrases between lovers
Daring and inexperienced
Fearing judgment while...
Longing attention and exposure
Not magical but mystical
Either loved or hated but always engaging
Its vulnerability has strength and power
Addictive when uninhibited
It is my craving.
My Muse

Alden Landry

My muse has an ugly beauty
Straining my eyes to focus on the perfection
My muse has cut me down
Left me hollow and bitter and whole
My muse is an antidote
To all that ails and impales
My muse is a paranoid schizophrenic
With a drug habit and a PhD in street-smarts
It is overpowering and circumstantial
My muse is an arrow through the heart
That cuts clean and heals slowly
It has lifted me and shaken me
And stirred inspiration in my soul
My muse is real and intangible
Contradictory and factual
My muse is a rhetorical philosophical question
With no imaginable answer
It is awesome and humble
And a true writer’s block
It is an addiction worth fighting for
My muse is . . . love
I have often wondered what would have become of our family, if my sister Emilia didn’t start her apprenticeship at the Iaccarino Costume Designer Shop—an upscale dress shop—when she was twelve years old.

It was not unusual in the early fifties in Naples, Italy for a working class family to have seven children. Our family was just that, and our sister Emilia was the oldest of the bunch. My mother was a seamstress, and worked at home, but didn’t earn very much money. My father was an auto mechanic, and when he worked, he used most of his money for himself. My grandmother helped with her widow pension until she died. Because of all those reasons, in time, we began to view Emilia as our savior.

Emilia started contributing towards the family as soon as she began working at the dress shop at age twelve. At first, the weekly paychecks helped pay for the food that was much needed in a large family like ours. Naples, at that time, was just beginning to emerge from the devastation of World War II, and school for children wasn’t mandatory. Nonetheless, by going to work at an early age, Emilia sacrificed her schooling to help our family.

In 1955, when Emilia was fourteen years old, Signore Filippo Iaccarino, her boss entrusted her with delivering the dress shop garments. This was a big step for her because the garments were worth thousands of lire, the equivalent of hundreds of dollars. It was a big responsibility for a fourteen-year-old girl. The timing of the promotion couldn’t have been more fortuitous because my grandmother died soon after, and with her also went the financial help she gave us.

Also fortunate for Emilia, and our family, was that the clients who frequented the dress shop were very wealthy. They were the wives of prominent members of Naples’ high society, which included bankers, doctor, businessmen and even Barons. These ladies would give Emilia tips, equivalent to many times her weekly salary, which in turn she would give to our mother. At one point my father lost his job,
and stopped working all together so that my mother with her meager earnings and my sister with her tips became the sole supporters of our household.

At Sunday meals, Emilia often recounted the stories of each delivery. She told us how sometimes she had to change three busses just to make one delivery all the way across town. Another time she’d tell us how much she enjoyed taking the funivia—the cable car—to Vomero, a beautiful neighborhood on top of the hills of Naples, and how beautiful Baroness Pignatelli’s house had been. She would also tell us how difficult it had been to walk up a long driveway in the rain with the heavy wooden box. At times, she had us all laughing when she would mimic Dr. D’Amato’s wife trying to fit into a dress, which was always two sizes too small for her.

At fourteen, our sister Emilia was small, skinny and had mousy looking hair. She dressed in hand-me-downs, and often she had holes in her shoes. She remarked often, as if joking, that because she looked like a street urchin and because the box was as big as she was, the ladies gave her bigger tips. Looking back, it must have been humiliating for Emilia to be pitied and be perceived as a street urchin, even though she always joked about it.

The box that the clothes were delivered in was a large rectangular oak box with a leather strap and buckle, which was heavy and difficult to carry. Simple dress deliveries were not so easy; winter deliveries were worse because the garments were much heavier.

After our sister Emilia married and moved to Piemonte—a region in northern Italy—she continued with her financial support to our family. I was the only one in our family to come to America; the rest of the family still lives in Italy. And they, like me, are still grateful to our sister Emilia. She took on the responsibility of an adult at age twelve, and saved us all, literally, from starving. I am grateful to her not only for those reasons, but also because her stories gave me a vision that success could be achieved through hard work, and that gave me hope for a better future.
“Macht schnell! Judenreck!” I was poked by the butt of a gun. I did not pray for a savior or a miracle. I begged. But my plea for any exit other than a chimney would not be answered. That is how this true story ends. Like the tracks on which we came to this place, our paths were already laid out. Nothing short of a cosmic train wreck would alter our fates.

I felt the heat of other bodies all around me through the biting cold atmosphere. My blindfold was not opaque, and I could see the murderers and thieves clearly. Shapes and colors were distorted such that I could see beyond clearly. I saw through to their twisted souls, and I saw myself. The only difference was the smiles on their faces. Even with cloth covering my vision, I could see there were no smiles among us. There was nothing among us. There was nothing but warmth.

We soon learned there was nothing they were unable to take from us. It was possibly the only gift they were given from God. Who could fault them for utilizing a divine strength? We had used up all ours. That is how they had already defeated us. They made us believe that we were broken and forsaken and forgotten. And now, they take our warmth.

I shook. In the novels where they use flowery imagery, immersion in water is symbolic of salvation and rebirth. Our salvation was from peace, and we were reborn into Hell. But Hell had yet to freeze over; our existences swam in icy waters. “Unhhh…” They were having trouble unloading a cold body. It is colder than us. We cannot feel warmth from it. I believe that was my mother. But I can’t see it.

Focus is the only necessity worth mentioning. Without it, I would be too distracted by the thoughts of death and eternity and fear. They are merely distractions and nothing more. My focus and my intent is survival. After all is stripped from a man, this is what remains. It is the tiny, underdeveloped tree that sustains its erect position after the hurricane mangles the forest with its large, clumsy arms. Train whistles breathe, insane soldiers shout, and the innocent men lay silent. But
none of these stir the waves of emotion collected and suppressed inside my head. They do not come close.

It is easier to put the situation in basic terms:

I am scared. I am wet. I am sad. I am growing comfortable as a corpse.

I use the only instrument I ever owned to record a magnificent opus to which I will be the only audience. It is doubtful if I even have time to replay what I have ingrained into my mind. The end is so near that it seems like it has already happened. My senses tell me otherwise. My instrument is turning on itself. It hears and sees things that are not there. Devils and cotton candy are around the corner because that is what my sensors are reading. Death for the first time is so cut and dry, and all the dots are finally connected. This true story can finally end.

And it ends with the beginning of dress rehearsal for the Patriot Players’ production of The Diary of Anne Frank. I play Peter Van Daan. Tonight I will tell the true story of a dead boy. No acting exercise or Method training could possibly prepare me to face what he faced. My director is no Hitler. Our Nazis are not automatons. We are simply kids acting out a fantasy that was never just imagined. I silently apologize ahead of time for any further injustice to the poor boy’s soul as I walk onto stage. I know he accepts it. We are no different from one another.

“Oh, Peter, if only I could help you, if only you would let me! Together we could drive away your loneliness and mine!”
Before November 29, 2001, I detested humanity. As cruel as it may seem, my hatred was focused on the portion of the population that was unable to walk or talk. That’s right; I just plain did not care for babies. What significant event changed my outlook on this delicate, controversial subject? Was it because a new leader was sworn into the White House? Was it because of the worst attack on United States soil since the English raped the Native Americans and stripped them of their land? Was there a rare astronomical occurrence that caused my neurotransmitters to realign themselves with the motion of the planets to produce this uncharacteristic stance on neonates? I assume all of the above had some slight influence on my views, but the simple fact of the matter is this: My sister had a baby.

For as long as I could remember, I had a specific distaste for infants. It would perturb me to hear a baby crying in the middle of a very important scene of a movie. It seemed like it was the only activity for which infants could muster up enough energy. They need not do much more than slightly lower their vicious, little mandibles in order for a spoon filled with mashed goop to gain entry into their never-ending hunger pit. There were very few differences between a baby and a black hole in my opinion, but the distinction came from elementary physics. Not even light can escape a black hole. Everything escapes infants. I refer not only to the many bodily fluids that could end up on your new favorite pair of shoes if you got too close, but also to the knowledge that was never able to be collected inside the heads of these young fools. How could it possibly take a person such a long time to figure out how many fingers they possessed? Indeed, I truly believed that babies were nothing short of a relentlessly needy and helpless race of underdeveloped dwarves.

And just when I had things figured out, my sister decided to conceive. I cannot be anything but sincere when I admit that the moment I first saw my niece, Morgan Taylor Piland, a switch was turned on inside me. I felt my heart grow three sizes just like the Grinch’s. In order to
intellectualize a moment like this, I agreed with myself that I had gained a philosophical notch on my belt and finally accepted the fact that all life had to begin in this manner. But it was much harder to explain the intricate moments after our initial meeting. There were times when I held Morgan, and suddenly I felt happy within myself. And no matter what substance came out of Morgan, I found myself more than willing to help clean it up. She was learning new things! I would have never guessed that I would learn from her as well, but it happened. Everything that I had etched onto my stone tablets as my own personal law was somehow scratched out and rewritten.

Almost three years later, I am teaching Morgan Taylor Piland how to ride a bicycle with training wheels. This was a bike that I picked out from the toy store, bought with my own money, and furnished with colorful ribbons that I personally attached to both handles. I have yet been able to pinpoint the exact traits that distinguish Morgan from the countless other children that I have loathed in my lifetime besides the obvious fact that she is my niece. That could very well be her only saving grace.
What you see in me . . .

Rosita Muniz

In a day I see me still and reluctant
Timid and discontented
My mouth runs dry with complaints
And audacity
And in a day, you see the energy I carry
You see how it flows like the falls
And you embrace all that is beneath me
You kiss me in the mouth of madness, regardless
Making it known that you see the beauty in me….
Some days I feel distraught
Lost in another realm of some sort
And just as I begin to feel paranoid
I feel you taking my hand
Then suddenly I am found
You saw that I was lost…
Then the world becomes familiar again
and the day makes sense….  
I’m starting a new chapter in this life
And it began with all that is God sent
But it couldn’t be done until I turned the page
Love, you are part of the reasons
I welcomed change . . .
(go) speed racer (go)

elven ridgway hillard

i imagine times past . . .
i live in the rear view.

foot pressing
hard on the gas,
the other
hard on the brake.
engines revving
. . . and going no where. fast.
fast. fast as u can
get it.
. . . if only that other would let up.
hmmmm . . .
maybe, just maybe!
i can get some traction.
traction, and
real life speeeed.
the speed i need
to make it to the
finish line.

........................

. . . hmmm
if only!
i could get
that other
to let up.
For your own good . . .

Evelyn Ridgway Hillard

So you say it’s for my own good.  
You buy me these things because  
I can not choose for myself.  
I can not know what I want,  
You say. I know what I don’t want.  
I know I don’t want you.

You go thru the motions for my own good.  
You wink a sly face in the public eye.  
And never again do you look my way.  
You boast of my beauty to the onlooker,  
And later forget my name.  
I know your name tho  
Beelze-BUB.  
Never forgetting you. Always regretting you.  
Your face. Your name. Your cold-hearted fame.

And again you say it’s for my own good.  
And in the end—I say—  
I don’t believe you.
For no

Evelyn Ridgway Hillard

No thank you. I would like to do it myself.
No thank you. I really, really insist.
No please. I am able to do it myself.
No really I’m quite sure I can handle (it) myself.
Land of the Free:
Free to “spin” the facts
Free to libel those outrageous enough to search for the truth
Free to scare your countrymen into one political persuasion
Home of the Brave:
The “Brave” who run for public office and run away from public service
The “Brave” who hide behind party platforms and stifle their own personal conscience
The “Brave” who promise social security and instead deliver insecurity
The Rocket’s red glare:
The glare into public libraries
The glare into private bedrooms
The glare into liberty and the pursuit of happiness
The Bombs bursting in air:
The Bombs over Baghdad
The Bombs over Iran?
The Bombs over North Korea?
The Star Spangled Banner:
Red for Republicans
Blue for Democrats
White for the flag we’ll raise in surrender to Super Tuesday
Rocking Horse Winner

Lori Joyner

You ride a wooden stallion to the winner’s circle
From childhood to young adult you live the miracle
A childlike innocence becoming a deadly thing
You ride the wooden stallion, your favorite plaything
Feel the rhythm of the beast’s flesh as it runs with the speed of light
Hold on, close your eyes and wish with all your might
Your life ends, not from atop a horse do you fall
But from the obsession of it all
The morning sun shone on Grandma’s ruby red climbing roses. The jeweled branches stretched out along the roof line of the tiny gray house as if to protect it from the roar of farm trucks entering the cannery next door.

Each morning my Grandfather set out on his quest for the County Record. His faded aqua Chevy gave out a long creak as he opened the door. The musty smell of the interior escaped into the morning air. Bob at the corner market was always glad to stop and talk a spell. Each purchase came with free information about hunting dogs and shot guns, ball games and horse races. Somehow this community managed to escape change. It was a 1950’s town in a 1970’s world.

Back inside the 1940’s bungalow, Grandma began the day with her favorite hymns. The house was filled with praise and the aroma of fresh coffee. She made a sudsy pan of dishwater from the pot she’d used to boil the morning eggs. She’d state her mantra, “Ain’t no sense in was-tin’.” The house’s only amenity was cold running water.

The 1930s had changed the way they lived. Banks could no longer be trusted. The safest place to keep your cash was in the freezer. A container marked “pig brains” was not likely to be investigated. The remainder of the cash was rolled and discretely hidden in Grandma’s bosom.

They had all they would ever need. Now they lived through the glory of their son. My Grandfather, basically illiterate, turned past the front page, straight to the results from the local racetrack. Grandma read them aloud to his itching ears. “My boy did good last night,” he’d brag to the neighbors. “His horse won again.”

My father, busy pursuing his own popularity, left Mom at home. With little education, her only option was to take on a “job” as a foster parent. The free love attitude of the late 60s gave birth to many unwanted children. After one year of placement with the family, it was decided that I would be adopted. The family needed someone who could help with household chores and care for aging adults. I imagined
that I exuded responsibility and maturity, but my only true qualification was “female.”

The stresses of a bad marriage and a gaggle of needy children proved overwhelming for my Mother. She survived on small doses of Valium and large doses of country music. Grandma’s house was just outside my bedroom window. Life was more positive there. I split my time between the two.

Grandma was welcoming, but always busy. There was work to be done, women’s work. She was just the person to train me for the lifetime of duties that lay ahead. I was her constant shadow from the kitchen to the garden. I would always be rewarded with something sweet. She sometimes sent me to the track with Grandpa. There I would be rewarded with funny stories and red cherry slushies. On those evenings Grandpa traded in his baseball cap for a wide brim. He splurged with a sports coat and a splash of Aqua Velva.

At 7:00 pm sharp, the bugle sounded, signaling that it was post time. The grand stand was washed in a drab gray from ceiling to floor. Red stripes ran down poles like candy canes. Smoke swirled atop pipes filled with sweet cherry tobacco. Would-be millionaires hurried about placing bets before the next show of trotters took to the gate. Gin and tonic . . . hot dogs . . . caramel popcorn . . . “Where’s the slushie man, Pop-pop?” He had no intention of letting me down.

When Grandpa handed me that precious offering, what I remember best is the look of satisfaction on his wrinkled face. His smile, almost toothless, ran ear to ear. He didn’t buy me that drink because I had done my chores, or hidden the gin from my older brother. It wasn’t because I helped Grandma deliver food to crazy Uncle Job. Nothing I had accomplished could purchase that moment for me. He gave it to me just because he loved me.

Few people can say that they grew up as rich as I did. I watched my own food grow on the vine. I walked with Grandpa and his trusty twenty-two through the golden autumn forest, in search of dinner. I’ve learned the harder way that children are gifts to be treasured. That sometimes, in pursuit of our own successes, we leave behind our greatest accomplishments. Often, less is more. And life really is short. Take time to reward yourself with simple things, like red cherry slushies, for no reason at all.
In Memory of Choices

Meghan Bernier

Your death,
Motivated by sickness,
Was carried out
By choice.
Since when,
Has “free will,”
Been forced?
My life,
Is my choice.
To carry on
With methodical
Meanderings
And painted smiles.
Living life
As an emotional kaleidoscope
Of vibrant colors
And chaos.
You chose death,
I choose life.
I am Deborah Yeng

I am the straightforward sign
that traffic seeks for guidance and direction.
I am the faint breeze
that gives the gentle willow its timeless rhythm.
I am the unwavering priest
that soothes the conscience and purifies the soul.
I am the patient brush
that untangles a thousand natural knots.
I am the sudden miracle
that appears when all hope has disappeared.
I am the deceiving spider’s web
within which strength is hidden despite its fragile appearance.
Insomniac's Dream

Deborah Yeng

The sleep of this night deepens, but mine does not. It will envelop my mind in a shroud of safety, keeping frightening fears at bay, and yet it too keeps its distance. As I desperately seek that refuge held just beyond my reach, I reluctantly realize no amount of sheep could coax its arrival. Tossing and turning, I hope to find that one perfect position that will unlock the chains of my restlessness, but that too remains elusive. My surroundings continue to be an incessant nuisance, driving away all whispers of peace with its overwhelming reality. The violent wind rages outside, triumphantly battling Mother Nature. He noisily pushes the metal tin across the gravel and manipulates the flag as effortlessly as if it were a puppet made to dance by strings. But the wind quiets and sleep comes unexpectedly with the lulling sway of the trees. As I begin to softly sink into a sweet slumber, the clanging of pots from the kitchen abruptly awakens me. The loud voices slice into my haven of dreams, and with the sun, signify the passing of yet another restless night.
How to Survive the Trials of a Cashier

Deborah Yeng

Don’t panic.
The rush is coming.
Anticipation builds,
And you swallow hard.
But don’t panic.
They approach the front door,
And you wait.
Dingaling!
You hear the dreaded tinkling of the bell.
That means time is up.
You prepare yourself for whatever’s thrown at you.
You know to expect the unexpected:
A difficult question?
A strange request?
An unacceptable check?
A grouchy customer?
You plaster a smile on your face and
Wait.
The customer slowly walks towards you.
While the line lengthens behind him,
He takes his time.
Thinking,
Thinking,
Thinking,
You fight the urge to tap your foot.
You grit your teeth and remember,
Always remember
To smile.
A smile
Can change your attitude
And theirs.
There is time.
There is always enough time
To smile.
You keep in mind that they are unfamiliar with this.
Perhaps they have never been here before,
And you patiently answer question,
After question,
After question.
But then,
The phone rings.
The customer
Asks you to read off your entire menu.
A diner
Asks for a refill of soda.
The packer is confused and
Asks about the last order.
The customer changes his mind and
Asks to get a refund.
All are asking YOU
At the same time.
You hear the chaos and noise unfold around you.
The Chinese shouting in the kitchen
Blends with the English chatter out front.
You hear the dishes clatter as they are washed.
You hear the baby crying in his high chair.
You feel the threatening winds of a confusing tornado
And hope you will not be sucked into its mayhem.
Then amidst the pandemonium,
You hear the faint laughter of the customers as they merrily dine.
The radio hums soothingly in the background.
You smell the enticing scent of mouth-watering food in the air
And see the gratitude of your regular as
He waves goodbye once more.
You feel the warmth of his smile as
He promises to return again next week.
You know he will.
He always does.
You pause
And remember to pace yourself.
Steady always wins the race.
You take a deep breath,
Turn around to face your next customer,
And as always
Smile.
An old black Ford sits abandoned under an oak tree
The once shiny car, now covered with thick dust,
Plays blackboard to the neighborhood teens
Crude scrawl they write
The old car
Yearns for weddings, new births, indeed, deaths
They are not soon forgotten
Now a spider’s web
On the broken window
Makes a home for a new species
Inside the car a squirrel digs
Through the fluffy remainder
Of an upholstered seat
The old car by the oak tree
Relishes different seasons
I leaned too hard on the looking glass of my life
And it shattered
And I’m happy
Insight can be a handicap that leads to limiting predictions.
I stared too hard in the mirror
And I lost focus of who I was
And it was exhilarating
With no hard lines distinguishing me from anything else—
I am free to become all the things that drive me and stir my core.
I put my 5-year plan in a safe place
And now I can’t find it
So my adventure begins
For now I am wandering lost on paths that I never knew existed
And in doing so I have created a journey that is all my own.
Our lives are Jokes:  
he found peace in underage sheets early in the morning  
and they slapped handcuffs on him and threw him in jail!  
bad, bad, Mr. Wiggins!  
if i were him i would do it too  
i would do it too  
i would’ve done it too  
so way to go Mr. Wiggins!  
“All the world’s a stage…”  
and all that other hogwash  
was this scripted, Mr. Wiggins?  
Why didn’t you love your wife and your children, Mr. Wiggins  
you had it all you even had the Television i’ve dreamt of for a day or two…  
bad, bad Mr. Wiggins!  
The only place you can find happiness is in the margins of the script.
If the time before the past equals the past, which repeats itself to the now. Knowing its recurrence, why do we ask what the future has.

Do you want to know what i know,
It really ain’t much,
Some may say it really ain’t sh!t.
One thing I know is
If anyone other than myself knows it,
Sh!t is what it will evolve to.

OK OK OK

I won’t walk you in the door,
When you’re in I’m not giving you directions,
I’ll tell you that my footprints are all over the floor,
and each trail leads to a different door
with
different
blessings.

Some will call it a marvelous home,
Where the Truth is bright and rich,
some will be lost because they’re alone,
Majority refuse to leave the car
because the landscaping makes them sick.

What I will give you is simple and fair,
Because that’s what I see makes sense,
Now open your eyes and look right there,
don’t stretch your hand to grab
But steady your fingers to pinch,
A key you see from you to me
to an equation we see up in th
For me it was hard
for you it is simple;
because I've lessened the load
for you to bare

If the time before the past equals the past, which repeats itself to the
now. Knowing its recurrence, why do we ask what the future has.
I Saw a Crane in Heaven

Carl Forrest

Ivory crane,
Thy step is like idle wake upon the virgin shore,
Heaven, how far off you seem,
To men who rarely dream,
Who reach out with an ardent hand,
To each passing second, in each grain of sand,
To each blooming flower, upon each wilting day,
To bloom again, in twilight feigned.

Listen Old Father!
Heaven is found beneath the reeds,
Between each thistle, Aside foreign weeds,
O’ Father, Heaven is left obscured,
By nimble horizons and zealous shores,
In mundane longings, and futile moors,
Through transient suffering and worldly pains,
Is Heaven alone, left obtained.
There is a flower – a rose –
that blooms in a field of wheat,
golden stalks that grow and droop around that flower
-- that rose.
Its petals hold that all-to-familiar hue –
a light pink coloration
a complexion almost red
but shyly staying pink.
A slim stalk supports it
curving in the way I know
with leaves, thorns
that I’ve recorded all the days I’ve slept here
around the flower – the rose –
drooping my body, my eyes and brow
in the likeness of the weeping grain.
Carriage Horse's Lament

William Lloyd

I have walked for many miles
Down crudely bricked streets
And narrow alley aisles.
Past a thousand frowning faces,
And children’s sweet smiles.
I have given each muscle
To every demand.
I have labored so hard
I barely can stand.
When I tire I say naught,
For I have no leisure of rest,
Each day is a burden
Just like the rest.
When I hunger or thirst,
It is at your whim,
That I eat or I drink
I must do your bidding, never to think.
And yet I grow weary of
This weight I must bare,
I search for my labor’s end,
With a blind stare.
From a child’s hand
A sweet apple or pear
Is my only reward,
Simple and rare.
As yet I see no end,
To the streets and the aisles,
Only more frowns
For thousands of miles.
Pocket Watch of the Gods

William Lloyd

The gentleman’s watch
All golden and fine,
On the end of a chain
As if he owns time.
The mechanical ticking
Steady and sweet,
The purest of sounds
Next to a heart’s beat.
His fine coat and hat,
So crisp and so clean.
His gloves and his cane,
So exquisite and keen.
Reaching into his pocket
To retrieve his gold locket,
Gloved fingers to wind,
In golden chain entwined.
With a sharp glance
At the face of the dial,
He looks up in disgust,
So unbecoming his style.
Then with a snap—
The hunt’s case is locked,
And he whispers aloud,
“I should have just walked!”
But the time between here,
And the time to be there,
Is such a long time
That he should better not dare.
With his watch-winding done,
And both his hands on his cane,
He waits an impatient minute,
To check time again.
One Hard Kiss

April Green

Stand up.
Step forward.
Move closer.
Whisper to me.
Touch me.
I’ll tell you how.
Open my shirt.
Take it off.
Put your hands on my shoulders.
Run your fingers down—
    down to my hands.
Kiss my hands.
Drag your fingers back
    atop my breasts.
Feel for them.
Squeeze them and pull me closer.
Wrap your hands around my back.
Slide them down to the small of my back.
Pull me into you
Envelop my ass in the
    Palm of your hands.
Bring me around.
Slide your hands down between my
    Sweet thighs.

Lay me on the bed.
Kiss my lips gently.
Run your hands to my ankles and back.
Kiss my neck.
Touch my thigh.
Kiss my breasts.
Grab my thigh.
Lift my chin.
Kiss me hard.
Hold my face.
Let your fingers walk.
Touch me everywhere.
Learn my body…
Every muscle,
Every groove,
Every soft spot.
I feel you against me.

Hard.
Push against me.
Flush against me.
Hard.
Chest to chest.
One hard kiss.
One long look.
Two deep breaths.
In. Out.
Feeling you…
Smooth
Velvet
Rich.
Wanting so much for this to work
You will never understand
How much it hurts
To look into your eyes
And not see love there
From this agony
Lord I pray to be spared
Tired of crying and pleading my case
Love shouldn’t have to be proven
All you need is faith
For you love is akin to contracting a fatal disease
Be a man...let down your guard...open up to me
I can show you so much
We can share many things
But how can you accept love
If you don’t know what love means
Beauty

Rosita Muniz

Beauty . . .
Is it on the flesh of our insides?
or on the flesh on our surfaces?
Where does beauty reside?
What is beauty?
Is it the dimple on your face?
Or the life that you save?
Which is beauty?
Is it the time that you give or
The time that you take?
Is it beauty whether it is real or fake?
Does beauty ever fade?
If so, can it be replaced?
Was it beauty from the beginning?
Will you know it if you saw it?
What is beauty?
Is it red?
Is it black?
Is it a colorless act?
What is beauty?
Is it a size 5/6?
5ft 9
36C cup
Or is it weightless?
Is beauty written or spoken?
Illustrated and demonstrated?
Painted or sculptured?
Or is it simply in a jar?
What is beauty?
Over

Amy Crosby

“I’m over you”—such a dumb thing to say:
You’re not a mountain I’ve slowly crawled up,
Posing triumphant at the airy peak,
Bright moments of bliss before the descent,
Swift and rocky down the opposite slope,
And then a sneering glance back from the base.
No, I’ve not gone “over” you, or tried;
I just cling desperately to your side.
An urgency to inscribe this
Before it peals away like weathered paint
Recording it in the language of my spirit
My soul’s interpretation inked in blood
Individual words
Nothing more than simple definitions
But in summation, the whole of my perception
An answer to a lifelong question
That dwells just beneath the surface
Rain pinging against the pane
The distant howl of an injured beast
Fevered dreams, a frenzy of passions
Alternately submerging, then erupting
Shrouded mists bobbing in the glassy black water
On this semi-shrouded, moonlit night
Finally knowing what is it that I want to impart
Rapturous, like an experienced lover
Finding that aching spot
Igniting my pulsing pleasure
Ballpoint scratching away at this crisp surface
A naked figure twirling around a raging fire
Once empty page now pregnant
Fragments pairing
Melding
Sweet release
Sitting alone, in the cold solitude of my 10 feet in West Hollywood, I came to the realization that I’m pretty good at putting people together. You know, jacking people off. I’m good right now, you know. But I want to be great. You know that what people mean by putting the past behind you doesn’t actually mean forgetting the past? What it really means is that you realize that your life is wasted in thinking about the past because you prevent yourself from experiencing anything new or creative or joyful. All of your new experiences will be tainted by your constant internal comparisons to prior events. All your thoughts and emotions will be shadowed.

Must be why I hate thinking about my Grandma’s birthday.

There was a time when I didn’t know much about depression or bipolar disorder or whatever it is the doctors say I have, since I refuse to accept any of their diagnosis or recommendations for fear of having to admit to myself that I have something wrong with my brain. Chemical imbalances, repressed childhood memories and all the surplus possibilities they have thrown my way never stand a chance of a second thought. I know who I am. Once I leave the urgent care center with my prescription in hand, it’s an automatic. Who do they think they are anyway? In my mind, my behavior may seem erratic and my choices poor, but I’m not sick. Someone called me an alcoholic after I was pulled over for driving under the influence, like, a month before Christmas. The way I saw it, I was just unlucky.

I was already planning to continue driving regardless of the outcome of my DMV hearing. I drove everywhere I wanted at every opportunity I had. I was still able to do so legally.

When it happened, I was driving a new Porsche 911 Carerra 4, Cabriolet. Painted silver with gray leather interior and a black top, it usually caught the eye of anyone who had an idea of what I paid for it. It seemed to draw attention everywhere I went, which was great for my ego, but not much else at $1,171 a month, plus insurance.

I had no business being out on the street in the first place that
night. It was nearly twelve o’clock. I was hungry and in the mood for Vince’s spaghetti. At my age, I should have known better than to drive unnecessarily, even if only a few miles to pick up some take-out. Vince’s spaghetti is hard to resist. I have a soft spot for the tomato sauce, garlic bread, and blue cheese, in particular. I decided to sit at the bar and have a tall beer while I waited for my order.

I figured one twenty-three ouncer wouldn’t even faze me. Besides, I can’t watch the Mariners without a cold beer to occupy the empty space atop the smooth teak bar in front of me. Right after my first or second sip, a young woman brought out my food. I inspected it to make sure all was in order, then ripped down the last of my light beer and made my way to the car. I stopped at ARCO for gas on the way home.

I admired the oily white bag resting warmly on my passenger seat and looked forward to a relaxing evening in front of my big screen. As I scanned through the tracks on the CD, the young beauty in the BMW next to me at the light caught my eye. She couldn’t have been more than twenty and was obviously a college student out on a bender with her boyfriend who was behind the wheel. I also noticed a second couple shoehorned into the back seat. The blonde caught me checking her out and smiled sweetly. She looked over at her boyfriend and said something that caused the couple in the back seat to laugh and look over at me.

The light turned green and before I even put the Porsche in gear, the BMW was nearly a hundred yards ahead of me. At the next traffic light, the kids were laughing and enjoying their youth. The driver inched closer to the cross walk. The passengers watched me with delight while the engine screamed. I smiled. This kid obviously needed to be educated on the difference between his parents’ BMW and my six-figures worth of flawless German engineering.

The light turned green. I didn’t even think about it. I just reacted. The two of us simultaneously pushed our machines to their maximum potential; both vehicles accelerating with blazing speed and swallowing hundreds of feet of road per second. I’ll admit, the driver showed some skill, but the sedan was no match for my tight and finely tuned Carrera. Already two and a half car lengths ahead of the BMW and jamming at over 80 miles per hour (in a 40 mph zone), I immediately released the accelerator and applied the brakes. In seconds, enormous calipers gripped the massive cross-drilled rotors of my super high performance coupe, and cut my speed by forty percent.

Without warning, the BMW passed in a blue flash, and darted in front of me. Changing his mind apparently, the driver swerved jaggedly
back into the left lane, attempting to avoid a collision with the Chevrolet tooling along up ahead. Before the maneuver was even completed, the left rear tire was already a foot off the ground. The sheer terror that comes with knowing exactly what would happen next and that I was powerless to stop it, paralyzed my entire body.

First came the explosion. I watched the senseless destruction unfold eight feet in front of my face while I drove past the carnage with my top down. A ball of fire accompanied the sickening crackle of folding steel. The heat filled the air. Time stood still as the four door disintegrated into millions of pieces when it snapped in two against the base of a twenty-foot palm tree. The momentum of the wreckage kept up with the speed of my vehicle as if in complete control-stalking me. Parts of steel, plastic and iron, fired out of the chassis like bullets from a machine gun in all directions. The acrid smell of oil and fluids filled my nostrils, yet still I was staring in disbelief.

Schlaack!!! Another tree!

I lost sight of the horrid bloodbath for a second and then caught it again in my rear view mirror. It crossed over all three lanes and came to rest on the sidewalk. I snapped out of my stupefied trance just in time to make the right hand turn at the next light. I crossed the railroad tracks and turned right. I was home. The disaster still fresh in my mind, I trembled momentarily, then jumped from my car and ran across the intersection toward the billowing blackness above the rooftops of the neighboring homes. Before I reached the scene, something stopped me cold. I could hear sirens growing louder in the distance, so I rationalized my decision to turn back: What can I do? It isn’t my fault! Who gives a three hundred horsepower piece of machinery to a teenager? Those things have head curtains. They’ll be okay. . .

I didn’t sleep. The scene played itself over and over again in my head for the next ten hours, and I could do nothing but watch. Around noon the next day, I rode my mountain bike to the comer liquor store for something to soothe my nerves and my conscience. Leaving the mini-mart, I looked down the highway desperately for answers. Nothing. I pedaled slowly toward the site.

An aluminum piston lay in the gutter. Next was a headlight. Then, a slice of a solid aluminum intake manifold surrounded by thousands of glass fragments. I was in the midst of the remnants of lives that had been snuffed out for absolutely no reason, and I felt personally responsible.

A few days later, I drove past the same spot on my way to work and
noticed a wreath on the sidewalk propped up by a street lamp. Locking up the brakes, I pulled over, turned on my hazard lights and jumped from my car to investigate. Obviously, students or friends had assembled the memorial and listed the names, with photos of the four, on a cardboard insert. I just stared at the flowers for a minute or two and got back into my car, fumbling for the morphine sulfate tablets I kept in my sport coat.

I never did tell Grandma happy birthday. I got off the wrong drugs and onto the right ones. I got rid of that Porsche—and on with my life.
Last night I saw the stars fall down
they fell upon my head.
The pain was great
the light was bright.
I thought that I was dead.
I tried to tape them back in place,
but the tape was just too weak.
I could not fix the sky last night
so now the eve is bleak.
Today I saw the world slip through
the drain inside my tub.
It swirled and turned
and heaved and rocked
‘til the bottom was above.
I tried to plug the hole back up,
but the plug had been sucked through.
I could not save the world today
so now no life is true.