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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS: We are so pleased with the overwhelming number of submissions for the journal this year. As a result, the editorial board decided to accept more images than we have the capacity to publish in print. The remainder of this year's published images can be found in the Human Touch edition on our website.

Regarding Henry

What to say about Doctor Henry Claman? Where to begin?

There is the impressive catalogue of his accomplishments, awards and publications. There is the endless list of students, patients, colleagues, friends, neighbors and acquaintances whose lives he touched, sometimes briefly and sometimes not. There are the over-used but, nevertheless, appropriate catch phrases such as “renaissance man,” “citizen scientist,” and “gentleman scholar.” All of these and none of these capture the genius and the genuineness of Henry.

This tenth volume of *The Human Touch* is dedicated to him—its founder. Although I was not privy to the initial discussions about editorial policies, promotional strategies and financial concerns, I believe that Henry’s contribution to the first volume of the journal reveals much of what motivated him to produce our literary and arts journal. It is, not surprisingly, a haiku that he titled, “Bliss.”

*How delicious
to scratch
what itches.*

Henry was the most curious person I have ever known, and the many adventures and accomplishments of this quiet and humble man likely began as an intellectual itch that just had to be deliciously and decidedly scratched with more research in the lab, more reading in the library and more looking about in museums all over the world. He once described finding his way into immunology and allergy research as follows: “I started to work in the lab, and although all my experiments failed, I was having a wonderful time.” What might have dissuaded many people actually tickled Henry, and this delight in learning more and keeping at it would eventually change the direction of modern cellular immunology with his discovery of the interaction between the T-cells and B-cells. He also recounted how his book on Jewish iconography and Christian architecture began with an observation by Doctor Janet Claman, his wife, who remarked on the number of statues of Abraham, Moses and Elijah in the Duomo of Milan, a Catholic church: “I said I would find out why.”

Just as that first haiku provides us with a glimpse into what made Henry tick, so also do his other contributions to *The Human Touch*.

For instance, there is his droll humor:

*the trouble with atheism-
there is nobody to blame-
or to thank.*

There is also his deep appreciation for and pure joy in art and literature:

*poems rush out from
the most unlikely sources-
don’t touch that button.*

*you ask me where the
mystery of being is-
why yes, it’s right here.*

Finally, there is Henry’s deep wisdom, borne of love and loss, about our shared humanity:

*when will our sorrow end?
when our tears have dried and the
winds are out of breath.*

*a wish: let me not
be remembered as someone
who waited too long.*

I struggle with that last haiku, Henry, wondering if you were concerned about leaving something unfinished or something unsaid or were anxious about over-staying your time with us. And so I arrive at a paradox that you would relish, as you left us with so much yet not enough; you waited too long but not long enough.

On behalf of the past and current Editors-in-Chief and Editorial Board members, I wish to thank Henry and Janet Claman for their unwavering support, generosity and leadership. We will do our very best to continue your legacy.

Tess Jones PhD

*Director, Arts and Humanities in Healthcare Program
Center for Bioethics and Humanities*

Lines in Elegy *(For Henry Claman)*

BRUCE DUCKER

In every silence sits a stone,

A pit in every peach.

In every heart a hollow place

That solace cannot reach.

In every cloud a bud of blood,

In every pleasure rue,

And each tomorrow brings a trace

Of what I lost with you.

Henry Claman (1930-2016)

DIANE AND JOE GAL

Henry Claman, icon,
Arts in Medicine, and more.
Left us, not forgotten.



Two Sided Blues

MIMI KATE MUNROE

"Who'll set me free from bar and chain?"

"Not I", said the jailor, "Not I."

"My job depends on a crowded jail.

No Habeus Corpus and no damn bail.

Freedom's bad for my dinner pail.

That's why", said the jailor, "That's why."

"Oh, who'll cut down this bag of bone?"

"Not we", said the merchants, "Not we.

Demands for rope, a knife, an ax

Will help us pay an income tax

There's no demand for broken backs.

They're free," said the merchants, "They're free."

"Who'll see I do not die alone?"

"Oh no," said the sheriff, "Oh no.

Uphold the law, apply it here.

Today it's kind of quiet here.

What do you want, a riot here?

Lie low," said the sheriff, "Lie low."

"Who'll speak in wrath for me that's slain?"

"Not I, said the preacher, "oh nay.

Let's turn our other cheek and act

To keep our brother love intact.

I'll sell you one more holy tract

And pray," said the preacher, "We'll pray."

"Who'll keep my wife and child from pain?"

"Yes, who?" said the mayor, "Yes, who?

We need our funds for the township's dream

Of a city hall in gold and cream.

I'd like that kind of color scheme

All through," said the mayor, "All through."

"Who'll write my epitaph in stone?"

"What for?" said the banker, "what for?

The black ink on my weekly graph

Will represent your epitaph.

We'll keep it secret from my staff

Of course," said the banker, "Of course."

"Who'll set me free from bar and chain?

Oh, who'll cut down this bag of bone?

Who'll see I do not die alone?

Who'll speak in wrath for me that's slain?

Who'll keep my wife and child from pain?

Who'll write my epitaph in stone?

Who'll stop the use of flesh for gain?"

"That's we," said the people, "That's we.

For each murder in the morning

There's a thousand deaths by night.

You today, and we tomorrow,

If we don't all stand and fight.

There's two sides to every question

But just one answer's right.

That's we," said the people, "That's we." ♦

3am admit by an ignorant medical student

OREN M GORDON

She had an eye infection,
sweet little girl,
clutching a doll in one hand and
her mother in the other.
We tapped the staccato of her heart,
listened to her doll's sleepy breaths,
and laughed at the ladybugs in her ears.
She kept laughing
despite the time and the circumstance
until in my foolish fashion I asked,
"Can I look at your eye now?"
She replied by screaming.
"Ok! Ok!
I'll just stand over here."
But she kept screaming,
and screaming,
and screaming,
loud enough for every "waking the dead,"
"blood curdling,"
"ear-splitting" hyperbole
to rumble through my head
until I left the room
nowhere close to examining her eye.
My resident's only words of wisdom
were an exasperated whisper of
"Demon child!"
I agreed with a chuckle,
and we walked away.

A few days later,
after some sleep and antibiotics,
she was better.
Still playful, just,
screaming less.
And I,
I could look at her eye
as much as I wanted.
The day before discharge,
on my way to lunch,
the mother caught my eye,
full of concern,
and before I could ask what was wrong
she told me,
"You know,
you're standing on lava right now, right?"

"It's ok!" the little girl piped in,
"if you stand on your tip-toes
it makes it better."
So in the middle of the hospital lobby,
she taught me that the blue tiles are lava,
and the orange ones are safe.
We tip-toed our way out, waving and
we both made it out ok. ♦

Cadaver as First Teacher

PRIYA KRISHNAN

I have learned from bodies
so much. How to write love
letters to hips, how to wrap my hands
around my spine and drink deeply
of deep-seated twists that leave me
breathless in the morning's speckled sun.
How to hug the bark of a tree
with calloused hands, how to walk the
wooded singletrack for miles with
heels buzzing electric.

The bodies I have known are
maps. The warm smooth spaces of
skin, the light switch eyelids.
Even the unseeing eyes and
bluish hands, dry lips and swollen scalps,
their sock-covered feet I have held onto
as their metronome machine breath trickled away.
They were *here*. They left plants to be
watered, clothes smelling of incense, old pairs of
glasses.

The bodies I have known are
books I have read cover to cover. Yours,
not so. Here, where the car potholes before
coming back up to unmarred road,
I sort through layers of superfluous sinew
and watercolor muscle,
replacing the blade of the scalpel
again and again –

Me who wants to keep a Polaroid reservoir
of everything I love, when I cut
before even seeing your face,
gratitude tastes strange, and vital,
and strangely vital, water turned brackish
within the cave of my mouth.

You have no sock-covered foot to hold,
and I can't be the clip on your finger,
pulse oximeter, blinking a red-all-is-well,
since your soul has already decided
to pack up and leave, no
invitation to your journey towards death—
so I'm grasping from under the riptide,
hands outstretched,
pulling, slicing, tearing,
separating,
fragmenting, whittling,
and all this easy violence reminds me of
is how the dog is declawed
by the one it calls friend.

Maybe in the slippery midst of your
soaring muscles and far-reaching tendons
we'll approach familiarity (after all, I'll be where
you are one day) – two strangers
meeting eyes by chance on a crowded subway
skidding its way across late night tracks,
and smiling briefly at each other
as the train hums steadily to their separate stops,
holding the promise of home. ♦

Submission published previously.

Multilingual

DARLENE B TAD-Y

On my second day of med school, sitting in the anatomy lab, our anatomy professor matter-of-factly informed us that we were about to learn yet another foreign language—the medical language. He advised us to refer to our required textbook, "Stedman's Medical Dictionary" as often as possible moving forward. Boy, was he right. It took me four years to learn that language: the precise terms that describe the different parts of a person's leg, the various lobes of the brain, the proteins that are part of our DNA, the proper names of the thousands of different illnesses that can afflict a human being etc, etc. Reading through a chapter of my textbook often required me to have 2 books open simultaneously: the textbook I was learning from and my medical dictionary.

When I graduated to seeing patients and practicing medicine, I came to understand that the people I was trying to help the most (my patients) didn't speak the language I had taken such pains to learn. They did not speak "medicalese." Moreover, this language became even more complex as the precise terms I learned became abbreviated to allow for quicker documentation. The shorthand notes about patients became a jumble of letters, symbols, and numbers, which doctors, nurses, and other members of the team all understood. So when I spoke to Ms. S, I explained to her that as she was a 76-year-old woman who already had high blood pressure and diabetes, which is high blood sugar, and a weak or failing heart, we were concerned that her new chest pain may not be just indigestion, but might be a heart attack. When I wrote it in my notes, it short-handed to Ms. S, 76F w PMH of HTN, DMII, CHF presenting with CP, poss ACS vs dyspepsia.

I learned to be adept at communicating efficiently with my patients as well. As I matured, I realized that being able to hear the words that my patients speak to me was so much more important. I could really know them as the fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, grandfathers, brothers, or sisters who loved their 12-year-old collie or enjoyed their daily walk or playing bingo. I discovered that the language of my patients could not only communicate their past medical history and list of medications, but would also convey their anguish, fears, loneliness, despair, hope, joys, or relief in the personal anecdotes they would share. But only if I listened carefully.

Mr. P had been admitted for the third time with dehydration. He was a relatively young man of 63 years, but had already gone through the medical wringer. He had fought and won the battle against prostate cancer after hormonal and radiation therapy. After celebrating his fifth year of being in remission for his prostate cancer, fate cruelly dealt him another painful blow—he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. The day I met him, a year and a half after his second and unrelated cancer

diagnosis, he had already undergone several futile rounds of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. The "treatments" left him thin and emaciated, losing his hair, fatigued and dry. They condemned him to a lifetime of "NPO" - nothing by mouth, and having to take everything in through the small plastic tube plugged into his stomach through which only formulaic liquid nutrition and crushed medicines could fit. When I greeted him with the stock, "How are you doing today?", he replied, "Makin' it through, doc. Makin' it through." His fiancé sat beside him as we talked. They had finally decided to "make it official" when he was diagnosed with cancer for a second time.

After the official business of history-taking and physical exam, I lingered for a few minutes to check in on his spirit. He said to me and the medical students who had been furiously taking notes on their checklists, "You know what I miss the most? The worst part of all this mess? I miss drinking an ice cold glass of water. Think of it...on a hot summer day, you're sitting on your porch and you can actually see the heat waves all around you. You fetch yourself a tall glass, drop those ice cubes in from the freezer, and pour the clear water into the glass. You hear the ice cubes crack. When you sit the glass down on the rail in front of you, it starts to sweat on all sides from the cool water. Your throat is parched dry, and finally you reach for the glass. It's moist on your fingertips and on your lips. And that first gulp of cool, refreshment as it makes its way down your throat and cools off into your chest...well, it's just a little piece of heaven."

I felt suddenly thirsty. I *could* see the sweating glass, and I wanted the relief this miracle, this ice-cold glass of water, would provide. I looked at my students. They were mesmerized by his story. We collectively took a gulp, and I cleared my throat to thank Mr. P for letting us take care of him. I apologized for his pain and suffering, but more so because he couldn't enjoy the simple things that I took for granted every single day, hundreds of times a day. I shook his shaky hands, and offered him a couple "wetsticks," pre-moistened sponge-sticks to ease the cracked, dry lips of those who are NPO. He waved them away, "It's not the same."

"I know," I replied. "We'll do our best to get you where you want to be."

As we shuffled out the door, we made a beeline to the refreshments lounge, poured ourselves three big glasses of water and swallowed in silence. I thought about how eloquent, informative, and precise Mr. P's language had been when he spoke to us. And there had not been a single piece of jargon. ♦

Whispered Goodbye

NGOC VU

This is how the world ends?
A whimper?
Maybe, possibly, but no
Not yet, not now
Questioning eyes and desperate words

But who am I? If I could, I would
... I can't
Not now, not ever
Short white coat
Unsure hands
Untrained mind
Human soul

You are not ready
You are in between

The idea, the reality
The motion, the act
The conception, the creation
The emotion, the response
The desire, the spasm
The potency, the existence
The essence, the descent

I am not ready
I am in between

The idea, the reality
The motion, the act
The conception, the creation
The emotion, the response
The desire, the spasm
The potency, the existence
The essence, the descent

The two of us ... human souls ... in between
This one ephemeral eternity
We are not alone
Not now, not ever
Perhaps not a whimper but a whispered goodbye ♦

Nature's Spiral

OZ W PFENNINGER



The Place that Breathes Me in

KELLY R STANEK

The library creaks like an old body during expiration
The walls settle into the window, and the window swells and shrinks from the sun,
and the clouds
Each noise feels right, fitting, and justified
As if the library was sighing with deep breaths of accomplishment
Maintaining peace
Covering the sterile table tops
With homey excuses
Holding the truth in but making room for others to join
It is a house. A home
Full but never crowded
Over flowing but never losing anything
It is bigger than a breadbox
Bigger than a car
It can be a juggernaut or a pariah
It stands tall but often blends into the background
Yet, more than most, it knows its place
And as it settles and sighs, it creaks
Like an old body during inhalation ♦

Human / Body

STEPHANIE M FUKUI

Asleep in rainbow slew stars, smiling / Your body blank, in a metal casket

Tumbling happily in memories told through / Your body still, under my unsure blade
laughter and tear-glittered eyes

Laughing along in tones of white turning to / Silent as we probe fibers, layers,
gold over crackling red / folds, lobes

Full to the brim with grandbaby kisses and / Shrinking and breaking and teased
checked-off bucket list wishes / apart to the bone

A freckled amalgamation of natures: good, / A precise configuration of terms:
flawed, shadow, sunshin / structure, relationship, function

Preacher of love and friendship, teacher of / Paradigm of life, my first teacher of
humanity, which means: a purpose fulfilled / medicine, which means: a purpose fulfilled

Hope

KIRK FETTERS

Beauty and goodness are all around us;
but our lenses are too thick.

We are blinded by our own spectacles,
convinced of our own superiority.

There are some who believe truth to be theirs,
who believe power thus should be theirs,
for whom reality is singular and dichromatic.

Worse yet, there are some who believe truth to be a fetter,
who regard empiricism as conspiracy,
who regard conspiracy as gospel,
and who regard Gospel as a means to an end.

For what is Gospel without love,
conspiracy without fear,
and empiricism without objectivity?

There is hope in love.
In love, there can be understanding.
In understanding, fear can be ablated.

Without fear, we may step back
to pierce deception with objectivity;
And we may step forward to challenge
Those who stand
against love,
against understanding,
and trade in fear. ♦

More than Endless

MARK KESSINGER

more than an endless blank page
I need a night that is young most of the way thru

words elude me today, flirt with everyone else.
Now my art is more like a magician
producing tears out of a heart locked in stone.

Tomorrow is the syringe that comes for us
hemlock, heroin or happiness
its gotta be the cure for something.

I leave you this trail of seeds
what the birds don't eat
stand a chance of
growing the puzzle back.

Its gotta be the cure for something. ♦

Addict

MARY C MIERZEJEWSKI

She could feel their heavy eyes on the rolls of white flesh protruding from her favorite pink shirt, silently screaming their disdain for her “poor life decisions”. Her family surrounded her, but she could barely lift her head once they were out in public. Her once lighthearted personality that consumed others seemed to be absorbed by the corn syrup and saturated fats she pushed into her mouth.

Seated around the table at their favorite Chinese restaurant, she could feel the shield of technology against a loving conversation. Childhood memories faintly played in the back of her mind of her parents and two brothers sitting around a rickety light oak table sharing stories of their days. A time when weight never entered her mind.

John, her husband, was sitting to her left playing the newest social media game while casually sipping on his soda. Her eyes fell upon the bubbles crawling up the side while she pushed her hand over to his thigh under the table where she began to absently rub her thumb over his skin. His eyes lifted with a look of confusion, while he subconsciously pulled away from her.

She had never found dating to be easy, always having more of an interest in characters on a page rather than the men. John made it easy, though.

Their courtship started in a cafeteria line in college. Both of them larger than the majority of their classmates, naturally bonding over the comfort of food. Every week for a semester, they silently retreated to the farthest booth in the cafeteria together exchanging stories, and small talk over fried onion rings, grilled cheese sandwiches, and melted butter. Blooming slowly into not love, but a deep complacency to dull the throb of loneliness.

The waiter came and left their table, and the liveliness of her children still brought a smile to her face. Two plump, or *growing* according to her mother, boys were sitting across from her. Their chubby cheeks were rosy pink, just like they were on their birth day. She cried when she first held them. Their faces melted into her chest, and she finally felt that her fat had served its purpose as nothing else other than a pillow for her children.

Childbirth was a complication for her, and her doctor constantly brought up that if she wanted to feel that same warmth with her grandchildren, she should change her lifestyle. Yet when the waiter came and set the plate of food in front of her, the steam lifted from the plate and the smell overtook her to a point of ecstasy she couldn't find from her marriage. Her mouth began to water, and she absently nodded when the waiter asked if everything looked okay.

The sun had begun to set on what had been a sticky Summer day. Katie was sitting on the front porch steps in a new pair of pink jean shorts that her mother had bought her the day before as a congratulation to her journey to womanhood. She had officially started her period, and had just turned 13 years old the week prior.

The porch was her favorite part of her parents' home. It overlooked the country road with a long path before it. The red beams stretched to either side holding up the roof, which her mother had painted a blue sky with puffy white clouds. She and her brothers used to sleep on the porch in the summers before they grew older and found the girls in short cheerleader outfits to be more of a priority than playing with their kid sister.

Immersed in a new book, she didn't realize her cousin Mark had walked up the path until he plopped down beside her.

He was 15, tall, but round in the center, and had fingers that looked like little sausages.

“Hey Katie, whatcha reading?”

Averse to talking to anyone at the moment, she showed him the front of her book glancing at his face from the side of her glasses. She wondered if he knew she was no longer a little girl from the week before.

“Ah, yea, I haven't read that one. You seem to like reading a lot, don't ya?” His hand rested on top of her thigh as he chatted with her.

“Who wants ice cream sandwiches?” Her mother pushed open the screen door with an ice cream in each hand, and the slam of it made Mark pull his hand back into his own lap.

She had felt a pit in her stomach remembering the previous week when Mark hadn't pulled away his hand. The ice cream began to melt down her hand when her mother touched her shoulder lightly whispering if everything was alright.

Nodding her head yes, she shoved the ice cream into her mouth to feel the relief that the cool sweet brought to her mind. A high she would be chasing the rest of her life. ♦

Submission published previously.

Nostalgia is a Dirty Liar

ALYSSA JANE GAUDYNSKI

The woman won't eat.
Thumbing the purplish slices
underneath her eyes, like
a plum cut into quarters,
sour with sleeplessness.

Heart in mouth, head against the side of bed,
you'd think white lies wouldn't
stain sheets red. Her past employers should
get together, muse over such an implausibly
poor immune system, shot after shot
getting drunk as she used to.

Saying she's sick is easier than saying
something inside of her has died, that it is
poisoning the rest. Soiled sheets curled
around feeble wrists, weak ankles trapped the day before,
headboard splitting, cracking, reaching for the ceiling.

There was blackness in her fingertips,
crawling up spidery veins, a weight pressing
her to the mattress, a soft light
peeking through slats over her head
and there was the woman, trying desperately
to stay clean. ♦

Monday Morning, For Kim

PAMELA BROWN

"What did I say?"
I asked my friend, whom I hadn't spoken to
since her parents died
within three weeks of each other.

It's terrible, she said,
we're trying to out-grieve each other. But your note,
your note, was the one we re-read.

"Grief is the inevitable measure of love," she said,
handing back to me this amulet
I had made and forgotten.

I have carried it since then,
a smooth stone-like presence in the hand,
my empty hand.

I come to your house now
with my empty hand
and give you my stone

which you began to learn
before dawn this morning.

This is your stone now,
but I keep mine, too.

Always, now,
my stone will know your stone,

measuring. ♦

The Act of Sifting Through Rubble

TAYLOR A GOODSTEIN

It was around 7 pm on an evening in January when I declared Time of Death. For forty-five minutes after the girl arrived we had performed all of the necessary and expected “heroic efforts,” and with all the tubes and wires and beeping machines at our disposal we had kept her tethered somewhere undeterminably between life and death for probably 36 of those 45 minutes. For those last nine minutes we were most likely pumping stubbornly on a corpse, but the girl was young and stupid and none of us wanted her to go out that way.

But I did it, I called Time of Death and we stopped assaulting the poor girl’s body. The beeping machines continued to beep, no doubt frustrated by our lack of attention, and the ventilator continued to stupidly inflate and deflate her dead lungs, but we stood still, in observance with ER tradition: the taking of a cacophonous moment of silence in a bright, ugly room for a person who we had known only through vital signs. Six heartbeats worth of silence, and then we resumed the shuffling and the bustling of normal ER activity; docs leaving quickly to attend to other things, nurses sorting through the mess, the impossible mess, administrators documenting and directing, and me.

I was the ER doctor in charge. I had met the ambulance crew as they came in, pushing this mangled, unsaveable body into my jurisdiction, yelling quick, clipped abbreviations to define its status. I had been two hands among 10 that grabbed a sheet to hoist her onto the ER bed. I had shoved a tube down her throat and stuck EKG stickers to her chest and called for pressors. I had started compressions and stopped compressions. I had directed her death, more or less. I was guilty of hoping that it would not be so.

But I was not naive enough to think the worst was over. Adrenaline makes any attempt at life-saving a mechanical thing. So after the respect had been paid and everyone else had moved on to their next task, I breathed deeply, acknowledging what came next. And so I left the room and I washed my hands. I checked myself in the mirror. I smeared deodorant into my underarms and changed my scrub top. I checked myself in the mirror again, looking for blood in hidden places. And then I grabbed my white coat from my office, smoothed it against my body, and went out to the waiting room.

There, waiting for me, was a sister, a mother, a father, and a boyfriend. They were cemented with worry. The sister saw me first, walking with determination and looking at them, as I was, and asked the question that one asks on a day like this.

I grabbed a chair, pulled it in front of them, and sat before I answered. “I am so sorry,” I said, “but Wendy didn’t make it.”

And then I said nothing. I watched the pain come out and flood the room. I watched as their bodies, holding themselves together with worry, fell apart with grief. And after a while, I told them the things an ER doctor tells them. We did everything we could and I can answer any questions you might have and you can see her once we get the room ready. And I sat with them for 15 minutes answering questions, and then a nurse came out and nodded at me, which meant the room was ready, and I told them they didn’t have to but they could if they wanted to,

I warned them that we had her covered except for her face but her face was still broken in 2 or 3 places, and I apologized for this, apologized because we couldn’t hide this from them, and I told them that they would be able to see her for the next hour or so before we had to take her to the morgue.

Only the mother and the boyfriend wanted to see her. I led them to the room and waited just long enough to gauge initial reactions, to make sure they wouldn’t faint or try to look under the sheet, at the mess that had been made there, and then I left them there alone. I asked a nurse to let them know once an hour had passed, and to call the morgue to schedule a pick-up for ten minutes past that time, and then I went back to my job, to the woman in Room 3 with a headache, the man in Room 7 with a gout flare, the baby in Room 10 with a fever. An hour passed and I didn’t notice. The pathology tech came and went and I didn’t notice. The room was cleaned and sterilized and I didn’t notice, rushing, as I was, in and out of rooms, from one little tragedy to the next, caught up in differentials and lab orders and delivering diagnoses. It wasn’t until much later, jumping in between an intoxicated man and a woman having a miscarriage, that I happened to glance out through the window on the ER double doors, into the waiting room, and see that the boyfriend was still sitting there. It was then, and only then, that I looked over to Wendy’s room to see it clean and then at the clock to see that it was close to 11 pm. Hours had passed since her body had been taken, but still he sat in the waiting room, silently, looking down, arms crossed limply across his lap.

And I had about half a dozen patients to see, but I couldn’t shake him, I couldn’t do anything to ease his pain but I couldn’t turn my back either, so I set down my clipboard and punched at the door button and walked out to him and stopped in front of his feet. He didn’t look up when I stopped, he didn’t say anything, and neither did I. Instead I walked around his legs to sit in the chair next to him. I sat and I forced the need to rush out of my lungs, and I listened to the silence of the waiting room. And as I sat I recognized how different it was from the room next door, my room, how utterly it felt like purgatory, how swollen it had become after years of holding the anguish of humanity. It was a room that insisted on quiet. Anything else would threaten the wispy grip with which the room suppressed fear. The possibility of panic dripped from the walls, and silence was the only force holding it back. This was the room where people waited to know what plagued them, what unsettling disturbance had settled within their bodies, what fate had befallen their loved one, what future awaited them upon leaving. It was this room where they sat in contempt of the room next door, not because of its chaos and machines and lab tests and risk of judgment, but because of the answers it promised, answers that waited on the other side of those doors, answers they did not yet have.

And though answers had been given to him, this young man continued to sit here, in this heavy room, and perhaps it was the intensity of my need to know why that had driven me to join him.

continued on next page...

Air Time

LARA E CANHAM

After a few minutes, he answered my question.

"Where do I go?"

I held my breath, hoping to find the words all healers hope for, the "magic bullet" words that can pick people up, lift them out of their pain, and carry them onto bright futures. But there is no combination of words known to carry that power, so I settled on the next best thing: truth.

"I don't know," I said.

He didn't respond. Tears welled in his eyes.

"I wish I knew," I said.

"She was everything..." he said, and then trailed off as his face contorted with pain.

I let this sentiment hang in the air. *She was everything.* What an interesting description for a human, so full of meaning and simultaneously vague enough to mean nothing. What was Wendy to me? Was she everything? No. She was *24-year-old MVA victim with multiple fractures and internal bleeding, she was BP 50/35, she was HR 155, she was hemorrhage, shock and administer pressors, she was start compressions and insert a line and get me fluids, she was get her heart on the monitor and she was 45 minutes separation from being DOA.*

But this boy knew her as none of those things. To him, she was... *everything.* Sitting next to each other, less than 3 inches between our elbows, we could not have been farther apart. We were two strangers who had approached a tragedy from opposite sides, met in the throes of it, and he was forced to tolerate me because I was the person who called out the exact minute that his life completely changed. We sat together now only by his inability to accept that changed life, the one that waited for him outside those hospital doors, and therefore forced him to linger in the last place where he had still held onto hope that it might not be so.

I was a healer who had not healed, sitting silently next to my legacy. I looked at the clock. It was 11:07. I had to get back.

"Listen," I said. "My shift ends at midnight. If you're still here when I'm done, I'll leave with you. I can even give you a ride, if you want. Maybe that will make it... easier. I don't know. It's up to you."

With that, I stood up I went back to my job. I discharged two patients and gathered a history from another one. When the midnight doctor showed up to replace me, I ignored the excited turn of my stomach, hid my desperation to leave. I quickly gave him a run-down of the patients that I had seen and which tests they were waiting for, answered his questions, and wished him a good evening. I closed my unfinished charts, vowing to finish them in the morning. I pulled my arms into my thick winter coat and slung my bag over one shoulder. I said goodbye to the nurses. It was 12:07 when I punched on the button for those big ER doors, which swung out to reveal an empty waiting room. He was gone.

I let this fact sink in for a moment before crossing the waiting room to the glass doors of the hospital, which opened automatically before me, depositing me into the cold. Snow was falling lightly, and the ground was covered in a thin carpet of white. The harsh light from the hospital cast a rectangle of warmth about two meters out from the doors. I zipped my jacket up tightly, stepped outside the rectangle, and walked alone into the dark. ♦





Submission published previously.

Bipolar

CAM WASCHKE



Brake Rotors With Chamomile

KATIE VAN DEVENTER

Contemplation

VLADKA KOVAR



Seesaw Ambivalence

RACHEL M REVELLE

Of course you think everything is fine.
A routine doctor's exam,
Feeling healthy as ever.
23.

You mention a dark mole,
More to placate a coworker
Than out of any genuine concern.
Invincible.

("Have you had that checked?"
Sounds like paranoia to you.)
And yet he's taking a closer look.
Punch.

A few days later you get the news:

Malignant *Melanoma* **In Situ**

A balanced seesaw on the fulcrum of diagnosis.

This group of cells is dangerous,
Has turned against your body,
Is able to bring death.
Cancer.

And yet the cancerous spot
Is literally only skin deep,
On the surface and in position.
Removable.

The punched hole of biopsy expands
To a sewing needle sized scar.
You schedule six-month skin checks.
Routine.

You find solace in the linguistic balance.
It is a level surface on which to stand.
And yet still you wonder,
Melanoma?
Cancer?
Me? ♦

Pulling Teeth

JULIE BRADLEY

This kid has been through it all, so I am shocked when he comes to me in tears. I scan him quickly, looking for any visible injury—swelling, bleeding—and find none. He opens his mouth and points to his front tooth as he rotates it with his tongue. His eyes widen. I tell him it's ok, the tooth will fall out. He shakes his head fervently and points to me. He wants me to do it. He's crying now, mouth still open. Oh boy. I check his platelet levels and his bleeding times and take a deep breath. I twist slowly with gloved fingers; his tooth, hanging on by a thread, gives up. Together, we sigh in relief. He smiles that classic toothless grin. "Do you think the tooth fairy will find me here? You know, cause I changed rooms today?" he asks, panic rising. And I am floored. He knows he can't have soda because of his kidneys. He knows he can go home when his counts come up. He knows what it's like to sit alone in a bone marrow transplant room for weeks. He knows central lines and nephrostomy tubes. He knows what it's like to be so sick he can't eat for weeks. Or go to school. Or do much of anything. He knows fever, neutropenia, relapse. He knows all this and he believes in the tooth fairy. This means tonight I get to be the tooth fairy. Because if he believes, then so do I. ♦

The Day I Stopped Wearing Mascara

KATHLEEN J VISOVATTI

THE DAY I STOPPED WEARING MASCARA

was the day my husband was diagnosed with cancer
it says "waterproof"
but tears aren't water
Tears are memories, regrets, promises
of us
by me, to him

I CRY

when someone is kind
when a commercial, song,
movie or book
moves me
When life's joys
or sorrows
overwhelm

I AM A LIST MAKER

To Dos
Calls to make
and now, ask the doctors, Learn how to ...

OMENS

Cubs win 11-3
A casket truck drives by
Two lines reduce to one
The spot I can't remove
no matter how hard I rub.

OPPOSITES

He is active
I am sedentary.
He is thin.
I am plump.
I am healthy
He is not.
Emotionally
He lives vicariously through sports
and our children.
AA has shown him to acknowledge feelings
Maybe
eventually
he'll voice them

continued on next page...

C

Before
C was for cat, the wrong way to start my name, a dreaded grade.
Now,
BC is "before cancer"
The "big C" is no longer a capital letter.
C is for cancer
and caring and concern
and after it comes D
for dying
death and dread
D is for Don
His middle initial H
as in Hall
and HOPE.

BIRTHDAYS

My mother died at 57.
I tiptoed through my 57th year
Sighed with relief as it neared its end.
The day before my 58th birthday
Don was diagnosed.
His father died at 61
This is his 61st year...

THREES

My mother committed suicide
I'm still saying, "Don't do it"

Our first son died
birth defects.
I'm still saying, "I love you"

My husband has cancer
of the esophagus, lymph nodes, liver
I'm still saying, "Don't spread"

AWKWARD LOVERS

We married because it was the thing to do.
He was 27; I was 24.
We didn't realize how little we had in common.

We made the best of things
went our separate ways but
parented well together.
We weren't a couple
but were a family.

Now he's in the hospital
Passive by nature
he doesn't want to know the prognosis
but I do.
I'm a planner
so I follow the doctor
out of the room and hear
"Weeks, maybe a month"

When I return
Don asks,
I tell him, then hold him
and say, "I DO love you."
I avoid the IV
and morphine patch
as I crane my neck sideways
so our lips meet.
I think of my first kiss
in 4th grade.
We didn't know to turn
our heads in opposite ways
so our mouths would meet.
In our 34 years of marriage
Don and I haven't been
flexible either
Often failing to connect.

I vow I'll bend to meet him
from now on
So we go on living
preparing for dying.
Holding hands self-consciously

ORDERING OUT

Son, daughter, wife
every day at the hospital.
His "new" esophagus

continued on next page...

isn't working
so a stent is installed
to allow food to pass.
The procedure made his throat sore
so he writes notes instead of talking
We don't eat in front of him
so go to the Family Lounge
for take-out Chinese.
The food is good
and so is the conversation.
Scott is angry, feels his dad
abused his body by smoking and drinking.
Kristin is sad that so few good times are left.
I am sorry his life will be cut short.

MORE Ds

Don died today.
Moments before I arrived.
I wish I could have been with him
for my sake.
The chaplain says some choose to die alone
to save their loved ones.
We were there for two weeks.
At least cancer lets you say goodbye.

OCTOBER 17, 1997

We held his hand til it grew cold.
We talked about him and to him
After calls to family and friends
we each said goodbye separately
then together

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Don, you would not have wanted us to have a service
but would have been pleased we did.
Your friends came and talked about you and hugged us.
We truly celebrated your life
There was an article about you in the Chicago Tribune
because you were deemed deserving of more
than just an obituary.
Your boss, the owner of the radio
and tv trivia shop you managed,
dedicated his Saturday radio show to your memory and played
your favorite shows all day
mostly Jack Benny.
We arranged a display table of your favorite things and photos of you.

There was a crow bar and duct tape because you felt,
"No car should be without either"
an ice cube tray (because you stockpiled ice)
and a saucer because you thought they were under used
Of course we served homemade lemon bars, the dessert you made
for every meeting you hosted.
Your quirky sense of humor came through as well as your kindness to all.
Although he didn't approach us, your primary care doctor came and
signed the guest book.
That shows the quiet impression you made on people.

FIRSTS

Going through your files was tedious yet endearing.
You kept everything!
Bills, statements, even memos brought back memories of old cars, appliances,
previous residences, jobs,
children's accidents, and loans.
I'm figuring out your system and our circumstances
Thank goodness you told me where you kept things when
I needed to pay the mid-month bills just last week.
And, better late than never, you signed your will from your hospital bed.
Scott will deal with the health insurance matters, bless him!
I know my dad and brother will help me figure out a budget
and Kristin is ever in attendance to my emotional needs.
How fortunate I am to not be alone.
But, I am.
As never before.

MORE FIRSTS

My first day back to work, I forgot to feed the cats.
I had forgotten them one hospital day as well.
You were always so good about taking care of all pets.
It was Scott and I at the kitchen table for dinner
instead of you and me.
I found the broiling rack soaking in the sink
the next morning.
That's when I sank to the floor and cried.
The first cry.
The firsts are the hardest.
The first holiday, the first special occasion...
All the times alone. Without.
It'll never be the same.

continued on next page...

CUBS OPENING DAY

April 3, 1998

Cold! 38 degrees. We all wore winter coats.

But they won!

Loyal family and friends gathered to remember Don
and cheer his Cubbies.

Maybe this year...

Wouldn't it be ironic?

MEMORIAL DAY, 1998

Scott, Kristin, Starck and I at Wrigley Field

The Security Guard said, "I'm not going to babysit you guys.

Go out on the field for as long as you like.

Just let me know when you leave."

We almost tiptoed out of the tunnel
onto sacred ground.

What a thrill to look into the stands rather than from them

We almost dreaded coming

for fear it would be too sad

But Rena had pulled strings

so here we were.

Starck made it an upbeat affair

He brought a softball and bat

and pitched til we each got a hit

We sat in the dugout

peeked behind the benches at

the water fountain and urinal.

Walked the bases and outfield

touched the ivy

Took turns on the mound

After touring the field,

without saying a word

we scattered to scatter his ashes

as he had wished.

Jokingly, he'd said

"Oh, scatter some of my ashes at Wrigley Field

and flush the rest down the toilet."

We brought some to the Cubs' home

and saved others to take to the family cemetery

on the first anniversary of his death

Starck left some on home plate to bring them luck

Scott and Kristin to the outfield

His two favorite people in his favorite place on earth

Then they split left and right to bless the outfield

an image forever imprinted on my mind and heart

I went to first base,

the position he played in high school, college

and on the IBM team

As we left Wrigley Field

the sun came out

If only Don could have been with us

He would have loved it.

Some would say he was.

IRONIES

The Cubs had their best season in eleven years.

They made it to the Wild Card Playoffs

then blew it

"Can't ask for too much," Don would say

His friends know why they did so well

Don coaching from Heaven

ANNIVERSARY

October 17, 1998

Kristin and Scott didn't want to

but they went with me. Starck too.

We drove with Daisy,

named for her grandfather

conceived the week he died.

The two guys flew on a little plane

in turbulent weather.

To Mt Pleasant, Iowa

Forest View Cemetery

Don's three aunts, an uncle and a cousin

joined us as we stood under umbrellas and reminisced

then inurned the ashes

at Don's parents' feet, next to his son Christopher,

near his grandparents.

Inscribed:

"Our Best Friend

He lives in our hearts forever." ♦

The Last Knock

PAUL E SUAZO

The first time the knocking happened Mama tore into abuela's bedroom off the kitchen, her face knotted in fear, screaming, "Mama! Don't leave us! It's too soon!" There had been no one at the door, and Mama had assumed the worst, that abuela, my grandma, was letting us know that she had let go of the fight, abandoning her body to the cancer worming its way through her organs. Then I heard grandma say in that wisp of a voice she already had at that time, "*Estás loca?*" Are you crazy? I tiptoed to the front window and pulled the curtains to the side an inch or two and peered out. I saw the Atencio boys in the street, covering their mouths, giggling, pointing at our house. I moved the curtain a bit further to the side and waved at them. The younger one, Mario, was a friend of mine at school. Mama, coming out of abuela's bedroom, her face slack with relief, saw me do it. She rushed to the front door, a pit bull on the attack, threw it open, her eyes wild, and seeing the Atencio boys, shouted, "Go home, you little shits! You trying to give someone a heart attack?" Their eyes went big, and they ran off, Mario yelling, "See you at school tomorrow, Lee!" over his shoulder at me as he tried to keep up with his brother.

It had only been two weeks since mama and abuela had walked out of that door at the doctor's office, abuela slipping her gloves on her paper-soft hands, already accepting her fate, and mama looking as if she had just been hit in the head with a two-by-four. We were all surprised by the unexpected news of abuela's cancer and stunned by the doctor's final verdict, "There's nothing I can do." That car ride home was the most silent event of my life until Mama, small silent tears running down her cheeks, pounded the steering wheel with her gloved hands, muffled fury. The light turned green, but we didn't move. "Mama, the cars are honking at us," I told her while looking out the rear window. We stayed where we were, Mama's eyes closed, the cars snaking around us, until a nice, young policeman took Mama by the hand, leading her out of the car so he could drive it into a parking lot just off the road. Grandma leaned in toward him as he turned into the lot and said in that accent of hers: "She's lost it. These things happen."

Over the next few days, unaware that she was even doing it and unaware that in repeating the doctor's words she, too, was revealing her own helplessness, Mama had begun whispering, "There's nothing I can do," under her breath. During Grace at breakfast: "Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, ... There's nothing I can do. ...," her voice a croak. Walking me to school: "Mama, there's a car coming," "There's nothing I can do." At the grocery store: "They're all out of green beans... there's nothing I can do."

One morning during Grace, mama finished by saying, "And there's nothing you can do, Jesus." I opened my eyes, my hands still together palm-to-palm in front of my face like a church steeple, to find her eyes were already open, looking at me. I had never heard her challenge God like that. Then she said, "Mijo, when I walked out of that doctor's office, it was like I left the world and went somewhere new. Not like an explorer or anything so brave. I guess it was more like being lost in blackness. Like being at the bottom of the sea without air. Will there ever be hope again?" Mama had never spoken like that before, waxing philosophical. And I couldn't answer her question. I was eight. I couldn't have defined 'hope' if she had promised to take me to Disneyworld if I did. So I sat on my hands listening to her, glancing every once in a while at my atole, smelling the chocolate and corn go cold. Then she began to cry

heavy, heaving sobs. From her bedroom, abuela wheezed, "What's wrong with you? You're acting like your best friend just died."

Mama cried even harder.

About three weeks after the first knocking, there was another knock at the door. This time it was rhythmic, round and heavy, pregnant with authority. "*Esos malcriados!*" Those brats! my grandma said. I had just gotten home from school and was sitting in her bed with her, watching *Santa Barbara* and eating a tortilla smeared with peanut butter and jelly. Mama was still at work so I jumped up and ran to the door, expecting to see the Atencio boys giggling in the street again. But it was the doctor. His forehead glistened and his sandy blond hair was greasy. I could smell the sixteen hours he had spent rushing around the hospital rising off of his skin. I wondered if this is what a dad smelled like. I wasn't sure I liked it.

"Hi there. Is your mother here?" his breath was sour, like old coffee.

"No."

"What's your name?" he asked me.

"Lee."

"How is your mother?" he asked.

I shrugged. Can any eight-year-old truly tell you how his parents are doing?

He stared at me.

"She says, 'There's nothing I can do,' a lot," I finally said.

He flinched.

"Well, I thought I should stop by, but maybe that wasn't the best idea."

"Okay," I said.

"*Quién es?*" Who is it? abuela's small voice scraped along from her bedroom.

"The doctor, abuela," I called back to her.

I heard her ghost of a voice say, "*Ese gringo no sabe nada.*" That Yankee doesn't know anything.

"Is that your grandmother?" the doctor asked.

I nodded.

"I should go. Please tell your mother that I came by, that there is help out there if she needs it. Tell her to come see me. I can connect her with a social worker."

I nodded again, not knowing what a social worker was, and began to close the door.

He put his hand out, stopping the door, and said, "And take care of your mom, okay?"

I was too young then to know that that was the wrong sort of thing for a doctor to tell a young boy. That he erased the rest of my childhood in that instant. Now, I can only assume that he didn't have children, that he didn't know better.

"Okay," I said.

continued on next page...

Mama burst through the front door soon after that, her face wide in an ecstatic smile. "I've got it!" she said. "We'll have a benefit! Invite all the family. From New Mexico, California, Utah. Even Tia Sally, though she's a Jehovah's Witness. All our friends. Father Mendoza. Everyone!" Her voice was so high. I felt that something that fell from that height couldn't survive. I felt scared. "We'll raise *mucho dinero* and take mama to México. They have medicines there that they don't have in this stupid country. She'll be okay! There *is* something I can do." She vibrated, powered by some unknown source of energy. She made the sign of the cross on herself.

I began to cry.

That night I was woken by a quiet, rasping knock at the front door. I was still in abuela's bed, there was static on the tv. I yawned and looked over at her. Her hands were clasped across her stomach and she had a sly smile on her face, like she was up to no good. I laid my head on her chest and heard nothing. I got up and tiptoed to the door, past the snoring coming from Mama's room, and opened it with a gentle creak. Out in the dark street stood a shimmering, glowing old woman. It was my abuela. She had her hand over her mouth, giggling. Then she blew me a kiss, and a slight breeze kicked up, carrying the faintest of words to me: *Those Atencio boys are going to get it now!* I smiled. Then my abuela turned and began to glide up the street into the night. ♦

To Be Human

SALLY E PEACH

stevie always reminded me to be human,
so
when VA afternoons end early,
i grab cheesman park dirt
and get earth grit in my palm creases.
yet
you never had even a moment
to feel this morning sun.
now
We choose:

before constellations dim,
before frost thaws,
We gather.
your last breath gone,
your metronome broken;
We hold your hand.

or

We are prerounding. "Code Blue"
comes through the intercom. We
run down 6 flights. you are naked,
your genitalia is on display. We
thrust hands on your chest, force
blood through your body. We
stick a tube down your throat;
blood and secretions splatter Our
glasses. We shoot medicines into
your veins. We keep pumping; We
know this is futile. We continue
until your brother runs into the
room, weeping-screaming for Us
to stop. As We linger until our turn
to file out, We hear his anguish
howl through halls.

then

We round on the other patients.
We write lengthy notes that will not be
read,
and
the day goes too long for park dirt.
so
we didn't have the chance to be human.

♦

Toddler

JANE COLLINS

You wake up and neighbors tremble:
 walls wait for finger paint
And the carpet, after ten hours rest, nerves
 its threads and grabs its padding.
The cup and spoon clamor to be hammered
 on the eager table
The cabinet shudders, its crystal
 tinkling coyly within.
The clock marks time until you come to loft
 it high into space, changing the shape
 of the continuum.
I say you are the principle of animation:
Matter makes way for you
 waits for you
 prays for you
You wake up and life begins. ♦

Transport

QUINLAN B CORBETT

We watched food network shows while you were lying in bed, starving, and
 the last ferry ride home from the hospital, I thought, *this is probably the last
 ferry ride.*

The emerald buildings receded smaller and smaller through the rear glass windows
 beneath grey, open skies and the briny water
 sparkled

with specks of sun the day you let me skip school and we rode the ferry to the
 aquarium. We sat on the top deck cafeteria and I drank chocolate milk from a
 box, and you were radiant

and smiling on my wedding day, with your floor-length dress of magenta and cream,
 sky blue and dark purple. The desperation of knowing the world will end,
 unjustly, and the calm

of knowing the world always ends: free agency. You loved cottage cheese on toast,
 sometimes with jam, and in your last year we battled constantly because
 you abhorred water

which we drank aside glasses of rosé overlooking straw meadows,
 snow-capped mountains, urgent colors
 of earth and sky,

through whose mire, muck, enveloping circumstance, *darkness*, I drove home
 from hospice, 1 AM, the road coated in rain. The headlights
 threw darts

into the mud of my body which kept convulsing
 in colorless dream after dream where I couldn't save you. Only after some
 months

did you return smiling near green grass and skylights leading again
 towards blue. Now I talk to you sometimes, I ask, *are you here? Do you
 see this? Isn't this special?*

And some days, a whole tree fans and twists in the wind—
 it's not you, but I wish it
 to move through you. ♦

A Celebration of Roots

MARYANNE FREDERICK

We planted a tree and in her name
We grieve; our life is not the same
And as we grieve, the tree was growing
Giving strength to keep on going.

The towering tree gave shade and rest-
A picnic place, a little bird's nest
Like your loved one it was giving
A testament to her, no longer living.

Gone, now is that faithful tree. The
Roots still give to posterity
Feeding grasses, or a flower
Now it's reached its finest hour.

The tree's beauty was in giving and
It's still helping the living
Its strength was in its roots and
Here it will make its final tributes. ♦

Creating My Own Upper Crust

MARYANNE FREDERICK

My grandmother's hands were gnarled bumps
Baking, cooking, and loving their way into my life.
How I wished my hands were like hers,
As if arthritis gave her expertise in the kitchen.

She was so much more than that.
She believed in me and told me so.
With her crooked fingers caressing my face,
I flourished with her touch.

Now, degrees later, I look down at my
Tentative hands using her pastry cutter.
The faded green paint on its handle
Knows it's more than I can manage.

I'm trying in vain to make her crust
But it does not matter. Inside,
Her voice is whispering to me-
Telling me I've done well. ♦

Heartbreak

CAROLYN A HO

When I saw my mother's heart break
It was not with a torrent of tears
It was in the way her eyes clenched tight
As though in pain, in loss
As though in denial
Of the frail form that lay unmoving before her
The empty shell of her mother
Whose smile she could no longer see
Of that gentle, loving woman
Gone beyond her grasp
To where she could not be

It was in the way she glanced up at me
So panicked and confused
So deeply broken
That spoke of how her world shattered
In that moment, that very second
Her mother's eyes had darkened and dulled
And fluttered closed within her arms

It was in the way her once familiar eyes
That so often teased and crinkled with joy
Now dimmed with bitter tears
And wildly searched mine
Asking for the impossible
Asking for another chance

When I saw her heart break
It did not come obviously
No clenching fists
No palms held aloft in prayer
It was in the way her body curled into itself
As if to ward off the impending chill
From stealing away the warmth
Of the lifeless body she rocked against her breast
Of the pale, cold hand
That could no longer grasp hers

It was in her subtle clutching
Of the small, slender fingers
that once ran through her hair as a child
And now sat unfeeling and limp
against sterile white sheets

In was in the way those soft hands
Those hands that once held me
Ready to brush away childhood fears
Now shivered and shook
As she ran her fingers through thinned gray hair
And stroked a lifeless cheek

When I saw my mother's heart break
There was no piercing cry
No raging wail
Rather, it came in the deafening silence
Broken only by her quiet gasp
When she could no longer hear
The steady labored breaths
That once echoed through the room

It came in the desperate pleas
She uttered beneath her breath
Crying, "Wake up, wake up!"
Begging for just another moment,
Another minute, another second
As the one who brought her into this world
The one who nurtured, held, and loved her
Became the one she could not save

It was in the way that gentle voice
That had once soothed me
Now choked, and gasped, and strained
As it whispered words of love
And mumbled soft goodbyes
Upon ears that could no longer hear

When I saw my mother's heart break
My own followed suit
For right before my eyes,
A woman became a little girl
Crying, begging, pleading
For the one who slipped away

And I knew that nothing
Could lessen the anguish she now bore
And bring her mother back to her
Or her to me
And make us whole once more ♦

Grand Mal (Owens Shumpert, 1907-1923)

BONNIE STANARD

In moving the queen's cell to a new home
he steps on a bee and starts the smell
that starts the swarming and stinging.
By nightfall his eyes roll in their sockets,
his voice is multitudes, and his body
quakes as he wrestles with workers.

His mother wraps his forehead with a wet rag
and rubs his quivering muscles with liniment.
She tries to reclaim him, to snatch him
from the wings of hive, but he withdraws
as though another colony is calling.

Evening turns into rattled night,
and morning surfaces with fevered
drones that rise to sting his face
to swell his lips and tongue
and the fight's going on so long
he may be gone before the setting sun.

The black bag of remedy is sent for
and arrives with an antidote of dark smoke
that's shot into his body to try
to stop his slide to the honeybee's side.
But it buzzes into his veins and paces him
beyond the dormant dreams of nectar. ♦

Favela da Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro

ANDREW G FLYNN



The Separation

BONNIE STANARD

In my father's time, medical treatment
for a heart attack was rest
until the beat misfired again
and then the ambulance came.
After an emergency admission
he survived another time to sit,
legs dangling aside a cardiac care bed,
a tubeless needle planted backhand.
Between bites of boiled chicken
he said he won't make it through another attack
said it as if it was the weather
said it as if it was a bit of advice
as if it was something
I should know.

I can only understand that the moment
is not capable of conclusion.
He always recovered
even when his doctor said,
"It's all in God's hands."
But his knowledge of near death
was first hand and three fold.
He spoke to a junior lacking
experience, one breathing effortlessly,
one unable to look finality in the face.
He didn't speak again of hospitals
or his heart or his health
and he didn't recover again. ♦

Relative Inadequacy

BONNIE STANARD

My father lived with the devil in his chest
working up the froth
that would eventually regurgitate with death.
His heart kept thumping for years despite mortal damage.
Wreckage accrued with regular bouts
of near misses with eternity.
His final attack began and ended in an hour
while he was alone
within reach of the telephone.

In my dreams I am with him when his heart stops,
when he recognizes his end with "Oh shit!"
My clumsy fingers fail the 911 number.
I try to rouse help on a dead phone
only to see his breath spiral out of his chest
until his lungs buzz like a noisy transformer.
Powerless, inept, and blurred with figments
I fail him. The medics could have plugged his pulse
into an electric connection and brought him back.
It's the same dream. Same again,
as if my inadequacy is my father's death. ♦

A Mother's Load

MARYANNE FREDERICK

I'm sinking into the abyss-
Being ill is a sickness.
Floating in a pool of sweat
And nothingness.
Forcing myself to move-
To eat; to relieve myself,
But there is no relief.

I ache.
I ache to think only of myself
And to allow misery to take over
Instead of pushing it down
Holding it back
With an effort
Quickly fading.

Give me a day to feel bad and
A day to feel better.
I promise I'll get out of bed then.
Just...
Please don't look at me with
Your toddler eyes
Sparkling with mischief. ♦

After Life

JULIE BRADLEY

I'm in Egypt. It's August. It's hot. Hot. Hot. It's the end of my trip and I'm tired. But I drag myself to the Luxor Museum. After the sticky, stinky, amazing mess of wonders at the Cairo Museum, I'm pleasantly surprised at the cool, quiet, organized collection. I walk through slowly, letting the artifacts and their stories suck me in as the fans on the walls whisper quietly.

It seems, for these ancient Egyptians, life itself meant next to nothing. The years spent struggling on earth – just a blip in the forever after, just a preparation for the after-life. Tombs were elaborate storage units for the stuff that might be needed in the after-life. That stuff is what I'm looking at now: boxes and bins, chairs, beds, sandals, jewelry, games. It's mostly mundane, everyday life stuff (golden thrones aside). It's nothing I would consider needing for an after-life. The after-life they were readying for seems to be very much like life-life. It seems they planned to be organized, comfortable, bejeweled, and entertained long after their bodies quit being anything.

The museum is small. I've walked the perimeter, and have made my way to a small room in the middle. It is dark and empty, except for an open sarcophagus encased in glass. As I move closer to look at this wrapped up ancient person, this mummy, my mind flashes to the hospital. To the first girl I watched die. How I removed my hand from hers. How I held her mother. How I picked her sister up off the floor. How I bathed her body. How I tied her hands together at her wrists and her feet together at her ankles with fine white string, knots followed unnecessarily by bows. How I closed her mouth with a cloth chinstrap that was made specifically for this purpose—all to get her body just right before it hardens in some awkward, inhuman way. How I wrapped her in a white plastic drape, so the outline of her body was all that was left. And when I look at this wrapped body in Egypt, all I can think of is the body I wrapped in the Bronx, and how small the world is, and how little has changed. And how I hope there is an after-life. And how I hope my girl is organized and comfortable and bejeweled and entertained. ♦

Age 24

HIEU T DUONG

I think about you often
After two short encounters, we met
You, sitting there, more than just paper

My first impression, so young...
Age 24 should be bright and great
No dull moments to slow your steps down

Stomach pain though, you suffered
Beyond all words, beyond all imaging I recommended

You, sitting there, distraught
Sitting there, waiting
I'm, sitting here, unsure
Sitting here, with nothing

One more test, I recommended
Afraid of what could happen
If it came back non-conclusive,
Will pain be your new best friend?

I think about you often, so young...
Age 24 should be bright and great
No dull moments to slow your steps down. ♦

Setting Stone

JANE COLLINS

The tapping starts at six o'clock—
a music of loose percussive clicks—
my neighbor is rebuilding a wall of rock.
His meditative rhetoric
of long pauses, shrill clinks
then stone-deep silence shrinks
the distances of evening—
I can hear his chisel, reasoning.

What would he think, the long-dead
farmer, who harvested those stones
heaved up each spring and spread
on his fields? The earth's unhealed bones
he gathered and tossed into rough rows
that became boundaries through slow
accumulation. He did not mean
to make a wall, only to clean

his land for planting and drop his seeds.
But tonight, I don't hear his hope echo
through my trees. I hear my neighbor, freed
from his office, on his knees, chipping stones
to balance—"one over two,
two over one"—to woo
stones with patience. It is prayer
to take chisel to stone, to pare

or crack them until they fit the waiting
space. Glaciers, racing south
left them here and he, setting
these stones in place, the chinks like mouths
to feed, suspends that race and slows
this night to its moments, and goes
on tapping, tapping as night comes down
until, at last, he leaves off his song. ♦

Body Building

CHARLOTTE STALL

Early rounds in the ICU
Quite a buzz; more than usual
An infant admitted during the night
His diagnosis is extremely rare
His prognosis? Poor
His parents know this
Still, they want us to try to save him
Some thrive on a challenge like this
Others share glances that are filled
with sorrow
This family's situation breaks your heart
It can break their vows
Decisions are made
We forge ahead
Cysts are smothering his kidneys
His abdomen is huge
His kidneys are compromised
The year is 2000
Only a few medical centers are using
Peritoneal dialysis
To treat infants with kidney failure
We join their efforts
His parents learn to dialyze him at home
Amazing what they are able to do
Now, more than ever, they are part
of a team
Not just trying to save their son's life
But to give him a normal life
Right now nothing is normal
He has been tube fed since the
beginning
The dietitian calculates his needs
Based on his growth curve and lab
values
She recommends introducing him
to food
I am that dietitian
We can tube feed him so he thrives
But he doesn't learn the skills to eat
His mother and I develop a plan

No force feeding
No punishment for not eating
But he is never hungry
He tries hard; he chews but chokes
He cannot swallow
We want him to thrive
So learning to eat comes in second
Time passes and he has
A kidney transplant
From a cadaver
Another family's loss
His parent's prayers answered
He does well despite his complex journey
Unfortunately his liver begins to fail
Damaged by more cysts
He receives part of his father's liver
It will grow with him
And what is left of Dad's liver
Will regenerate
Transplant medications make him hungry
All that earlier hard work is paying off
He eats
Small amounts at first
He takes a bite and we clap
He claps too
Eventually tube feedings aren't necessary
He continues to do well
The liver team manages his care
We see him less often
Then we lose contact
We represent the dark side of life
They are in the light
But just this year
I receive a photo Christmas greeting
There is Dad, Mom and a teenager
He is as tall as Dad and muscular
He looks happy
Under his photo is written
"Body by Charlotte" ♦

Butterfly Thanks

MK PUNKY

In the same spirit of respect for the fantastical
extended graciously to the religious and ritualistic,
grant me, I humbly implore, an abiding tolerance
for my follies,
particularly my penchant for the admittedly imaginary.
When the butterfly who comes to visit me, the one who lights
upon a blossoming geranium,
when the winged marvel floats past my face,
the story I tell is redemptive and triumphant and reflects high moral character:
The butterfly, now a flapping flitting angel, was recently the caterpillar
I saved from asphalt death and transferred safely
to a sanctuary leaf. ♦

Coming Home

ANNETTE M HOUSE

for more than forty years
she worked as a nurse
all shifts, most holidays and weekends

in dark institutions
with dimly-lit hallways
underground steam-piped tunnels
leading to the morgue

she walked hundreds of miles
on cracked, polished linoleum floors
of unspeakably ugly colors

she was not afraid of death
or blood or copious bodily secretions
she did not turn away from
thunderous pain or howling grief

she never refused to bear witness
to the catastrophic or exquisitely sad
she formed bonds with the weak and dying
held together with tears and frustration and grief

she was afraid of not knowing
what was needed in a critical moment
of not recognizing an element in the challenge
of making a lethal error
of violating dignity when it lay beyond her understanding

her greatest failing was giving away
her best self to her work
of having nothing left for those
who waited for her to come home

her greatest fear lay in her inability to live well in ordinary time
time stripped of drama and stardom
of coming home ♦

For My Father.

AMY NACHT

He hated the word hate. Hate was a four letter word. One that was aligned with violence, racism, and hurt. He was dragged forcibly into a bathroom, his head shaved and called a Jew. This was in the 1960s at a southern private college. This was during the time of the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, no peaceful stones saved his hair or his humility. He moved to Boston, and never left. A city with diversity, with smells of retreating red coats embedded in the stones. A southern college experience, Boston, a childhood in Miami with Carmen with the caramels on her desk could not assuage the pain. When love is lost at an early stage, when fetal life is rife with as sense of unwantedness, and historical trauma is laid within the CNS pathways producing silent changes, depression can set in, like a jello served on Passover, green, filled with unidentified objects, sweet, crunchy, bitter, and an inability to hold a shape once broken. I tell my kids now that depression is a brain illness. You know how people get sick in their lungs like your brother's asthma, or in their hearts, depression is getting sick in your brain." Depression is being sick. To the world depression is a curse, a demon to be repelled at all costs. It is hate, that four letter word my father always told me to not say. Amy, find another word to say what you are feeling, that is a really strong word and doesn't describe your experience." I hate going to the museum Dad." I didn't hate going to the museum, I loved it. We would walk in the MFA and always sit in the impressionist gallery in front of Renoir's paintings. I often sat for long times looking at scenes with my father, his silence demanding silence teaching me without words. But those long silences, the closed doors, the frightening moments of rage and disappearances, I hated that and I didn't know how to say it. I miss my dad, his brain got sick, really sick and he never recovered from the night he was carried off a train, screaming his pain to the world, into a hospital. After calls to his neurologist, I asked, "how come you never consulted with a psychiatrist?" She didn't respond. She called me back two days later and said, I'm sorry, I should have consulted with a psychiatrist, but now all we can do is transfer him to a long term facility. In the end, I sat with him looking out at the Charles River, a cold grey day near Harvard square and played every song on my computer that he played for me as a child. While he lay with his eyes closed, I held his hand and we listened to the Rolling Stones, and Bob Dylan, to Melanie, and to Aretha Franklin. My father did like to dance, and hopefully he performed the dance at bougival, finding peace along the way-something he never quite experienced. Depression is being sick. Sick is a four letter word, but it cannot hold space on the shelf with hate. ♦

Let Me Find Hope

NEHA DASGUPTA

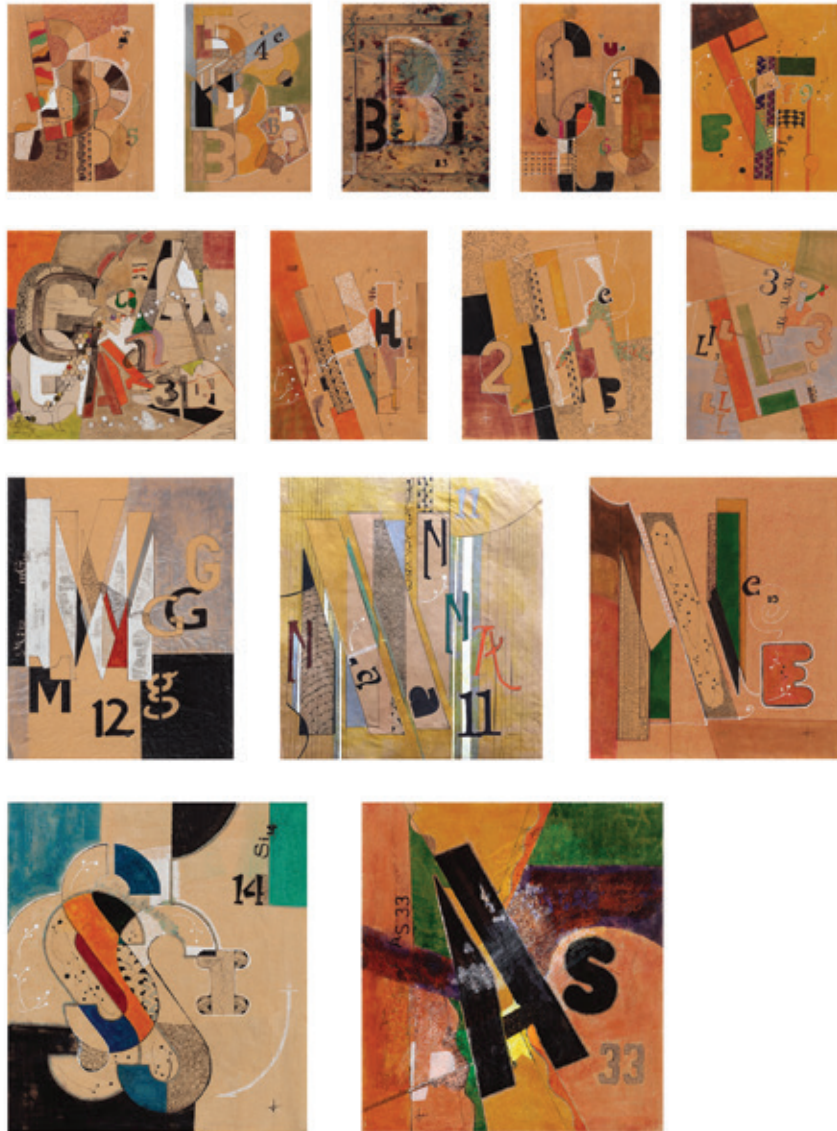
*Let me find hope...
In the gentlest of whispers,
which stops the loudest of screams,
in the deepest of love,
where my heart can lean,
and find its way back from the darkest nights,
as I lay my mind, on the first morning light...
let me find hope. ♦*

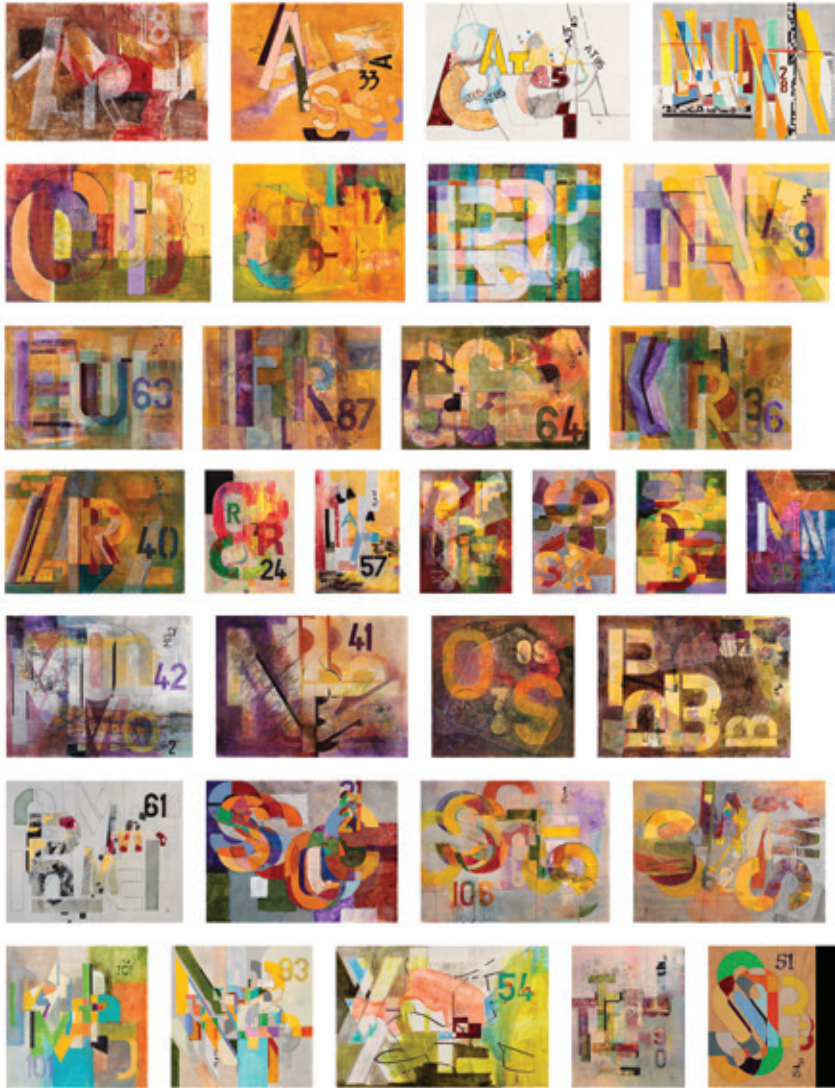
Artistic Alchemy: A Painterly Periodic Table

JOYCE M NIELSEN

The Periodic Table of Chemical Elements is a complex, systematic, elaborated and ordered mosaic of letter-number combinations that symbolize the earth's 118 naturally occurring and synthesized chemicals. Each letter-number code represents sometimes unpronounceable elements (such as Praseodymium and Ytterbium) as well as the more familiar H-1 for Hydrogen and O-8 for Oxygen. The painterly periodic tables presented here are an artist's interpretation (hence alchemy) of each element's symbol, rendered in mixed media, and organized and displayed in artistic-based categories: Ligatures 1 and 2, Graffiti, Flowers, Encrypted Textures. These paintings are designed to evoke recognition as well as continued mystery and discovery, thus both contrasting and complementing traditional scientific versions of the periodic table.







Ode to Having Hair From the Perspective of One Who Does Not

LAURIE B BOGUE

Worn long it fell forward across my face
A mask to hide behind, run my fingers through
to brush back from my face in dramatic sweep
Worn short for convenience
It easily tucked beneath a sun hat
With no second thoughts

Without it I am unmasked and naked
Before curious stares and sidelong glances
I stand beneath the brim of a ball cap
With the weight of unanswered questions
Heating the air and burning my pale scalp

My hand now runs across my head in mourning
feeling mere peach fuzz and bare skin
soft as a baby's bottom
skin of a puppy's belly
I search for the right cap, the right message
And, head held high, walk out the door ♦

Mandarin Lessons

L. E. ELLIS

I began learning Mandarin on my family's computer when I was twelve years old, reading the pinyin lyrics to the Mando-pop songs my best friend Qing Qing emailed me during her summers spent in Beijing and Shanghai. I took up the language again nine years later, at the age of twenty-one. I sat in bed on an early winter night, repeating the words Rosetta Stone spoke into my headphones. I didn't know what time it was, but my parents and my brother were asleep by then. Since my hysterectomy a few weeks before, night and day didn't mean much to me.

Packets of crackers and bottles of water covered my bedside table, ready for random mealtimes when my stomach grumbled or I needed to take a pill. I slept whenever I felt the urge, fatigue coming in waves every few hours. I often woke when the pressure in my bladder became too much to bear, the ache extending to my abdominal scars, insisting I stand on shaky legs and stumble to the bathroom in the hall.

I measured my weeks of bedrest in Mandarin lessons, as well as other ways. I often kept time by when my father would bring me a bowl of my favorite soup, or my mom would bring a new stack of library books to my bedside. Sometimes my brother stopped by my door to check in, encouraging me to watch new episodes of our favorite shows. Christmas arrived a few days after my surgery, followed by New Year. I slowly, carefully made my way downstairs to the living room on both occasions to greet my grandmother and sit with my family for a while before journeying back to my room and falling into bed again, exhausted from the effort.

Confined to my house for much of the winter, away from flu and other threats to my health, I passed time reading book after book delivered by Amazon Prime. I used the Christmas and graduation money mailed to me in envelopes marked with Santa Claus stamps to invest in stories that let me escape my too-familiar bedroom with its blue walls, old carpet, white furniture and paintings of distant places I feared I would never see. With no school and no job and nowhere to go, I invented ways to occupy my mind. I blogged, I wrote, I watched hours of Netflix and Youtube, but there was only so much of this my brain could take. I needed goals. I needed challenges. I needed something to override the words that replayed in my mind:

You're broken. You're damaged.

I drowned out the words with Chinese.

But why learn Mandarin? Why not continue the other languages that had captured my interest through the years? French. Spanish. Korean. Japanese.

It might have been because my grandfather encouraged me to learn Chinese, believing it the most practical language for America's future. Or perhaps I was starting to hope that, someday, I would finally have the strength to travel to China with Qing Qing, as she'd so often hoped I could. Perhaps I wanted to further immerse myself in the culture of the one friend who had been with me through every stage of my condition.

Qing Qing knew me before I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome at the age of thirteen. She stood by me through a decade of friendship that included years of failed medicines, chronic pain, and uncontrollable periods, the last of which lasted for ten consecutive weeks. She kept me company on the days I wanted to scream and cry, even the days I gave in to that desire. Mandarin was the language of the Taiwanese dramas Qing Qing and I watched together when I felt too sore to go out. It was the language of the Shanghai fashion magazines, Lunar New Year celebrations, and bubble tea that had become regular parts of my life in our mostly-white, suburban city.

But I think there was another reason I chose to learn Chinese. Why, when years later so much of the Chinese I learned has fled my mind, I remember this phrase:

Zhè shì wǒ de nǚ'ér.

This is my daughter.

Because someday I might use those words as I bring my daughter home from some crowded corner of the world.

In the weeks before my operation, I underwent a psychiatric examination to prove I fully comprehended the consequences of my decision. Removing my uterus, of course, meant removing all possibility of becoming pregnant.

"If you do want children and decide to adopt, are you sure you can you love a child that isn't biologically yours?" the psychiatrist asked me.

This question both puzzled and angered me. Stupid questions tend to do that.

As if we do not love friends. As if we do not love partners. As if love is limited to those who look like us.

At twenty-one years old, there was much about my future I did not know.

At twenty-four, I can't say I know much more, but this truth has never changed:

My future daughter might not look anything like me. She will not have my eyes or laugh or smile. But she will have my heart. She will have every undefinable, intangible part of me possible to possess. And she will be the greatest lesson I can ever learn. ♦

Joy and Misery

JAMES SZE

Clean and sharp, this monolith scatters Daylight
Concealing the organic-mechanic chaos within
Feigned Order imposed on Expected Entropy
All playing out in the glow of subdued electricity.

Smiling faces, in gentle voices, greeting souls contorted by
Pain Fear Sadness Guilt Despair Yearning Grief.
Smiling faces hiding the same
Broken people giving broken people
Relief Warmth Hope Joy Compassion Care
But never promises. I wouldn't dare.

Sterile rooms sterile tools sterile hands
Scrubbed true, marked in blue
The Silence broken by screaming capillaries disturbed
Burned back into submission.
A lifeless room built for saving lives.
We perfume serious work with music and laughs to remember

Long Coats eager to teach, short coats scared to death.
short coats eager to learn, Long coats short for time.
short for sleep, burdened by weightless things.
The coats grow longer
But heavier too.

"This is a safe place."
Discharged to street.

Compassionate cogs in this Engine
The Medical-Industrial Complex.
Serving the People, One Facility Fee at a Time!
We are Fulfilled by our work
So that someone else is paid for it.

Thalia and Melpomene on each shoulder
Service to service, room to room, case to case
Whispering,
"Joy and Misery" ♦

On a Scale of One to Ten

JACQUELINE JULES

"Rate your pain," she says
as she scans his plastic bracelet.

He obliges with a 6 or a 7,
high enough for meds,
yet not so high
he sounds like a whiner.

Every nurse entering his room
gets the same canned response
as if he's answering
a checker at Wal-Mart.

"How are you?"
"All right."

Except for the pain
hunching him over the tray table,
one silent hand on his forehead
staring at food he cannot eat.

Rate your pain.

Later he tells me
he just makes up a number.
Pain can't be quantified
or charted on a graph.
It has no algorithm,
only infinite power
to multiply.

Watching his pale face
turn away on a narrow bed,
I feel what can't be measured
growing inside me
at an exponential rate. ♦

On Disclosure: Why I don't Write my Pain

BAILEY L ANDERSON

Why do you make work about disability?

Let's be real, what you are really asking is "do you identify as disabled?" It is as if to presume that I couldn't care if I didn't have a personal relationship to it. *I can't see it, defend your positioning.*

Yes, I identify as disabled.
I have for several years.
No, I don't always identify as disabled.
I haven't for years.

In undergrad, I refused to identify myself to my teachers...only a select few knew and that was only after I went home realizing that there was no way I could ever pass their class without disclosure. I absolutely despised having to be that vulnerable with teachers who may, or may not, care. Their responses varied, but after one particularly awful experience I remember vowing that I would never be that upfront with anyone. Success looked different, for me. I took a vow of independence (yet, always needing my mother, boyfriend, best friend, sister, and father's help with writing...so independent).

By asking for help I would be affirming that I was dependent, but more than that, I was opening myself up for both pity and the accusations of laziness. I quickly internalized these ideas; that my need for help was a sign that I was insufficient, lazy, and not smart enough for academia.

Today I've taken a new vow: I refuse to feel your pity for me. I refuse to tell narratives that ask for pity. I will wait until you know me well enough, until I have built a long relationship, to actually disclose the complexity of my relationship with disability to you.

It is why I don't write my pain. I would rather not publicly identify with that part of my disability than deal with the dehumanizing, infantilizing, pity that is so linked to disability. My body is not a site for you to process your relationship to your own entropy and bodily reality.

Yes, I identify as disabled.
I have for several years.
No, I don't always identify as disabled.
I haven't for years.

For me it is political. My disabilities exist in ways in which I can try to keep them hidden, and then have the privilege of being upset when they are exposed. Yet, for me to not identify with them is to deny that they even exist. Another privilege.

My new practice is watching what happens when I let them rupture into the world...smearing across the screen and dismantling ideas of the "perfect" professor whose poise with words that dismantle ideas rather than boomerang back at the self.

"You didn't spell that at all correctly. You weren't even close." says my student, "nope" I reply.

For me, my disability carries with it a history and present that is emotionally wrought and simultaneous factually simple. It is intertwined with the precarity of my body, and is ever shifting and changing. It for me, exists on many levels; emotional, mental, and physical and does not discriminate.

In graduate school I furiously claimed my disability. I clung to it like the life vest holding up my identity. Finally. Less of the hide-and-go-seek. I felt more honest. But I still didn't talk about how AS makes my back hurt so much that I want to climb out of my skin. It is not a sharp pain that comes and goes, it is the kind of pain that never leaves, it feels like it is eating the guts out of the body. How my insomnia is in part not being able to sleep, but if I'm honest, it is mostly because it is too painful to stay still. I refuse to feel your pity for me. I didn't mention how I can't put socks on in the morning because of the tightness and that when I say I can't move more, I really. Can't. Move. more. I refuse to feel your pity for me. The drugs made me lose my proprioception so badly that I would fly, feet wrapped, arms entangled when I fell...once so badly that a car pulled over to ask if I was ok...I vowed not to take the meds (which was good, because apparently my kidneys couldn't handle them anyhow). I refuse to feel your pity for me. And when I'm scared because I notice the reduced mobility climbing up my spine its fingers digging in deeper each year, I simultaneously give in and experience, and yet I still know that to say this to you, is to let you into my pity. Yet, I refuse to feel *your* pity for me. This is why I don't write my pain.

There. Radical honesty. Can I live with the repercussions?

My work is indeed about self preservation. I remember in ethics class deciding I didn't believe in altruism...and I still don't. By the time I cannot dance like I do now, I want to have redefined dance for my future body...because for some the future is today, and yesterday, and tomorrow. And then I think about how I understand the world better by digging into understanding something I care so deeply about. Blacklivesmatter. I can step aside and acknowledge that sometimes someone else needs to be at the center.

I now continue to spit into the wind of academia asking for us to finally acknowledge that disability and the body possess and produces knowledge not in spite of, despite, overcoming, even though, inspiring, because of, fighting through, but because it factually holds knowledge that isn't gained in an sparkling-rainbow-studded-journey, but rather in the moment-by-moment existence of being with.

I refuse to feel your pity for me. I refuse to tell narratives that ask for pity.

I will wait... ♦

Scars

ANNA S STADICK

I'm a vain person.
I know that.

A mirror is either my best friend or my enemy, depending on how I feel on a particular day. I'd like to say that I just appreciate beauty, appreciate health, but, really, I'm just self-absorbed. I'm shallow.

Maybe that's why my scars bother me.

"What's wrong with your face?" She asked, "Do you have the chickenpox?"

I looked at the girl in the desk beside me. Her long brown hair was tied into a tight braid that went down her back and she wore red earrings that matched her scarf. She wasn't someone I particularly liked in our seventh grade class, but the school was small and I couldn't afford to hate someone I would see everyday.

Still, I hated her in that moment.

"Well?" She asked.

"It's not chickenpox. It's just my face, okay?"

My nanny asked me if I was okay on our drive home from school and I told her I was. Even with my face turned towards the window, she could see I was crying.

Don't pick at your face. It will only leave scars.

I could hear the woman's voice in my head; see her sitting in her white lab coat in the office. I hated going to my appointments. I dreaded the way she'd stare at me, the way she half-shook her head, and when she handed me a bottle of cream that I knew wouldn't make a difference.

It will only leave scars.

I tore at my face anyway, hating how the skin tore so easily but wanting to see the blood trickle down my cheeks. Maybe I wanted a scar, proof of—proof of what? I'd have scabs. I'd have to avoid eye contact and comb my bangs just so. It was my punishment for being so ugly.

Ugly.

Pimple. Zit. Those are ugly words—I can't say them aloud.

I cleansed. I washed. I took medicine. But, still, ugly, and it was my fault.

So I scratched and I tore into the face I loathed.

Acne isn't an illness. It's not life or death. It's cosmetic. Am I even allowed to remember it as painful? With everything in my life now, can I say it was ever really a part of me?

My mental illness reminds me of my acne. It's not my fault. But I feel like it is, so I self-destruct. I attack my body in ways that don't make sense, in ways that actually do.

I bang my head onto the kitchen counter over and over, just to feel the physical pain of the mental agony that I can't put into words. When my sister asks how I got the concussion, I say I fell and hit my head—so clumsy.

These scars are the kind I live over and over again.

When the acne flared up again, I grumbled to anyone who'd listen. I was an adult and adults aren't supposed to have acne.

I tried makeup for a while to see if I could hide the acne until it went away, but it persisted for months. I couldn't meet the eyes of the clerk at the checkout counter or of the man's bagging my groceries.

"Just go to the dermatologist," my husband said, sick of my nightly washing rituals.

"I'm afraid."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I guess I'm embarrassed."

I made an appointment, almost canceled it, but managed to get myself there. I dreaded her look of disapproval, the way I'd leave feeling like a failure. The way I feel when I leave my psychiatrist's office: embarrassed.

But a new doctor walked in. "Hi, I'm Molly," she smiled.

She asked me a few questions and I answered accordingly, waiting for that look, directed at my forehead.

Instead, she leaned forward, took my hands in hers, and looked me in the eye. "This is going to get better," she said, "I know it's probably been really hard and I'm so sorry."

I nodded.

"But we will work hard to fix this—we'll do whatever we can—and you'll be okay. I promise."

I cried on my way home, the emotion suddenly very much on the surface. What was it? Relief? I don't know, but I left feeling like I'd just talked to a *real* person.

This was the first time a doctor had looked at me, *really* looked at me; it was my first experience with empathy in a doctor's office.

This was the first doctor to ever make me feel at ease, to make me feel like I wasn't some freak with a gross face or just another crazy bipolar patient. I don't think Molly knew how much her kindness and understanding mattered.

I wanted to be beautiful, to be normal, and she saw that. ♦

The End

JULIE BRADLEY

These are the things I think while caring for him after he's gone: How he would throw his notebook from the bed to the floor and wait patiently for me to pick it up and hand it back to him before he threw it again and again and again: endearing tenacity. How he would beat his hand to his heart, his way of saying I love you: sweet and poignant. How just hours ago a trio of nurses sang Feliz Navidad, loudly and poorly, because that's the only song we know in Spanish and we wanted to make him happy. How he shooed us out of the room, reaching instead for dad. And how now he is quiet, cold, and unmoving. I look at him, blurry through tears that have collected but refused to fall. The dusky shade of my purple nail polish nearly lost in the dusky purple of his skin. I laugh. I have to. Because if I don't laugh, I have no idea what kind of noises will come pouring out of me. I laugh until the tears come and streak down my cheeks. I write his name on a tag and place it on his toe. I tie his hands together across his abdomen. I tie his feet together at his ankles. We take him to the morgue and return to his empty room. I watch as his mother puts his belongings into a giant bag, one by one. His father pushes his empty wheelchair slowly down the hall toward the exit. The wheels squeak as they turn, the chair strangely and newly weightless. They have taken their time and collected everything, and now must leave behind the only thing that matters. This is hard. Walking home the sun was shining and it was nicer than it's been in a long time. I know that has nothing to do with anything, I just think it's a nice way to remember the end. ♦

Danny Boy

FIONA C HORGAN

The summer day I met him,
A boyish grin lit up his freckled face,
A baseball cap sat atop a thick mop of hair,
His chest wall displayed a newly-placed broviac line,
The scars on his tanned legs disclosed adventures on his BMX bike,

and I teased him for adorning his hospital room wall with
a poster of the periodic table.

The winter day we lost him,
A breathing tube protruded from his gaunt face,
His bald head was covered with a woolen hat,
A bloodied IJ line distorted his neck,
His withered legs were speckled with petechiae and ecchymoses,

and I walked past his bed, unable to say 'goodbye.' ♦

The Masseuse

ANDREA DEJEAN

I.

I was, perhaps, too tired, too beaten to be apprehensive of a stranger's touch on my bare skin, skin and scarred soul searching for comfort from the wreck I had let daily life wreak. That first time, the masseuse seemed what she still seems: an oxymoron – friendly sorcerer, California shafts of light spiking through darkness, Oriental rings of aura glowing behind the lids of closed eyes. Her touch, while I was lying with my femininity pressed against the table, was neither invasive nor probing. It said, 'Trust', and I tried as much as the newness of the experience allows in one trained not to trust newness, tensing when she asked me to turn, expose the triangle of sex.

But how quickly her hands had made me feel whole again. (A slight turn to the insoles of my feet shot puppet strings to my shoulders.) And yet gently dismantled, each member set aside to rest, but still joined, coordinated in movement and shared anticipation, like fish in a cove.

The next morning, with the phantom force of her hands still upon me, I struggled to keep from crying, suddenly bereft.

II.

I had so looked forward to returning to her, to returning to that restful that calm that she had induced through mystic music and sacred touch. But she certainly could have told me: no two experiences are ever alike. Each pressure from the same hands that had before so soothed me, now turned energy upon itself to fester. Her touch upon my legs was agony, I ached to kick out like an ornery colt, unable to be calmed; each touch a further antagonism. She sensed it, tried to exorcise it, palm-pumped my stomach, danced from body point to body point like the burdened lover of one unable to be aroused or satisfied. Some restlessness in me had numbed her gift. I was both disappointed and relieved: one can choose discipline after all.

Afterwards, she wanted to talk (like certain lovers after the act). Outside in the clear sky was a full moon.

III.

She is curiously responsive, that way. Able to be a liberator, a healer, if you want that, if she sensed you came for that – or if you simply said it outright. And yet she can be so truck-stop life real, you can imagine her pistol-pop gum chewing the entire time she pounds your flesh. "Yeah, so howze ya betta half?" (Like the tough lady trainer in some B movie you wish love would find rather than the empty-spirited, bottle blond who plays the fighter's *goil*)... if that's what you wanted.

She seems to know, even by your silence, what you want. Concentrating for long minutes on the toes, sore from wearing cheap shoes walking hard on unyielding concrete. Or on the knitted brow between the shoulder blades. Rare are the times she has violated that sensibility. Once, just rubbing muscles and soothing tensions when I wished for something more... otherworldly. Again when *her* life pressed against the studio door: the recent decision to return to Paris, her daughter playing violin right angles in the room below, a storm exploding in the streets, celestial bodies in upheaval, my body unable to let my spirit fly.

There are times when the rabbit prefers the silk lining of the hat.

IV.

The crystal she had nestled in the hollow beneath my hip was hot, too hot to bear, but it is hard to say what is more surprising: that it seemed to burn or that she snatched it up and away when I said so, as though it were, in fact, an ember. That encounter was the most magnificent, for I saw the spiky white and gold flames that engulf and protect her hands, if only long enough to be certain of the vision. She is some sort of witch, I concluded – and was frightened. A good witch, I reasoned, and was calmed. A magician, too, is she not? – for she made me see the vision. Her room is filled with objects one (like me) does not wish to examine. How does she succeed in being both of that world and this? What keeps her from hurting me when surely she can? Clearly, *that* is the mystery.

Epilogue:
As she prepares to leave, I try to be happy for her, but can only be sad for myself, which may be why I have no similar gift. So she will go and we will meet again, someday, and she will smile as though time has not passed. Perhaps for her it doesn't, or at least not in the same way. I will feel the loss of her stronger than I should, in the confusion in which someone like me always conducts her life, unable to get beyond the grounding that the masseuse has so gently transcended.

And I want to know, do her hands have memory? ♦

Divide

ROBIN J AUBREY

When did disagreement turn to hate?
When did disagreement turn to fear?
When did disagreement turn to a
blind eye and a deaf ear?

“Listen to me!” Crowds are shouting.
Screaming and taunting won’t change minds
Sarcasm and hate draw the battle lines

Leave and scream or stay and listen
Disagreement is a given
What is your decision? ♦

Love of Silence. Silence of Love.

MARK MANAGO



The Rabbit Hole is Over There

JOHN A UNGER

I'm listening to the chemo machine pump, clunkada-clunk, clunkada-clunk, rhythmically infusing an eleven-thousand dollar liter of melphalan into the dangling tubes of an apheresis catheter sewn into my chest: busy professional suits, neckties, stethoscopes, white coats; seriously practical shoes, eager medical students, anxious wife, lengthy explanatory health insurance tales and travails, just another day hurtling down the long ways down the rabbit hole of medical diagnosis and treatment. What's up doc?

I just start mumbling along saying, "melphalan for Ungerman," my nickname from my Alaska deckhand days, when I was always yelling back at some screaming skipper or another that "everything was Unger control," as the back deck became a snarl of hooks, lines, cod, halibut, or salmon, about to snap and go over the side as I was slapped to my knees from one angry wave or another. Now I'm saying "melphalan for Ungerman," silently to myself or aloud: I can't tell anymore. I am becoming God's grace and prayer.

Then with a clunkada-clunk Dick Cheney pops into my head. They put the venous catheter into my chest right around the time Cheney accidentally shot his buddy in the face with a shotgun. I am lying on one of those cushioned medical tables to get the spouts sewn on to harvest stem cells, to infuse melphalan and my flash-frozen stem cells, and to drip endless bags of this and that straight to my heart, and I'm looking up into the gauzy, surgically masked face of the technician poking around at my bare chest. I'm going a bit bugaboo from something they gave me. I babble about Dick Cheney and shotguns as the ceiling twirls, fluorescent tubes and medical room stage lights so much like spinning, badly made star war's swords, as the man began his work.

Suddenly he shoves me hard as I'm snickering about Cheney shooting his buddy's face full of pellets, and I'm trying to make a song out of "shot gun dimply do-wah hey".

The swords are now whiter, brighter, hotter; the eyes behind the mask glared, the lizard skin around the eyes cracking, the earth was giving way: eyebrows now a tightened frown, like those stupid, angry frowny-faces, the anti-happy face. This guy was the anti-happy face, his eyebrows now angry, hairy centipede hands trying to reach out and furiously yank his face down and down.

With another clunkada-clunk, my mind clanks to the evangelical nephrologist who tells me the medically skewed, you're screwed news in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His face screams unblemished destiny, angelically bright; tinged with natural, heart-pumping pure oxygen; pink, rouged cheeks, upstaged by his huge white teeth, which remind me of Mr. Ed, a talking smart-aleck horse from TV in the sixties. The Doctor's teeth, as white as a bleached Sunday shirt, yak multisyllabic medical words. He has that indescribable God-blessed shine as he says, "You have Amyloidosis," his face all white with teeth again. I stare at his face; then down onto a sheet of paper between us. I try to spell out the word; he notices my struggles and spells it for me. I can't get over how the "oid" seems to disappear when he says the word. Where does that "O-I-D" go? Does it go the same place the "e" disappears when I have to change it all the time trying to spell judgment right? Does the "e" and everything else reappear on judgment day?

Our loved ones and we all some day begin to fall down the health woes of a rabbit hole; clutching at the roots of a menagerie of institutions and characters who start pulling life apart, melting taffy tree-roots on a hot day; endless phone calls and letter and forms and forms and more forms; tasks and more tasks to stay alive, to keep moving, to stay independent; tsk, tsk, tsk; stay on it or die, penniless, no less.

All of life whirling to this melphalan moment, a moment we all come to, conscious or not, babbling or not, clunkada-clunk—clunkada clunk. Dick Cheney, shotgun face-dimply pellets; judgments and God, Mr. Ed, all of it, a cacophony, sound cranked up as clunkada-clunk: "melphalan for Ungerman," thoughts of youth, thoughts of Hollywood, thoughts of politics, thoughts of death, thoughts of God, or no thoughts at all.

Then,
in another breath,
heartbeats to the realizing horizon:

The rabbit hole is always just right over there.
Can you see it?
The closer the earth slips under our feet,
slips towards the shadowed tones of the under known.

The more I pray,
the more I feel the clarity of the light;

I've changed waves to the top of a sea of diamond dust.

Sparkling,
I swirl and twirl,
the sun blessing down, all around;
anger and politics
shaped and polished
to love.



The Tag

LIZ BETZ

Just one thing to wear is all she needs. Carole has been in her closet for twenty-five minutes now and for each garment that she's pulled from the closet, she's found nothing. How funny. She used to claim that she had nothing to wear but it had never really been true before. Surely it isn't true now.

She hears her husband come into the room; the day is softening towards bedtime. He places his clothes over his valet chair and slips into his cotton pajamas.

A resentment of the minimalist wardrobe of men slides into Carole's mind as she tosses one blouse and then the second into the corner. She is past the point of hope for a resounding 'Yes! That's the one.' She tells herself she'll be good with a 'close enough.' Surely there will be a 'close enough.'

"Will you be long?" His question interrupts her thoughts. She glances at the clock and then at him, while her hands still pull at the closet's contents. He explains, "I want to get a little extra sleep. You know. Be bright and ready for the old team meeting."

She shrugs; her hands have found a beloved jacket, an 'always works' staple of her wardrobe. She feels the history of the jacket, where the memories could take her if she indulged, like the social events she attended wearing it, where she earned her share of glances. Or when she wore it to work but seduction and sexy thoughts were the silk lining. She slips it on.

Her husband flips his pillow with a sigh and picks up the novel he's been reading for months. He peers over his reading glasses as he counts the pages to the end of the chapter. He clears his throat.

Carole's hands stroke the fabric of the jacket but at the last button a funhouse thing happens. The garment stretches, it puckers. It barely meets. To wear it she would have to leave it open, but that isn't attractive because it looks exactly what it is, a jacket that can't be buttoned. She pulls it off and gently puts it on the reject pile, as though a wreath on a grave of her youth.

She lifts her head and modifies her goal. All she wants is a garment that is flattering but at least something that actually fits. If she doesn't find something soon, it means another shopping trip. But this thought too is a betrayal, for in her hand is something new, the tag still on it from her lunch-hour shopping trip.

"A power purchase." She told her office friend and added, "My size. My color. And on sale; I didn't even have to try it on."

"You know what works really well?" Her friend's words come back to her. "Snap a photo – of yourself in a mirror, only position the camera over your face. A mirror on its own can lie, but a faceless photo tells the truth."

Tentatively she pulls the tagged garment over her head. The truth? Carole has no idea, but her friend might have been giving her a big hint. But this wouldn't be wrong, it couldn't be wrong. She knew the sale was final, she knew how this worked. She stares at the mirror, the lying mirror tells the truth. She doesn't need a photo.

"That's not exactly a good fit." Carole frowns because her husband has spoken her thoughts, but she reserves her glare for her own reflection as she tries several necklaces, then a scarf; finally she adds a long cardigan.

Maybe her friend meant it as a kindness, the way bad breath can prompt the offer of a mint, but the result was rude. A co-worker, she doesn't even like her, it's a quasi-friendship they maintain. A frown alters her face while she imagines confrontations where opinions are exchanged at full volume and a satisfying rift has been rendered, her anger resting on the messenger.

No. Not now, now she needs sleep.

Carole ends her closet mission to surrender into the cool sheets and a good night kiss from her husband, but while her eyes close her mind does not shut down.

She grasps the pouch that resides where her flat stomach no longer lives. She's been altered. It's a rude awakening, and a mixture of anger and despair washes over her. It would have been better not to know this enemy's advance. Menopause is an unwanted ticket that the body pays for.

She'd embraced fashion as a teenager, to express her inner feelings. She'd had to grow comfortable with what nature had given her – nice legs but too broad a shoulder and breasts that never grew past apple size. She'd learned to dress that body.

She turns in bed, seeking a degree of comfort and temperature, but no spot in her bed will settle her as much as knowing she has one thing to wear. She wills her much older body to accept the familiar mattress, pillow and the radiated heat of another sleeper but instead she recalls her youthful sureness in the dressing rooms. Her flair was strong and without disappointment. She didn't deserve this; that was the thing. At any point in her life she could have been reckless, developed eating disorders, let herself go, but despite all those resisted temptations, here she is.

What you need, she tells herself, is help! Help in not obsessing. She sighs. Help in accepting her new self. Her husband moans in his sleep and she is reminded of the help given to her; the photo tip of her co-worker, (a real friend) and even her husband's honest comment.

There isn't a price tag on learning what you need to know, but it is worth a lot. Really, all she needs is one good look, and she will go forward from there.

The End ♦

The Theft

LAURIE B BOGUE

I need to report a theft – the theft of a year of my life
An insidious thief drained me of strength and stamina
as I lay in the hospital, chemo coursing through my veins
from multiple tubes connected
to the infusion pump at my bedside
Left frail and bald as this disease ravaged my system
I was stripped of peace of mind, sense of self
and reality as I once knew it

I battled nausea and fought to keep food in my system
I had to learn to walk again unassisted
I suffered bone fractures – pelvis and lumbar vertebrae –
in bones weakened by disease and damaged
by my falling again and again

But this thief did not get away with everything
It underestimated me and my oncologist and our teams –
A special nurse who held me in her arms when I cried
And told me we were in this battle together –
a battle we waged for many, many months –
Or my therapist who helped me find the courage,
determination and iron will
that my father bequeathed to me
which lay hidden in my soul and
that even I had trouble reaching at times

This thief had not met my friends who were my caregivers
Rita, who patiently cared for me every single day for a year and made me feel safe
Marvia, who refused to let me give up, all the while fighting her own cancer battle

I am slowly returning to the world
reassuming the roles of neighbor and neighborhood warrior
and of mom to my dog Chance
returning to a world diminished by the death of three friends
whose grace, strength and kindness were immeasurable
by the deaths of a number of dogs whose encounters had brightened
my daily dogwalks with Chance
There are new fences where old fences once stood
houses rebuilt or razed for redevelopment
new businesses operating where familiar businesses once stood

I have returned to a world profoundly changed
As is my own reality. ♦

Unplanned

JEANNETTE GUERRASIO

We didn't plan it
Surgery on the same day
By the same surgeon
My thumb

Your middle finger
We sat together in pre-op
I went first

You blew me a kiss

We didn't plan it
The post-op one-handed texts
Celebrating the dishes we couldn't wash
Joking about it all
How many times did I hitchhike?
How many people did you flip off?
By accident, of course

We didn't plan it
The snowstorm on

Post op Day 5

The white coating our world
And you, letting the dog out

That night

Slipping

Falling

Four stairs down
To the cement garage below
And you

were gone

We didn't plan it
Sitting

Holding your hand

With my bandaged thumb

Ventilator and ventriculostomy secure
My doctorly presence

Somehow an instant reassurance
For your partner and friends
But, what could I do?

You took your last breath

It wasn't planned

Now
My scar

A permanent reminder
I sit

but the tears don't fall
It would be much easier

if they did ♦

Wake Up

CONNOR FENWICK

It started as a trickle, as it always does.
It irritates my hand, as my dry, cracked fingers rotate the cheap plastic knob.
The water burns my hand- much like the many glasses of scotch that have simmered
down my throat.
I rotate the knob too much- now it's too cold!
After a deep breath, I finally get the water to the right temperature.

I stand up in the slick, cold tub, my bloated nude form
still buzzing with adrenaline.
My head pounds, jolts, my skull ringing in the same manner as church bells do.

The water streams down my face, forming fanciful patterns along my skin.
The water embraces me, molds to my form, and accepts what I have become.
The water understands.

I close my eyes tight, the light too much to bear.
I try to avoid thinking about my past, it only casts a shadow over the present.
I have little success, as my breath catches in my throat.
No matter how hard I try, I choke
Over the many unsaid words,
and unspoken phrases,
that I could have used to prevent my present circumstances.
A dismal thought crosses my shattered mind; I need help.

Violent coughs squeeze my chest,
and I must take a moment to catch my breath.
Now more than ever, it feels like I need to fight for my life.

The water fills to the brim of the tub, circulating warmth.
I hold myself tightly, numbly moving in a trance,
as I rest my head beneath the water.
A cycle forms, my head dipping in and out of the water,
my stimulant and confidant.
The more I repeat this action, the safer I feel.
I go quicker and quicker, until at last my head begins to ring again.

My weight shifts.
I rock back on my feet, leaning into the side of the tub,
my fingers tracing the outline of so many faded scars,
as my body straightens out, the water sloshing around me.
My toes reaching out in front of me
as the water constantly changes to envelop my form.

My eyes bolt open,
the light glaring into my retinas.
My eyes twitch, struggling to focus- I only see double,
two impressions of myself, both as fuzzy as the other,
as I fight to make the image clearer,
and work to stabilize my two halves.

"Hello?" I call out, startled,
as I hear a door slam shut downstairs.
My vision goes in and out of focus,
my heart racing as I look across the bathroom
searching for the source of the sound.
My mind races through the sludge,
attempting to recall if I closed the door to the bathroom.

"Mommy, I'm home."
A pause.

A long span of silence.

"Mom? What's wrong?" I hear the voice again
panicking, calling from the hallway.
"Mom?!"
I can't bring myself to respond.
I laze in the tub.
My heart is slowing down again.
"Mom?! There's broken glass everywhere!
Where are you, mommy!"

I don't know how to talk.
I don't want to talk . . .
I begin to panic, because I can't talk.

Epically tired, my head slips under the water.
Devoid from energy, my eyes lose focus.
I seem to have lost my strength.
The water shudders, and I feel the sides of the tub vibrating,
my body writhing, splashing.
My lungs punch against my ribcage.
Then I black out.

continued on next page...

I hear them before I see them,
the Demons that dance in my mind.
They chuckle their instruments as they invade me,
thrusting their fingers down my throat
and shoving against my chest.
Pressing down and crunching bone.

I'm jolted,
my lips broken apart,
the demons shocking me.
I shudder.

My eyes open to pure white,
an Angel kneeling above me,
pushing down on my chest.
I cough violently, hacking up bile and water,
my lungs emptying of fluid.

I black out again.

I wake up, draped over the knees
of my daughter,
her hair falling over me in a shawl.
She cradles my head in her lap,
like the water did.

I feel a sharp sting hit my face.
I slowly move, touch my face
and wipe a tear away.
Someone's crying.

Her head shifts,
her eyes watering.
She litters my face with kisses.
"You need help."
I nod and roll up into a ball against her. ♦

Word Become Flesh

RACHEL M REVELLE

My work is with words. I do not do any physical exams or procedures. I do not know how to properly reposition or bathe a body. I sit down with patients, and we talk. In this way I am taking after my Granny, a Baptist preacher's wife from southeastern Virginia, known for her ability to name and converse with anyone in the tri-county area. In other settings I have taken after Poppa, the preacher who inspired my vocation. When I preach I feel the responsibility of proclamation, of offering words into the sound-scape of existence that might embolden persons and communities to live and act with hope. As a chaplain, however, I am especially aware of how words meet flesh.

In the central story of my own faith tradition, we profess that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The divine wisdom of the universe seeks self-expression through incarnation; embodiment; enfleshment. Somehow God is present in and through the broken, bloody, beautiful flesh of human bodies.

The word "courage" is made flesh every day in the lives of cardiology patients in the CICU and the CTICU. I had frequently described these patients as courageous—enduring the inevitable volume overloads, adjusting to life with an LVAD, waiting for the ultimate goal of transplantation, wading through a complicated rehab process post-transplant. And then I discovered that the root of the word "courage" is the Latin word "cor," meaning "heart." I almost simultaneously came across this etymology from sociologist Brené Brown, who defines courage as "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart," and poet David Whyte, who describes courage as "the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work; a future."

I see the word courage made flesh in the man who temporarily took himself off the transplant list for a season of rejuvenation with his family after the shock of a friend's death during transplant. In the woman with adult congenital heart disease who is risking the strain of pregnancy because motherhood is the desire of her heart. In the wife of a long-term heart failure patient who, in a last act of love and devotion, made the call to turn off his devices when she saw with clarity that "we've met our match." They spoke their mind about the state of their heart. They let their heartfelt participation with life guide their medical decision-making. They spoke with courage, with heart. It is not easy. It inherently involves risk. But so it is when word becomes flesh. ♦

Your Money or Your Life

JUSTIN HAUXWELL

"Business ain't my strong point"
He said through pursing brow
"Money comes and money goes –
I really don't care how
I'm here cuz I love people
I'm not here for the green
CPT's and ICD's
What the hell does it all mean?
I want to wipe out illness
Help people live their lives
Money over patients
I can't prioritize
Health needs are universal
That's what it's all about
Just let us see our patients
And leave the money out." ♦

The View from the 8th Floor

JACQUELINE JULES

Wearing a blue gown
over khaki pants and loafers,
tubes taped to both nostrils,
he rolls an IV pole
to the picture window
beside room 806
and stands as silent
as the stately trees
eight floors below.

I admire
the back of his bald head,
the way it sits
so steady on his thin neck,
indicating total focus
on the foliage through the glass—
thick with colors
his aging eyes may not see again. ♦

Anger

KALINA LARSON

Anger, I know when you're present.
You make yourself loud and clear in the pounding of my heart
The clenching of my teeth
The tensing of my muscles
The warmth of my skin
The redness of my cheeks.

We don't meet very often
But when we do
You stick around longer than the 10 seconds I have allotted for you
And I hate it.
I acknowledge your presence and I can't let you go
I hold on to you, Anger.
I fuel your fire
Feeding you all the instances in my day
My week
My month that have pushed me around
Or shook me up.
I hold tightly to my lid for the fear of losing it to you.
I want to scream.
I want to run.
I want to punch you
Something
Anyone
Anything.

I can't show you to others because I hold myself to higher standards
And others expect me to be a certain way
And hanging around with you is just not acceptable.
So, I bury you deep in my pit of emotions
Pushing you down further and further
Yet all my thoughts kept feeding you a rope
To pull you back up to the top.
Just when I thought you would bring me to tears,
You disappeared.
I don't know where you went, but I'm glad you left.
Even so, I know you will, one day, return. ♦

100 Words Of Winter

MIMI CHAU

An empty field
razed through by a scythe
raw edges, flushed angles.
Winter is here.

My chilled fingers cannot explain the sweat
seeping under my arms,
the stink I produce.
Sharp.

Winter is here
and I cannot see farther than this field.
Stale grass,
brittle, and motionless in the wind.

The dread as the sun drops
like a rag over my mouth.
A breath cut short,
and then suddenly the click of realization.

Each day forward
will be darker than the last.
A lesson in the nature of seasons.

I am in a field.
It is winter.
And I feel. ♦

To See A World In A Grain Of Sand

ART ELSER

A small dark hole at the edge of space
no bigger than a grain of sand held out
at arms length. Curious scientists point

the Hubble telescope and let it watch
that dark for ten days, then for eleven.
It searches thirteen billion light years out

and finds that the darkness, that grain
of sand, holds three thousand galaxies,
each with hundreds of billions of stars

like our Milky Way. The human mind
cannot begin to grasp the magnitude
of that discovery. How then to grasp

the wonder of the God who flung
those galaxies and stars for us to find? ♦

Submission published previously.

I Read to My New Grandson

ART ELSER

Softly, so I don't disturb others,
I read *Jonathan Seagull* to you
by the faint green lights
that trace your infant struggle
to live.

Your mother lies sleepless
in another room, weak
from birthing you today.
She sees only darkness.
But these dim lights assure me
you still live.

Reading to you of grace and courage,
I want you to hear
and use these words: friendship,
compassion, love, words that
I too need.

I touch you, to steady my fear,
as the green lights, the color
of hope and spring,
illuminate the words I read
to let you know you are not
alone. ♦

The Terror of the Breathing Tube

ART ELSER

Strangled
by the tube
that snaked
into my mouth,
down my throat.
Couldn't pull it out.
Arms tied to the bed.

My eyes were closed.
I could see a vision
of my own face,
the fear on it.
I fought for my life.
I sensed the nurses
and my wife try
to calm me, to stop fighting
the tube and restraints.

The terror went on and on.

Finally, a nurse removed the tube.
I still had nightmares every night.
Couldn't sleep until sleeping pills
extinguished the terror.

I do not remember
the heart attack,
the ambulance,
the ER,
my heart being shocked,
only that tube and its
monstrous terror. ♦

Good Catch George

MARY CLARK



Home

VLADKA KOVAR



Plains to Mountains

MICHAEL T AUBREY



Mopani Leaf

OZ W PFENNINGER



Mother: Lost and Found

SUSAN GUNDLACH

Where did your mind go when you lost it? Your bright blue eyes gradually misplacing their life, giving in to bewilderment, fear, then nothingness. Just gone, or perhaps buried deeper down? Now and then a flicker, a sign, a message: *I'm still in here*. And possibly, somewhere in your lostness you did remember the rhododendron bushes on our patio, how they always bloomed, white, pink, purple, just as I came home from college. Our two little Scotties you loved—*those dumb dogs*, you called them. Our human family as well. Lurking in the fog there might have been memories of swimming at Cedar Point, attending piano recitals and graduations. Of how you were crazy about chocolate and became giddy on one glass of wine. Did you know back then that you were the softie among all the aunts and uncles?

Old photos that finally lost meaning to you show you smiling and laughing, enjoying....

I'm still here. How like you to pull together the fragments, to send solace, like the dependable rhododendrons, to the sad and wondering left behind: *I'll be all right*, you said to me, clear as day, in your strong younger voice, in a dream I had, two nights after you died. ♦

"all your lovely fragments"

—Cecilia Woloch

Apple

JOSEPH T KARWIN

Awake, she sits sturdily,
but press too hard and she'll bruise
easily. She wears her blood on her sleeve,
skin beneath, and like a black hole in space, her heart is stiff, deep,
and in a place so distant that even my words, soaring like
rocket ships in the darkness,
fail to penetrate.
Her body burns ruby red,
and running down her skin, thin rills of milky galaxies
send shivers through my fingers
as they imagine tracing her.

When she cries, her tears
slip
sweetly.
When she laughs, her voice sings loudly
then smooths into slippery
water
slides.

But when she sleeps, she collapses in
like a dying star in an endless universe:
once soaring, alive, burning
with a roar; now withered,
dreamless, rotten
to the core. ♦

Countdown

JOSEPH T KARWIN

I often think about the universe
and loss. But meter is always scarce;
time is just God doing his worst,
so I guess I'll make this terse:
You are no longer here.
I look at the far,
dark sky on clear
nights at stars
light-years
go— ♦

Cold After William Carlos Williams

JOSEPH T KARWIN

I will only say sunset snow
glows like your rosy, sniffing nose
while you slurp chicken soup. ♦

Feeling Better Yet?

JUSTIN HAUXWELL

To keep you from hurting yourself
We keep you from yourself
No decision's your decision
But to keep up appearances
We cash your checks
With lip service and a
Reassuring smile ♦

Chemo Skinless Falling

JOHN A UNGER

That melphalan,
hydraulically inspired mustard gas,
pushing, pulling, and ripping
the marrow to another
moment of God's Grace:

the first blast of a chemo-lean,
head-shiny clean,
local economic stimulus machine,
at 49 in Arizona;
the second,
at 58 in Georgia;

left my emotions filleted,

shattered at the touch of a snowflake.

I am
freeze dried
starkly skinned and salaciously sliced
by Bering Sea blizzard-winds;
the sharpest of sheers,
leaving me as beached and bitched bones
on one of those Aleutian Islands
where no one goes:

a sudden cliff-less falling
into something painfully so beautiful,

laughing tears of long and warm cascading rainbows,
the unfolding crest of forever. ♦

Halloween

CHRISTOPHER H SCHIFELING

“Put your hands up”

“...like you’re stopping traffic.” But Ms. C can’t stop it—not any of it. Her hands flicker in and out of her grip, exactly as expected. I feel like a magician “I must have gotten it in the 60’s.” ...moving on to my next trick: charming cobras from her navel. Pulling back the curtain of her gown reveals a water balloon belly and several snakes that I send dancing to percussion. “Looking at me now it’s hard to believe I was such a skinny rocket back then.” Spiders! crawling on her chest. I’m thrilled. “It’s scary to think it’s only getting worse, but that’s my cross to bear. I won’t say I didn’t earn it.” For the finale, I press her shin casting a plot six feet deep. “I just want to be with my grandkids now.” I stuff her treats into my doctor’s bag of tricks and rush off for the rest of rounds greedy.

Sitting at home that night, it dawns on me: Ms. Williams is dying in a hospital hours away from home and family. Spellbound by the mask of my own making, I saw only the “interesting case.” Only now am I able to see her pearls.

I hope she haunts me. ♦

Linguaphiles

CHRISTOPHER H SCHIFELING

The common cold could well surprise ya
when chief complaints serve up coryza.
And if the bug goes south (then north)
then emesis is easier to mouth (less coarse).
But staying on the subject taste,
a rash on skin might garnish an amuse bouche ration:
try a cluster of vesicles on erythematous base?
Unless erythema migrans rings in Lyme.
These words they buzz just like a game show chime.
All these sequipedalians hit the spot, every time.
But are our neologisms valid
when, whether with relish or rote,
they’re anosognostically toted?

We doctors must eat our word salad. ♦

Next Rotation

JEANNETTE GUERRASIO

I, his sick patient
My former student attends
I am filled with pride

My cherished patients
Our former teachers grow old
Repaying with gratitude ♦

Ebb and Flow

WILLIAM KROMKA

Sometimes I wade in the ocean just to feel its spray,
Hit my windswept hair, wave after wave.
We may find our whole story writ after the grave,
But still I strain to read, page after page,
The ensemble of texts, are we the masters or slaves?
It's the light of the day that casts the shadows in caves,
Be brave and not afraid to stray away from the gray,
For when you're gripping the frays at the end of the braid,
Remember it's here that the fire is made. ♦

Shades of New Mexico

MARY D POOLE

Tree trunks almost black, their naked branches beige.
Leaves rusty brown, falling to lawns the tint of wheat.
Adobe homes plastered in tan or burnt sienna.
Office buildings of ecru, chestnut, sometimes russet
Vacant lots of gravel, rocks the hue of sand.
The faces here—white, tan or bronze
Some coffee-colored or chocolate brown.
The shades of New Mexico. ♦

Dying Friends

MARY D POOLE

My friends are dying, one by one. I'm lonely and bereft.
"They've lived for decades, just like you, so what did you expect?"
I thought I'd be the first to go. I'm older than my friend.
"Age is just one factor in the journey to the end."
There wasn't time for a good-bye. I wanted to say more.
"No excuses, no reprieve when death is at the door." ♦

To Live Alone - or Not

MARY D POOLE

I don't mind living all alone, with no one there to care
If bed's unmade, dishes unwashed
Refrigerator bare.
Sometimes I wish I weren't alone. A male friend would be fine
To see a movie, take a trip
Or share a glass of wine.
Someone to love me once again who always would be there
To share my bed, kiss me good-night
With memories to share.
But then I miss my solitude, to read a book all night,
Eat pizza for my breakfast
And leave my hair a fright.
To live alone or not alone. I find alone is best.
With friends and family close by.
Who cares about the rest. ♦

What I fear...

GEORGE HO

What I Fear... a poem

I fear becoming irrelevant, passive, impotent
being powerless, without control of my destiny
I fear further incremental losses
accumulating over time that diminish my life

I fear becoming burdensome and dependent
upon the largesse of others
to cleanse me, to feed me, to clothe me
to shelter me, to pamper me, to love me

I fear becoming insignificant, being ignored and left alone
needing others for everything
that sustains me and defines me
that I am not myself anymore or even what I used to be

I fear becoming abandoned, locked in this purgatory
of helplessness and despair
with no end in sight forever
and forever...to continue suffering without relief

I welcome an end when life is no longer livable, I do not fear death
When I can no longer respond or reciprocate
I beg for understanding and mercy
To gain reprieve and to receive assistance to depart

Let me go...help me with my anguish
Relieve my suffering and facilitate my exit
Let me go gentle, into the night
Do not let me linger in limbo immersed in the indignity of lifelessness

I have lived fully and well
Loved and blessed by family and friends
I leave you with gratitude and love, no regrets
Only wishes for you to be as lucky as I have been ♦

What I Fear... a pantoum

I have lived fully and well, loved by you
I fear becoming irrelevant, passive, impotent
I do not fear death
I fear further incremental losses

I fear becoming irrelevant, passive, impotent
Being powerless, without control of my destiny
I fear further incremental losses
Losses accumulating over time that diminish my life

Being powerless, without control of my destiny
I fear becoming burdensome and dependent
Losses accumulating over time that diminish my life
I fear becoming abandoned, locked in this purgatory of despair

I fear becoming burdensome and dependent
Upon the largesse of others to cleanse me, to feed me
I fear becoming abandoned, locked in this purgatory of despair
Forever...to continue suffering without relief

Upon the largesse of others to cleanse me, to feed me
Needing others for everything with no end in sight
Forever...to continue suffering without relief
I fear becoming insignificant, being ignored and left alone

Needing others for everything with no end in sight
I welcome an end when life is no longer livable
I fear becoming insignificant, being ignored and left alone
When I can no longer respond or reciprocate

I welcome an end when life is no longer livable
Let me go gentle, into the night; relieve my suffering
When I can no longer respond or reciprocate
I beg for understanding and mercy to facilitate my exit

Let me go gentle, into the night; relieve my suffering
I do not fear death
I beg for understanding and mercy to facilitate my exit
I have lived fully and well, loved by you ♦

Cancer, A Beginning

JAN RUDEEN

It begins with words:

Malignant.
Radiation.
Chemotherapy.
Unfamiliar words,
Ugly, each syllable breath-stopping.

With speculation:

What-ifs and probably isn'ts.
But you can't let your mind go there,
You can barely stand to be in this room
With this confident surgeon and her visual aids
Pulled out of a pretty, flowered box:
Hard plastic breast, flayed, dissected and labeled,
Lifelike prosthetic breasts (a matching pair, Caucasian),
Rubbery, saline-filled implants,
Mastectomy bra.

More doctors, more words:

On forms, so many forms to read, fill out,
Decisions to make that are
Life-changing, body-altering, mind-numbing.
Who am I? Is this my life?
Is it too late to say I don't want to do this?
You want off this ride, but instead, go to the restroom
Out the door and down the hall, away from the metallic chill of the exam room,
Away from these doctors and all their words,
Away from your husband's stricken face and your own disbelief.
You are watching some absurdist play,
Stunned by the sheer volume and weight of its unfamiliar patois,
Acronyms,
Statistics,
Treatments,
Outcomes,
Unknowns,
Best-guesses.

A biopsy, more information:

While lying on your front
Positioned over a hole in the table,
A doctor you cannot see because your head is twisted
Around the opposite way,
Is speaking to you, asking if you feel any pain.
You do and tell him so; he says, "I'm sorry,"
And hurts you again.
You're thankful for the nurse who stands at
your side where you can see her,
Grateful for her hand on the back of your neck,
That you can look into her eyes when she talks to you.

More rounds of tests,

Because tests beget tests.
The doctors need to contrast, compare,
Scrutinize, infer, devise strategies, formulate a plan
For what cannot yet be known until it's excised and examined.
Their hunches in this moment are based on years of expensive education
(which you do not possess),
Extensive research and papers and trials.
Doesn't anybody go by gut instinct anymore,
or would that prove fatal?
Anyway, what could the gut possibly know about
These blackguard cells squatting in my right milk duct?

Indeed, and there's the rub:

You are facing
A formidable intruder that makes you feel
Afraid and vulnerable; all your
Mantras, totems, angels and crystals,
Your vitamins, supplements, dream analysis and
Yoga are no match for its bullets, savage and sure.
This, then, is your choice:
Life—most assuredly
Life, if you agree to the experts' predictions,
Prescriptions, poisons and pummeling, and let them

continued on next page...

Do it their way;
Or, quite possibly, Death,
If you dare stray too far eastward, away from their Western
Mountains of drugs and data and toward your own New Age leanings,
Your Buddhist poets and desert Masters,
The mind-benders and self-helpers whose company you've sought out
Over these many bumpy and pot-holed miles of your journey,
Sharing anecdotes over a cup of herbal tea.

It comes down to this, then:
Migraines, urinary tract infections, menstrual cramps, flus—*whatever*—weren't deadly;
You could afford to wander, experiment, even do nothing at all about them.
What you're up against now potentially IS, and it's a whole, new world for you—
An overpopulated place that includes several women you know.
Yet, you stand alone: This is your diagnosis, your body,
Your cells and history and distinct disease process.
Only you can ask your questions, make your decisions,
Seek your own truth and
Figure out for yourself, by yourself, this strange new terrain.

"In the beginning... the earth was without form, and void..."

In the beginning was the word...
And the word was "Cancer." ♦

Deluded Me

ADITYA MARWAHA

Surrounded by the chaos of the universe
I sense the world tilt around me

foolishly thinking myself the axis
I can't/I won't see the change around me
I swell up my pride to an extreme
Where a small prick can break a mirage so beautiful

Loneliness is just a refuge from reality
thinking the world is full of just hypocrisy
Scared to have my pride taken away
I start to turn to solitude.

Having pushed others around me away
I have no one to keep close
but that's what I wanted anyway
my stint with being delusional ends today ♦

Tender Muscles

JACQUELINE JULES

Deep inside my body,
like the piriformis under the glutes,
grief swells, compressing
an easily irritated nerve.

On the table, asked to put a strap
on my foot and stretch,
I long to be a cat clinging to a tree,
knowing it is easier to climb too high
than get down without drama.

Twice a week appointments.
Daily exercise, dry needles, too.
It will take work, my therapist warns,
to unwrap claws, let go of thin branches
trapping me in place.

Twinges shoot down my leg,
spread through my back,
strangle daily joys.
But what if therapy fails?
All that effort wasted?

I'd rather be rescued
by a fireman with a ladder,
than learn how
to climb down backwards.

Yet I am lying on my stomach
lifting my leg ten times,
holding for thirty seconds,
dutifully doing the work
I'm told will relieve
tender muscles in time. ♦

Embryogenesis

STEVEN H LEWIS



Möbius Strip

GERARD SARNAT

X-ACTO knife cuts strips from paper.
I take one ribbon so tips form a circle –
never inside outside twains shall meet.
Twist once to make a figure 8.
Reconnect then paste to create an endless surface
which symbol laid down sideways equals ∞ .
Stood up, string run through top, hung
near open window → limitless revolutions
again and over, over and again
as our journey captures infinity on trial. ♦

Unseen Amusements As Winter Creeps In

KELLY R STANEK

Coldness huddles
Like a giggling child, playing hide and seek
Beneath the trees; Beneath the bridges and highway overpass; Within the courtyards
and into the low valleys between the tall mountains
The sun plays the game too
Joyfully seeking her icy partner
Stirring him. Tickling him with warmth ♦

The Aura Above Autumn

KELLY R STANEK

Above me they appear like butterflies
A fleet; a crew; an army; a congregation; a ballroom in the sky
The breezes are their dance partners
The cooling air spinning them round and round in a dizzying fashion
The glittering sun illuminating their golden coats
And setting fire to the rubies that speckle the fringe of their dresses
Soon the gold and crimson glitter will litter the streets
Admirers will pull out their cameras
Nature's paparazzi
But the subjects don't object to the attention
For the photos sell a sweet celebration of seasons switching
A series of queries about the circular cycles of life
Cut from the trees by wind like a knife
The leaves fall ♦

Code

RICHARD FROUDE

The truth is he may have been unresponsive for hours before anyone found him. His nurse called the code just before 6am. It felt exciting, dress shoes slipping through the corridors, down the six flights to the garden level.

Even then, by the time we arrived the room was full. He lay beneath the window, hospital gown pulled from his body, chest exposed, abdomen, everything. One of the seniors called out instructions. Who was timing? Who was on meds? At the tail end of her shift, the nocturnist circulated a few feet away from the bed, maintaining a tenuous sort of order through her bodily presence alone, then instructing us to form a line for compressions.

I found my place. It still felt exciting, the chaos. The streak of protocol that ran through it, by which we arranged ourselves. Exciting to watch this man die? To see him saved? To ground myself as I waited my turn.

The curtains were a dull pink. The walls were muddy green. The morning outside was dark. The Ambu bag was purple. One of the other students held it while an intern with a thick beard gave chest compressions. The man on the bed did not move or groan. His eyes were open. The med nurse administered a shot of epinephrine. Tacked on the walls behind them were intricate designs cut from adult coloring books, among them a message written with a shaky hand: "Today is a gift."

The stepstool was orange. I climbed up and took over compressions. I didn't want to look at his face because I knew I wouldn't be able to forget it. I didn't want to look, but I did. His eyes were still open. Spittle had collected at the corners of his mouth. His lips had blued. I pushed hard on his chest. Someone suggested I slow down. I tried to sing the song in my head that they tell you to keep the beat but it was just too ridiculous.

I hadn't seen my son for two days. That morning, as I'd left the house I'd heard him calling from his bedroom ... "Daddy? Daddy?" And I was already late, I knew I had to leave and I hated myself for that, closing the front door, walking away.

I pulled my hands from the man's chest as another nurse placed the defibrillator pads. It was more like TV than anything else I had seen in the hospital. The senior shouted clear. We all stood clear. And the man's body jolted. The next in line resumed compressions.

The nurses' T-shirts were bright red. The defibrillator housing was yellow. The sun through the windows was lightening the sky. I hadn't always wanted to be a doctor. In fact I hadn't wanted it at all until fairly recently. But this proximity to something I did not understand, to eyes that remained open, to the fold between artificial lights and a darkness that does not end – I think in some way I had always wanted to feel this.

Another epi shot. The brakes on the bed had come loose somehow and with each firm compression the foot end was pivoting toward the doorway. The nocturnist noticed this and called us to order. No pulse. Another shock. Brakes reapplied. Compressions again. The intern with the thick beard hung back against the wall. He might have been crying. I climbed the step stool again.

The man's abdomen was distended. I tried to find the song in my head. I drove my linked hands into his chest. It was morning now. The student holding the Ambu bag wiped saliva from the man's cheek. I caught a sour smell in my throat and was suddenly afraid. "Good compressions," said the nocturnist. Good compressions. The man's eyes were a blue grey. The hospital gown was pale green. The intern's scrubs were—

But someone was shouting to stop. I did not. Someone was crying beside me, telling me to stop. I didn't know. The senior gently held my arms. I let up.

The man's son must have been late 40s, 50s, disheveled as he stood above his father, heavy set and in tears. "Stop now. Stop now." The man lay naked on the bed. His eyes were still open, his sternum marked with purple bruises. "Daddy ... it's time. It's time." And the man's son turned away, wailing through the open door, into the corridors. And for that moment, he was my son. And I was his father, lying in the center of this room, chest crushed by own hands, staring at nothing, into nothing, and I wanted to go home.

At the conference room debrief, the plastic lilies were white. The intern with the thick beard still hadn't said a word. The senior informed us we had done what we could, and the truth was – we knew what the truth was. It felt better to have been there together. The intern nodded. And as the nocturnist explained – he might have been unresponsive for hours. But I wanted more. The compressions? My inexperience? The pivoted bed? If we'd found him sooner?

The questions were pale and weightless. Why did his heart stop working? Why did this happen? And I realized as I was speaking that I was asking the nocturnist why it is that things die, why it is that we lose people and I knew she could have no answer, and she did not.

The questions had no color of their own, the way pure light is a concert of everything we can see.

The answers are impossible because they refuse this light.

The answers are silent and dark. ♦

Dr. Minotaur

JACK R MILLER

I had avoided my physician, Dr. Minotaur,
Until a pinked, constricted throat threatened my breathing.

In line at the pharmacy, minutes from swallowing pills
For a now-named ill, I wondered, When will I? Die. (I will.)

A vivid clearheadedness rushed in—placebo-like.
An animal in me had finally spoke: how sick I was!

My heart galumph-galloped, mortal as a handicapper's
Who's bet his breath on a race that's going down to the wire.

I teared, swelled gratitude, elation! for my drug store chain's
Pharmacy! What nonchalance! while dispensing witchery

Around the clock for mere money! I hallucinated
My far away health finding its way home. My eyesight hugged

My skin's applause. Some magnified sweat glands disgorged a gelid
Humor. Luncheon meat scent and nostalgia marked my landfall,

Discovered I my body to be wearing mixed nightclothes,
Pretenders to clowning, **they** had dressed me for this outing.

A chill of empathy shook me—for the prey animals.
At killing times, local lions choose irregularity

From among the lurching, vomit-eyed beasts of stampede.
We sickly have been graffitied, **I dress to acquiesce—**

Oh. Inches from me, in line, ein schönes Fräulein
Blows snot of her own Krankheit into a clutched bouquet,

Her prescriptions enfolding tissues. There's-no-wedding-ring.
My sex parts, blank and unconcerned with me for days, stir stir.

It feels new and good for the millionth time, "I must live!"
While the many-voiced intestines cast their lone vote, "No. No."

Her name is like mine, writ somewhere on a new Petri dish,
Ones that obliged our loaded nasopharyngeal swabs

And welcomed the clowns' antibiotic discs. "Let her live!"
And it just so happens, the sick enjoy an esprit de corps.

She accepts my lozenge, worries it. In line, the old story,
Ours. Help me, Dr. Minotaur! She is wretchedness and

Ripefulness, I'm the leaning man with lady in a koan.
How did Adam Eve spawn some faceless billions? I am groan. ♦

Whose Hand?

PRESTON GRALLA

He stood behind her, not daring to touch her shoulder. He took a breath.
Reached out. Then stopped himself.

"Can I touch you?" he asked.

"Of course you can. Why would you think you need to ask me that?"

He pushed her hair aside, brassy blonde now so many decades after the soft
gold of her youth. He touched her shoulder, felt it not just in the present, but
through time: bony and taut as a 12-year-old, pillow-soft at 17 cradling their
newborn son, full and firm in the voluptuousness of her thirties and forties, slowly
losing muscle each decade beyond. Now the flesh beneath his hand was slack.

Whose hand was it? Whose shoulder?

"You need to get ready, Bob. They'll be here soon. I told you. It's nearly two o'clock."

"That's right," he said. "I forgot."

Who was coming? And why?

"No, Bob, she said gently. "Not in that. Dress in something more comfortable.
Maybe sweatpants. And those special sneakers we bought you yesterday so you
could walk more easily. You need to be dressed comfortably for them. Remember?
I told you that before."

Before? Had she told him that? When was before?

"That's right. I forgot."

He slowly dressed himself, pleased he could still do it. Out of his sight she
packed his bags. She put them in the bathroom and would get them when the
visitors arrived. She walked with him to the living room and they sat on the couch.
He smiled uncertainly.

She's beautiful. Who is she, again?

They waited together for the doorbell to ring. ♦

Submission published previously.

Heart to Heart *for Hank Morgan, in whose chest beats the heart of Hope*

KIRSTEN M MORGAN

I. Love Song

In the room the shamans come and go
speaking in voices leaden and low,

as he lies splayed, barely born, tethered
by tubes and lines running magic potions.

A tattered heart, they say. No hope.
Let him float back to the seas.

If he lives, none of you will ever be free;
your lives will be bound to his care.

In the room the wizards come and go,
seeing things we can never know,

but we use clouds as compass, hear augury
in wind, see hope scived on the moon,

watch gossamer threads encircle
his body, stitching breaths into hours,

and tell them to try everything they can,
daring to disrupt the cosmic plan.

II. Absolute Silence

On the night
they splay
his chest and carve
into his small essence,
we wait,
struck into silence,
so far beyond words

that when a few come,
they are ungainly
interlopers
without a place
to light.

The wait,
no frame,
no ground
how strange
to float,
how odd
to surrender

all that is known,
while elsewhere
sorcery erupts
in a sea of white

with other
incantations
replacing
our lost words.

We can only
freeze,
ancient reptilian
pose of concession,
and wait. Wait.

III. A Love Letter for Esperanza, Who Gave Her Heart Away.

It wasn't from love, though love
touched the borders of those days,
winding through distant lives
in slow and mournful dance. It wasn't
from the wishes that hung on bare
branches, subject to the whim
of wind, then fell, one by one, until
there was only a crazy wildness
left behind, and none
knew how to pray.

Were you happy, Esperanza,
or did the world hold too much
danger to keep you close?
Was your time ordained?
Were your days carved
with necessary brevity,
or did you leave in random
flight, one new soul sliding
away far too soon?

Did you know you were tricking
that dark messenger,
who, drunk with power, seized
the light bundle of your unfinished life
and swept away in haste, not
noticing that your gift,
small and forgotten,
had been left behind?

I see you still around the edges,
Esperanza, holding the thread,
mouthing the words on another
stage as you shadow the boy
who carries your core in rhythm
with his exuberant days,
as he runs, laughs and plays
as though there's no tomorrow.
May you stay near, an echo
of your unintended heir,
and may we ever hold dear
the immortal child
whose name, in any language,
is Hope. ♦

Gifts

LINDA L ROPES

When the needle pierces her small, thin arm,
my daughter winces
She burrows her baldness into the thick pillow pile,
awaiting the gift—
energy from a stranger's blood.

The little boy in the adjacent recliner
wildly waggles his rag doll,
"Stop crying, Bobby!
You know you have zucchemia!"
Another gift—
my daughter and I giggle quietly.

While rising pink delicately defines my daughter's cheeks,
I survey the pale green hospital room.
November light slants across suspended bags of blood,
the fretful boy clutches his chastised doll,
myriad monitors blink red,
angel fish trail fairy fins across the aquarium.
Another gift—
Briefly, the muse has overtaken my persistent grief,
granting me a moment as a writer,
not as a mom. ♦

Cut Short

LINDA L ROPES

School photos on tap tomorrow
and her bangs curtain her blue eyes.
Impatient to play in the leaf piles
accruing yellow in our back yard,
my 10-year-old daughter fidgets
throughout her at-home haircut.
Hurried, I crop her bangs too short.
My strawberry blond screeches
her dismay in the bathroom mirror.
I promise her hair will grow back,
but I lie,
not knowing that in three months
every strawberry strand will fall out,
victims of chemo for the cancer
that will kill her. ♦

When You Go

LINDA L ROPES

If you fast forward to your grave
leaving your once little sister behind
I would cherish your red hair
your sprawl of freckles
your quirky humor
hiding your ample feelings
behind your gotcha grin.
But what will sustain me
through certain grief
is that moment
at our failing father's bedside
when he wept with anguish
over his incontinence.
"It's okay," you whispered
and reached out to smooth
his tangled eyebrows
one at a time. ♦

Hearty Vigilance

R. STEVEN HEAPS

I was skeptical
when my sacred,
but cynical friend,
John Brennan,
who had cardiac
by-pass surgery
decades after
self-defrocking
his way out
of the priesthood,
told me that after
surgery to repair
my mitral valve,
I would live
each day with
my mind in my heart,
my heart in my head,
ever vigilant,
always aware.

Before the procedure
I had moments
of dread and urges
to flee when
I envisioned my
heart silent and still,
the robot
tunneling his way
through my armpit,
breaching
the rear wall
of my atrium,
stitching away at
those raggle-taggle leaflets.

While running
on the trail
by the river
below our house
this morning,
with one million,
six hundred
eighteen thousand,
five hundred
sixty-six minutes
rung up on my
perfectly-patched pump,
I was reminded
of John's wisdom
when an unbidden
moment of
abject terror
staggered me like
a slaughter-house sledge,
sparked by mindflashes
of my carcass
plumbed through a machine
in that
fluorescent-flood-
stainless-steel room;
my heart
flabby,
cold,
inert
.
my self somewhere(?),
still hopeful. ♦

Submission published previously.

Deadly Guest

R. STEVEN HEAPS

How strange to live with a killer;
how odd to share space with
a part of you bent on
destroying the whole of you, mindless
suicide terrorist replicator
primed to slay the body
in which it dwells,
to cut off its nose
(and all else)
to spite itself.

When the tests claim that
some cancer was
left behind after surgery,
some tiny specks
of renegade cells
dividing,
re-dividing,
re-re-re-re-re-re-re-dividing
unduly fast
(or maybe not-so-fast,
that's the Big Question),
it's hard to escape the image
of these wild little bastards
as they dodge killer T-cells,
as they slip-slide their silent way
out from the cozy prostate bed,
as they ascend along
the aorta highway;
it's a trick to elude
the echo of these rogues
as they ricochet
off to their favorite haunt,
your spine,
for their final assault.

At moments it seems
you might reach inside
to pluck them out
with your fingertips,
with micro-tweezers,
with a teeny golden spoon,
or maybe an onco-magnet,
but there is no magic,
and when your
derelict vessel can
no longer be salvaged
through radiation,
what remains are
girlie chemicals eager
to brittle your bones,
to fill you with flames that breed
empathy for your tormented wife,
and yes,
to sprout you some
splendid ya-yas all your own.

When all's been done
that will be done,
that can be done,
you're left with prayer
if that is your wont, but
I don't and I won't,
even should options
dwindle to merciless misery
or narcotic haze.

How strange to thrive in this
living-with-a-killer world--
though mindful of the evil
that grows within,
to defy terror that
feeds on what may await;
to look not back nor
toward your yet-to-be,
but at this moment, this day,
for that's all there is,
and all there ever was--
to LIVE. ♦

Submission published previously.

ODE TO THE SURGEON

R. STEVEN HEAPS

For twenty years
“anatomic” surgery
has removed prostates
while sparing the
tiny nerves that allow
You-Know-Who
to “be all he can be”
in the army of Amor
(though often with a
helping hand from
Big Pharma.)

Men worry about
post-surgical sex life and
while it’s odd not to be
firing live ammunition,
Catholics can afford
to be dysrhythmic
and paternity suits
are no longer a worry.

About the quality of
his sexual experience
one nerve-spared fellow
wrote that while the
“whole orchestra didn’t play,”
he could at least “hear the trumpets.”
I consider myself lucky that
only the piccolo section
and a tuba or two
sometimes seem to get lost
on their way to the concert hall. ♦

Dedicated to Robert Golden, M.D.

Submission published previously.

A Trace of God...In a Milkweed Pod...

ALICE M ABRAMS

There is that perfect moment as the casing bursts and parachuted seeds
take to the wind.
Secreted in ignored landscapes...Milkweed...though neglected...thrives...
At zenith awakening...a silent death...
Ignites explosive release...
Suckled within pod darkness...
Its womb sun warmed...
The nobly nested regiment descendants ...
Conjure violent eruption...
Relinquishing to aimless soft breeze...
Angel hair parachutes giving lift to...
Darken seed slivers...
Settling midst moist loam to...Birth anew... ♦



Spaghetti Light

MICHAEL AUBREY



My Stardust

LISA LITZENBERGER



Resilience

SALLY E PEACH



Elegy for My Mother's Shoes

JANE COLLINS

The assault on her closet
comes the day after the jaunt
to the orthopedic shoe store.
I say, "You heard
the doctor. They all
have to go." In each box
lies a twining
pair, like lovers in diaphanous
sheets. She stiffens
as I uncover their naked
backs and shining skin:
tangerine satin pumps with thin
straps and sky blue mules
with Louis XV heels, golden evening
slippers, piped with silver, sling
pumps in real satin de chine,
and at the bottom, two pairs
of Roman sandals that could have
wrapped the heels of gods
or crisscrossed the calves
of soldiers in the MGM epics we
watched late into the night
and pointing, she'd say, "That's Victor
Mature. He was from
Brooklyn. My cousin
knew his sister." ♦

Submission published previously.

The Howlers

SHARON J WISHNOW

"Hi, my name is Christine and I'm an alcoholic."

"Hi, Christine," the semi-circle of AA members echoed back.

Christine took a deep breath and twisted the paper cup of coffee in her hand. "It's been two months since my last drink, a six-pack of Miller 64, watching my figure and all," she laughed at her own joke.

Several people shook their heads, some appreciating the self-deprecating humor. Others sitting stock still, a few twisting their own cups of coffee.

The introductions continued for those who wanted to share. Christine wanted to share, she told me. Yet, she said nothing after her greeting. Baby steps I thought, she was here.

"Hey, everyone, I'm Jackson," a middle-aged man popped his hand up in a small wave. "Five years today, sober." He nodded his head like a bobble head toy and pursed his lips. I could see he was trying not to cry. He looked up at the ceiling, breathed in the stale air of the church meeting room and crossed his fist arm to his chest in a symbol of self-solidarity.

The group smiled and a few applauded. He was a hero, a sponsor to many there. He had crashed when the stock market crashed in '08. His recovery took longer.

I watched Christine, her eyes wide at this revelation. Take it in girl, I silently encouraged her. She was a hard case, court-appointed AA meetings or a rehab program. The family court judge was sympathetic and gave her a one-time option to pay for her multitude of sins. Child abandonment, neglect, shop lifting, DUI, and who knows what else she had gotten away with. It was the DUI that sent her to court. She was driving drunk on the way to her daughter's daycare. When the police pulled her over, the toddler was unstrapped from the baby

seat, sitting on the car floor.

"Your honor," the court-appointed attorney argued, "My client is a struggling single mother. She had the right intentions that day but her judgement was impaired by her illness."

The child, Tabitha, was put into a foster home. Christine was given three months to show the court she could be a responsible and sober parent.

"I hate these meetings," Christine told me after the first week. "Every day a bunch of strangers passing looks at each other about me. They're no better than me. A bunch of head cases self-medicating. You know this is a disease. It's really not my fault."

The first two weeks were rough. When the social worker refused to let her talk to her daughter, she consoled herself with a bottle of vodka. I sat with her the next morning in her kitchen. She was dressed in ripped jeans and a dirty gray sweatshirt frayed at the collar. She was barefoot and the soles of her feet were black with dirt. She was rocking slightly in a chair, holding a stuffed cat.

"What happened?"

She looked up at me, eyes rimmed red with dark circles beneath. Her skin was covered in acne, a few scabs where she had scratched. Her blonde hair hung limp on her head, her nose running. She'd stopped rocking long enough to drag her arm across her face to mop up the snot.

"They wouldn't let me say goodnight. I always say goodnight to Tabby. Goodnight Tabby," she cooed to the stuffed cat. "See, Tabby cat," she pushed the dingy toy missing a button eye and an ear in my face. I jumped back from the stench of it.

Christine was a book keeper. She worked for a large plumbing supply company. They had generously agreed

to a three month leave of absence. "Tom gambles a little," Christine had said of her boss. "He said he knew a little about the itch."

Time was spilling down the drain on her. "Why vodka?"

She shrugged. "It's cheap and hits you fast. Makes the howlers stop." I nodded at the description, the feeling that if you didn't drink, every cell in your body would howl in pain, your brain melting from a fog horn blaring in your ears. The need was more than a hunger, certainly and ironically, not a thirst.

"Missing Tabby is worse than the howlers," she rocked faster and hugged the cat closer to her body. "Help me."

We tried different AA meetings every day until she settled on this one at the church. You walked right up the front steps, no back door. It was a straight view from the street.

"Are you religious?" I wondered if that was why she liked this meeting.

"Nope. I'm a recovering alcoholic and a recovering Catholic. My daddy, before he died, tried to pray my drinking away. Told me to let Jesus serve me the word. I did. Jesus was the bar tender at Razor Backs, two for one ladies' night every Friday and Saturday." She laughed at the memory.

I arrived early to meeting one day to help set up and was surprised to find her inside. The meeting room doubled as a social hall. Stacks of chairs lined the walls. Fluorescent lights buzzed overhead. Even with the window blinds fully opened, and the morning sun streaming in, the room was institutional, old gray linoleum floors, white walls, a large wooden cross with a figure of Christ hanging next to an American flag. Christine nodded to me but didn't offer to help snap open the chairs. Instead, she walked into another room. I saw a light flicker on. The room was painted lemon with a Noah's Ark mural

on one wall. Low tables with colorful tiny plastic chairs were tucked neatly under. A bookcase filled with puzzles and toys and an artist station stood ready for play.

The AA leader stood next to me. "She goes there every morning. It's where the little children come during church services." I nodded, looked away to allow Christine her privacy. By the time people came into the room, she was back, no mention of the side trip. She sat with her back away from the lemon room. She never sat next to me but she would look up and catch my eye as if trying to put a hex on me.

"Hi, my name is Christine and I'm an alcoholic. I've been sober for over two months. I hope to get my little girl back soon. She was taken away from me but the court gave me a chance to get myself together. Staying sober is the hardest thing I've ever done."

The meeting continued, Christine caught my eye. She had a determined look on her face that I hadn't seen before. Sweat sprung under my arms, shame for past hurts. Each day was hard for me too.

"Hi. My name is Louisa. I'm an alcoholic."

The group greeted me.

"I've been sober for fifteen years." There were murmurs of affirmation and heads nodded in encouragement. "I caused a legal scandal in the state, female family court judge delivers drunk verdicts. That was a long time ago." I paused and waved a hand to the side as if I could wave the headline away. Hearing the words fall flat in the church made the pain crash back. "The howlers are always whispering below the surface," I looked at Christine and saw a smile on her face. "I believe in second chances." ♦

Vision of the Hand

SHAYER A CHOWDHURY

The Vision of the Hand

Is not just to save man from the chaos of the deep,
but to awaken him from his unconscious sleep,
To reassure him of his purpose in life,
not to be brought down by his struggles and strife,
But to be the strength of the creator within,
and know that love is his savior and friend,
It will broaden your horizons on the highest plane of life
and defeat his foes with all his might.

For a brother to me
is like the one in me who's trying to succeed in
a world that refuses our needs,
that's slowly bringing our people to their knees,
because we fail to take heed that
We need Unity, Nationality, and Divine Creed
being universally taught to all nations and all lands.
Listen up my brother man,
For this society has written a script for me to live,
For them to take,
And for me to give
My life for their own selfish gain
so we can remain behind in this cruel game.
My morals and principles are all jeopardized
when they realize my eyes are on the prize,
but when I take the time to look within,
I'm proud of being in this brown skin,
at the same time honoring my next of kin.
This society can't change me my friend,
For my vision is for us to be the Kings of men... ♦

By: Darryl Cooper

"Mujahid"

#911-539

Baltimore City Detention Center

Don't Move

SHAYER A CHOWDHURY

Let me pull your strings,
like the tides in
their silent moondance.
Anchors aweigh and
I cast you
onto the seafloor.
I'll give you back to your
self later,
maybe.

Let me spin you out,
like a spool of thread
eyeing needles and
leaving the air stitched,
rippled with our slips.
Your hips
open like a book.
I find you at chapters' edges,
and curl your page inwards.

Let me pour into you,
like cream into my coffee,
coffee into my core.
You stick to the shore,
left behind by the ebb.
My hands web and
spider on your spine,
don't
move. ♦

Colony Collapse

LISA LYNN BIGGAR

John spots Lydia from the window of the restaurant, her body swaying with that soft fluidity, knowing he could single her out in any crowd, every mark on her body memorized, every angle carefully measured. She's on the stairs now leading up to the Indian restaurant, her heels making the metal sing. She stops to compose herself at the door, and he knows she's brushing wisps of hair from her face, pressing her lips together. And then she walks in, scans the room, coolly acknowledges him, strolls over to his table in the corner.

"I don't have long—there's an art opening," she says briskly, her dark hair pulled back in a purple scarf, her hazel eyes watered down, that spicy Asian perfume she took to wearing when she started exploring other men.

He closes his laptop. "Good to see you too."

She sits across from him, puts on her reading glasses that hang from a beaded chain around her silk turquoise blouse, gives the menu a cursory look.

The place is empty, except for a couple sitting across from them, in the other corner by the window—middle-aged, like them, but comfortable with each other, still able to gaze into each other's eyes. This isn't a tourist spot. It's tucked above a Laundromat in an apartment building, far enough down from the theatre district, and far enough up from their old neighborhood in Murray Hill, where John still lives in the same loft, frequents the same bars.

The waiter comes over, refills John's water glass. Lydia asks about the special.

"No special no more," the waiter says.

"It's posted out front," Lydia says.

"Have no more," the waiter says.

"Do you still want to stay here?" Lydia asks, her voice filled with that same accusation—even when she was cheating on him she blamed him for all his inadequacies. He nods, not wanting to further complicate things.

"Something to drink?" the waiter asks.

Lydia orders a glass of Shiraz; John a scotch, straight up.

His cell rings. It's Dana, their only child.

She's lost.

He gives her the address again.

"She's not lost," Lydia says, with that exasperated wave of her hand. "It's impossible to get lost in this city."

"I said I'd pay for her cab," John says. "But she wanted to walk."

The waiter comes back over with their drinks and papadum, asks if they're ready to order; John tells him they're waiting for their daughter.

He dips a piece of papadum in the green hot sauce, takes a bite, purging his sinuses, remembering the time they lost her on the boardwalk in Seaside Heights. She was only three or four, and all she wanted to do was run. For a split second she disappeared in the crowd, then she rose like the sun in her yellow dress, a police man lifting her high above the waves of people. He's dreamed that scene over and over at night, sometimes never finding her in the end, the sun never rising, his body drenched with sweat.

His cell rings again. It's Chad, his director. He lets him leave a message. "We're doing a documentary on bees," he says to Lydia.

"Bees?"

"Colony collapse disorder—they're disappearing from the hives."

She looks away. "I've tried calling her."

"She never answers her cell anymore."

"I know she blames me."

"Lydia, this isn't about our marriage."

She unfurls her white napkin, places it on her lap.

He does the same, brushing the crumbs from the red table cloth. He looks back up at her, determined to keep this meeting civil. "How's your painting going?" he asks.

"I have an exhibit in Chelsea in May."

"That's great."

"My abstracts," she says.

"Maybe I'll try to make it. And bring Dana."

"Steven will be there."

He nods, sips his drink, some poet she's living with now. All John could see in her abstracts were splotches of color anyway, lines dripping, bleeding.

He clears his throat. "She needs you."

"She hates me," she says, takes a gulp of her wine.

"You know that's not true."

"Well what am I *supposed* to believe?"

"I don't know," he says, shaking his head, the days of certainty far behind him. Yesterday he went to church for the first time since the divorce, nearly two years ago, now, but the sermon left him empty, the faces around him searching, craving something more.

The other couple gets up to leave, both offering thin smiles of encouragement on their way out the door, as if, perhaps, they've been there. But he can see that they're younger, now, at least they look younger, probably never had any children, never had to wait with pounding hearts for their daughter to come home in some shattered state.

"She's losing weight," John says.

Lydia stares at him, lipstick bleeding into the thin lines above her lips. He only told her that Dana was having trouble at Marymount. "What do you mean?" she asks.

"I thought it was just a phase."

"Like my affairs?"

"Lydia, please," he struggles with the words. "She's down to ninety pounds."

Lydia stares at him, something in her eyes he hasn't seen in years, something between compassion and desperation. "What's wrong with her?"

"She's not eating."

"What do you mean she's not eating?"

"The counselor says it's an eating disorder."

"My daughter's fucking starving herself and you don't have the decency to tell me?"

"When's the last time you saw her?"

"I've tried calling her—she just hangs up on me."

"She *wants* to talk to you. She *wants* to understand."

"I don't even understand," she says, her voice rising to that childish wine.

—
continued on next page...

He opens his laptop, clicks on the pictures of Dana, showing them to Lydia, one-by-one, documenting the loss. In the beginning, he tells her, he thought it was something that would correct itself, like the economy, or the weather. The equilibrium soon found again. But now he no longer recognizes his own daughter, her once chubby cheeks now gaunt, hollow, her legs barely able to support her skeletal frame.

Lydia looks up at him, her eyes wide, frightened, like a trapped animal—the look she gave him when he came home early from a shoot and she was in the shower with one of her art students from the college.

“All you could do was take pictures?” she asks.

“I thought if she saw them—”

“She needs to go to a therapist.”

“She won’t go.”

Lydia rubs the lines on her forehead. “She’s so stubborn.”

John closes his laptop, remembering how happy they’d been when they made the move from Brooklyn to Manhattan, his documentaries getting broadcast on PBS. Dana was just nine, then, the magic of the city shining in her eyes, hope in every corner. He can’t pinpoint the day when she lost her way, when they all lost their way.

“People don’t understand,” he says, looking out the window, “that without bees there’ll be no food.”

“What are you fucking talking about?” she says, her eyes bulging.

“Bees are the great pollinators.”

“We’re talking about Dana. Our daughter.”

“I know,” he says, taking a sip of his drink, but it was always easier to focus on his documentaries, to explore the changes, the warnings in nature. They had Dana just out of college, neither one of them ready to start a family, but the miracle of it, the beat of the tiny heart, seemed larger than themselves.

“You don’t know what it was like,” she says, finishing her wine. “trying to raise a teen-aged daughter while you were off in some other world, filming monkeys or kangaroos or god knows what.”

“You weren’t alone.”

She looks at him, the pain deep in her eyes.

He wants to reach out to her, but can’t.

The buzz of the exodus loud in his head.

“Maybe we should order,” he says.

“She has to eat.”

“She won’t—not in public.”

“Why is she doing this to us?” Lydia says, her lips trembling now.

John calls the waiter over, neither one of them even opening their menus.

“I’ll have another Shiraz,” Lydia says.

John orders another scotch.

His cell rings. It’s Dana.

She’s two blocks away, but has decided to turn back. He know there’s no point in arguing with her now. He tells her that he loves her, then closes his phone, looks up at Lydia. “She’s not coming.”

Lydia nods and looks away, out the window, at the waning light of the city. ♦

Return On Investment

MALCOLM RIMMER

We made for them
a world of dreams
a world we never had;
but we take up space
in our old age beds
on wards our money bought.

We cost too much, we are too slow,
we dodder and we mumble.
Our savings they are not enough,
of course that’s our fault too
for squandering our surplus earned
building systems that now discard us.

So, in your modern, thrusting ways,
ask a simple question;
what was it that you did
for the next generation? ♦

The Newborn

CHRISTINA R FARID

Apropos, isn't it, that my first clerkship involves brand new babies. This world is so new to me, disorienting, and scary. The attending physician is part of what terrifies me: she is a tiny, austere, and experienced goddess of all things womanly and all things medicine, kind of annoyed by me but also the tiniest bit warm. I, as her student, require a lot of babysitting now, but soon will be something of which to be proud - her product and her contribution to the world (of medicine, id est).

I've been under her supervision for four days now. Most of my work has involved gaining some bearings with the electronic and paper medical records, trying to get relevant histories from patients, and practicing very abbreviated versions of physical exams as I learned them. My first day involved being on call for the labor and delivery unit and was uneventful for those intents and purposes; however, yesterday I was called in because there was one patient in our care in early labor. My attending's phone call woke me after an unsuccessful attempt at texting me. An hour later sans breakfast I strolled in and accepted my task of documenting the patient's pre-, peri-, and post-partum information on the - rare, mind you - paper chart. My attending headed to her office to catch up on paperwork.

At this point I still very much feel like a newborn giraffe, freshly covered in amnion and slime, attempting to use the legs I clearly possess but have yet to learn to use, because god forbid there is a lioness preying on me in the bush.

The lioness rolls in not twenty minutes after my arrival that morning. We have a new patient in our care this morning, I thought, how exciting - I should go introduce myself. Upon entering the room, I see Dad, terrified, in the corner and Mom on the bed, very distressed and clearly in pain. There are two nurses in the room, trying to care for this patient in a flurry of activity. I forget to introduce myself as I scramble to find something in which this patient can vomit, because it is imminent as she writhes, moans, and belches. She is young. She is barely showing. Is she gravid? I thought, as the gravity of the situation began to settle on me, though I knew she was.

She finally gets her stomach contents up. There is vomitus on the floor, and just as we realize there is a hole in the bag in which she threw up, she starts and screams, and we realize her water has broken. Everyone in the room (three nurses now, and me) is in "fuck, fuck, fuck" mode and my only usefulness at this point is to note the time of spontaneous rupture of membranes. "SRM at 0934," I quasi-shout, to which a nurse replies "Thank you," and changes the pad on her bed. "Don't throw this away," she says as she hands me the old pad, which has 'particulates' on it. I can draw for you exactly what it looked like. When I look up, my tiny attending is walking in the door and a gigantic wave of strange relief hits me. My security blanket, which has provided an astonishing amount of familiarity and safety in only three days, is here.

The ultrasound machine is drawn to the patient's bedside as the nurses break down the situation and background for the doctor. A team of neonatal practitioners is trickling in and I, horrified, notice the area being prepared for a baby to be born. They are asking the patient how sure she is, how accurate that 23 weeks and 3 days is the gestational age. A remarkably vivid image of the first-year lecture hall pops up in my head as I remember lung embryology and the magic number of 22 weeks. I feel a sliver of hope.

The patient up to this point has been crying, presumably because of the pain - which started a couple hours ago, goddammit, because my attending asked at least three times - and now begins to weep, presumably because she knows better than anyone in that room that her baby is coming and things are looking grave.

Doctor looks and looks for a fetal heartbeat with the ultrasound probe, which seems oddly invasive today. She verbalizes a few times she could not find one, then suddenly a regular flutter on the screen - a heart beat! The doctor asks how dilated the patient is. Why the hell hasn't anyone checked?! She retrieves sterile gloves and opens the patient's legs. One of the longest moments of my life is seeing that little red foot attached to a floppy little leg, the two of them, almost forgetting that they are attached to the rest of the little body. "I've got a footling breech," shouts the doctor, and things start moving faster in a way that made me underestimate how slowly they were moving in the first place. I feel less than useless. I instruct Dad, who is still in the corner, to go hold the patient's hand, and proceed to just watch my attending. She is digging around for the other foot. She is digging for the hands and arms. The head is stuck in the cervix. The head is still stuck in the cervix. I see only a headless doll being manipulated by sterile white gloves attached to a haphazardly donned sterile gown. I hear nothing.

After some minutes the entirety of the baby is delivered - "Time of delivery 0948" - and before she is handed off to the neonatal team, I notice two fingers from a sterile white glove on the baby's chest, searching for a beat. I am impressed at how matter-of-factly yet compassionately the patient is counseled on the baby's status and prognosis.

Is it over yet?

No.

Resuscitation of the baby is being attempted. It's called. Wait, there's still a heartbeat. Fuck. Call the transport team from Children's.

Why is this dragging on?

What is the doctor telling the patient? I don't know. She is at the bedside, sitting now, with no gown on, just both hands gently holding the patient's arm and talking to her. "What time did you start having pain?" again. "Have you had any sexually transmitted diseases?" The patient doesn't know chlamydia counts as an STD. What could have caused this?

I never introduced myself.

The neonatal team moves the baby to the NICU and I follow. I come back to labor and delivery only after her endotracheal tube is proven via two X-rays to be in the right place, and only after I realize it would take more than the three previous attempts and three blown fragile young veins to place a line. How did I do in there, doctor? Don't ask that, you selfish ass.

Over and over I hear anyone and everyone involved say how much they regret that baby having a heart beat. They readily admit having had the urge to discontinue attempts at resuscitation. My naïveté leaves me confused and hurt at these words. Something about their experience and wisdom makes me aware of my naïveté. I should know why they feel that way, but I can't help but feel cruelty in those words.

When I think of trauma, I think of a semi truck colliding with a sedan. I don't think of a young mother-to-be unexpectedly delivering a baby for which she did not plan halfway through gestation. I don't think of a fetus trying to pass through a nulliparous cervix feet first. I don't think of a pre-infant being manipulated, intubated, force-fed oxygen, poked, X-rayed, transported, baptized. I don't think of a medical student on her fourth day on the job. I could understand, though, a newborn giraffe versus a lion. ♦

40mg of Citalopram

ALYSSA JANE GAUDYNSKI

And the next day was always a new person,
with a ceremony to match.

Red wine staining our gums,
fingers covering smiles, barring laughs.
If my youth had a character in a comic book
it would be a collection of all of *them*,
my girls.

My first loves, charismatic with no charisma to speak of,
burning holes in the back of that guy's jacket with a cigarette
after he made fun of me at the bar.

My girls, dry-cutting their hair
consuming without constraint,
weeping openly on a street corner,
the most damnable girl-gang that ever lived.

I can only hope for heroines of the same quality
in future story-books for little girls. ♦

Submission published previously.

The Rest of What Was There

LEONA A SEVICK

It was only a second's view of her breasts,
so small you could have cupped them both
in the palm of one of your hands.
Our mother ran toward her with a towel
to shield from view what the waves had done,
stripped her of the modesty now lying
at the bottom of the ocean.

We loved this girl who climbed onto
a plane and sat still as stones
for the thirty hour flight to America.
In her luggage we found colored pencils
and charcoal wrapped in handkerchiefs,
large sheets of sketch pads ripped from their
books and folded into tiny squares that fit.

We called her *Ee-mo*, Auntie, and between
her shifts waiting tables at the Horn and Horn,
she would draw us anything we asked.
My favorite was the fancy women,
their white skin outlined in the blackest ink,
their eyes so large and round they eclipsed
the rest of what was there.

Her diagnosis came when she was fifty-two,
when her hair was still blue-black.
After the surgery, after her breasts had been
handled and marked then scalped off,
after her hair had turned a whisper white,
I wondered if she saw herself the way I see her still,
brown and blazing glorious in the noonday sun. ♦

Submission published previously.

In A Common Dream

CARA M LORELLO

I hold a key in hand
while behind a door
made of flesh, a monster
sleeps soundly.

Love, or something like it,
lulled it into hiding
for the night, a kind
patience not yet tried
from having witnessed
the beast's complete
control of me.

Through my eyes only
does its ravage fail
to shock, every fleck
of their pale brown
brunt-proofed from
a 17-year watch of
the secret lives I've
led.

I cannot bear to let
a thing of love see
all this monster reaps,
this kind of evil
that sees, hears, speaks
without flinching, must
show proof on a body
to exist, have purpose,
make living collections
of its prey for whom
enduring silent stigma
before death is
penance.

The key in the dream,
my silver bullet of
free will, that which
every human being
is born with, I could
make scrap metal of
if, if, if not time after
time to the beast my
body submits, no amount
of free will, wariness,
or love can outwit.

Do I live with my monster
finding solace only
in dreams like this,
or could I bury the key
on faith it never wakes?
What was my mistake
that let this thing in me
out?
A lack of faith,
lack of God,
lack of money,
lack of will,
lack of love,
or some other defect
higher minds have
yet to isolate?
Would the answer
even matter if being
well was my choice?

Doctors say this is
where denial becomes
voluntary.

Did I choose this?
The dream ends before
I know the answer,
the key turned back
to a fistful of sheet,
the only thing left
being the hunger,
a sleeping monster
disguised as
relief. ♦

Silent Watch

CARA M LORELLO

You are up walking circles
while I lie reclined on the heap
of our mixed clothing,
half-awake in the early dawn,
the labors of our lovemaking
long dried, pulses calm.
I am listening.

Our talk is about the mind,
the return of the black dog
you dread. I grin upon hearing
Winston Churchill's metaphor
for depression,
a bit of trivia you learned
from me.

I repeat in my mind anti-suicide action steps
as the concerned friend or family member
for the healing powers
I wish they had.

I try to separate truth from jest,
knowing your mental state,
awaiting the unfurl of your white
flag. Whether waving high,
or lying afloat in water,
you won't drown on
my watch.

What psychology terms as 'signs'
depressives emit are invisible
to most of the world;
not to my eyes, and this I hope
you take comfort in.

I picture your demons as vultures
circling your brain in its
weakened state.

At this point, I am used to feeling worlds away
beside you in the bed we share,
your body to mine alive and breathing,
your mind unaware of the fear
in mine. ♦

A Memory

CARA M LORELLO

I tasted chocolate for the first time in years,
broke a small square hard as a nickel
over my tongue where
it turned to silk.

In its taste was childhood;
hand-sewn Halloween costumes,
paper crowns with too much glue,
barefooted runs on hot July nights,
blue-white sparklers in each hand
sweeping small comets of light,
climbing to high places without fear,
times of guiltless pleasure.

I held the taste until it grew watery,
then swallowed slowly, as if the past
could somehow make me full again.

Like a northern summer
it was a pleasure short,
gone quick as it came. ♦

In Coma's Grasp

CHARLES WHITMORE

You've been in bed, laid down and safe
with lines that coil from place to place
with skin deep brown, not that of snow
false sleep presents you in a somber pose

Both eyes swelled shut, without REM's flight
a brain well battered from last night's fight
we've scanned and studied, without result
circled round your bed, talking data and doubt

Wake now or never say survival plots
those trends and lines track lives not dots
had you awoke, what stories you'd told
of what you'd seen or sought to hold

Instead your body withers to waste
a tiny stroke keeps you asleep
your life now dimming, fading more each week
in coma's grasp you'll die asleep ♦

The Four

ANNETTE M HOUSE

The four horses of the apocalypse
have come for my friend

one bears the glittering reflection
of the rare tumor in her brain
another rears in fury demanding
her very life

the beauty wearing the orange blaze
desires her stories
the mare of the unfinished face
covets her paintings

but we who love her
have unsheathed our swords
have nurtured our blood lust
we surround her
our weapons dripping with alchemy
our mail rattling in magical incantation
we bellow savagely
you cannot have her
her opulent pigments are ours
her poet's voice is ours

you are gloriously beautiful
mystery is in your breath
but she is not yours
you cannot have her ♦

Complexities Of Arboreal Music

ANNETTE M HOUSE

Among the quiet
cherry trees in
Washington is an
indicator tree

its heralding of
perfected blooms
tells us when
to come to
the capital

my mother
was such an
indicator tree

we watched her
carefully, in silence
for signs of
fortuitous greening
or hints of withering

without words she
spoke to us of
wind and cloud
of solar flare

our secrets and lies
were born on the
breezes that ruffled
her supple limbs

mysteries of light
and rooted wisdom
transformed her maternal
splendor into images
of delicacy or frailty
we knew she was
as old as the
earth itself
that she mourned
for the seasons
of bloom she
would not bring forth

we watched
and heeded
or not

we wish we had
seen the intricacies
of her petals
the exquisite design
of her leaves
the durability
of her bark

we wish we had
heard the complexities
of her arboreal music
as it sang through her
as it struggled
to warn us of
what was to come ♦

Things We Like

MARGARET E TEETS

I drove a blade into a body. I tore open the flesh. I severed the vessels
that once coursed with life and love and being.

And I liked it.

It's a strange feeling—to comprehend that someone's grandmother,
auntie, lover, friend, mother, sister decided to give her body to a stranger.
Or that the object of my curiosity, my practicing device, my index of
anatomical structures once looked upon the world in the way that
I'm looking upon her insides.

It's an exciting feeling—to wrap my fingers around the structures
that I've spent hours scouring over textbooks attempting to understand.
All the while knowing that I am one step closer to helping living,
breathing bodies. She is responsible for that.

It's a hopeful feeling—to slowly discover the unknown. To think that
one day, I might be good at this. Maybe one day, I could prevent another
body from resting stiff, cold, and cut open.

But most of all, it's a sad feeling—to realize that gratitude, like so many
other times in life, is an emotion that becomes masked by stress, business,
and the job at hand. I wish I could shake her hand. I wish I could show
her my gratitude.

Perhaps that would make it okay to like it. ♦

For the Children, For the Kinder

FREDRICK R ABRAMS

It was May in nineteen sixty one
And I, my wife, and two small sons Were
cast through chance in Amsterdam

Sixteen years since World War Two
And still our troops were scattered through
The German State

And I was stationed near a gate
Where S.S. troops had hobnailed through
When it was death to be a Jew

Among my duties, I, a military doctor was
Directed to inspect a medical clinic
We erected in Dachau
Whose infamous barracks sheltered now

A Quartermaster store
That dealt in furniture
where only death had been
Dispensed before

On leave we chose to visit Holland where
Woven on the soil's dark loom
Fields of tulips were in bloom

In Amsterdam we found a place
Cast our luggage on the bed and raced
Into the sunshine Out along canals and streets
We watched the passing little fleets
Of motorboats and bikes and wandered past
The Rijksmuseum

People smiled as they forbore
Two small boys of six and four
Skittering along a street
Poking curious faces in neat
Shop doorways and alleys
Climbing stair-bridge mountains
Reconnoitering canal valleys

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The children looking prim and clean
In knee socks and Etonian hats
Serenely perched on fresh combed hair
Were entirely unaware

Of how bright and full of life they looked
Like the promise of a marvelous book
Whose pages had not yet been turned
Of dreams and joys yet to be learned

We turned into a busy street
And there a vendor sat with neatly
Set out treasure racks
Of flowers books and candy wraps
And shiny foiled wrapped little sacks
Of chocolate, the Dutch are famous for
And little boys just can't ignore

The sad-eyed lady at the stall
Whose wrinkled brow and mended shawl
Bespoke the years in bygone places
Of dreams and memories of faces
Friends and kinships long erased
Of wasted past that can't be traced

To be that old and look ahead
for better things is tragic.
No magic memories of youth
and song and light
To tide her through the lonely years
Just tears and sighs and last goodbyes

Her few remaining friends depart
Just as leaves drop from trees in Fall
Blowing winds and winter frost Until
all are quite lost, beyond recall

She saw the children
Cocked her head and hesitatingly said
Embarrassed... "American"?

And when we nodded
She pushed her shawl from her withered arm
Where all could view letters and numbers
in her parchment flesh, so starkly blue

And then as she revealed her past
she asked almost imploringly
"Juden"?

Again we nodded knowing then
That we could trace
Our fathers to an ancient race
Yet too shy to show our tears
In common from five thousand years
And still too stilted for a true embrace

From her we bought a small bouquet
To celebrate my wife's birthday
We disentangled then and stood
Awkwardly a moment more
And smiled and parted from her store

The four of us moving from her life,
And my wife held tightly to my hand.
As we walked on twenty paces more
I turned to look and saw her coming
Past the stores, her stand untended
As she wended through the crowd
And called on us to wait

We stopped and wondered
What urged her to a tragicomic gait
Then we saw that she bore
Clutched in her outstretched hand
Two foiled wrapped packages of candy

These she pressed upon the children
Who looked puzzled
And eyed us for permission
to accept a stranger's gift,
And wished for a nod that we gave

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And she too asked with her eyes, gravely
Permission to touch the future
As she said "For the children For the kinder
Alles for the kinder"

But before we could respond to her prayer
She was no longer there.
Slowly and breathing deeply from her run
She pushed back to her stand in the sun

She folded her hands and she closed her eyes
And then, just before the crowd screened her again
Blocking her from our sight
We saw that her lips were moving ever so slightly

She lifted her face to the clear blue sky
She shivered, yet the sun shone brightly.
Then
She wrapped her shawl around herself tightly. ♦

Camino Real

FREDRICK R ABRAMS

Smooth white coral caressed by endless tides
Radiates the heat as if it were the source
Like medieval Salamander that fire and flame abide
Iguana is unscathed as he shimmering heat wave rides
And like Eastern Holy Man crosses coals
Not changing course

Crystal waters fill all the polished tide pool bowls
Then recede leaving worlds of hollow lapping sounds
The undulating water sighs across the sunken shoals
And sings across the coral heads
As it fills a thousand holes
Reaching shore with shells and sea foam lace

Bejeweled and begowned

Overhead suspended as if from sun spun string
Serene sea birds the earthly magnet all defy
They sail in seas of air with sensuous outstretched wings
Silhouetted silently they dance as some birds sing
And soundlessly the terns pirouette against the sky ♦

The Conqueror

ALICE M ABRAMS

The tumult of traffic cocoons her

Heated fumes vaporize...the air is thick

Again she withdraws her trembling foot back onto the curb as the light turns red

Jostled by ghosts gliding effortlessly beside her and beyond the curb...
dizzying images abound

Monstrous vehicles blast their horns "Get out of the way old lady"

Too tired to scream "Stop world" she seeks footing once again into
the treacherous street

A firm hand grasps her elbow and guides her beyond the corner of
59th street to the promised land of Central Park...car horns orchestrate
a thunderous cacophony

In slow motion the traffic lights wink from green to red...green to red...green to red
They shuffle slowly midst the immobilized traffic

She and her Sherpa have conquered Everest!

Abruptly releasing her elbow from her invisible guide... turning East toward
Fifth Avenue...her murmuring whispers fade

"Nobody has ever helped me across the street...nobody has ever helped me
across the street...nobody has ever helped me across the street...
nobody has ever helped me across the street" ♦

Gregeroony

SARAH M STEINBERG

When Greg and I met I was with another. Greg was handsome, although I hardly noticed at first. I thought Chris was the one. He wasn't and it would take a while to figure it out.

We were co-workers, waiting tables at an LA area restaurant. We were living the dream. We were both doing our art; Greg was making music and I was pursuing an acting career.

Greg would ask me out for a beer after our Sunday brunch shift. I blew him off for a while until I was finally single. We went for that beer and then on our second date went to hear the great guru Ram Das chant.

A long line descended from the building. The new age hipsters were wearing flowing velvet clothes. We laughed. We were dressed like regular people. We hadn't received the memo, nor would we have taken heed if we had.

Not long after our date Greg announced he was moving to Oregon. I didn't know at the time that he was moving there with a woman, someone else he had been dating. Months went by. I kind of forgot about him.

The phone rang in the afternoon. He sounded despondent and afraid. He had been thrown in jail for trespassing. Unlike the sane person I knew, my friend had walked into a stranger's home, opened the fridge, took out a beer, sat down, and put his feet up.

A man entered the house, astonished and surprised to see this stranger making himself at home.

After that there was a diagnosis. Medication was prescribed and taken.

I received an email out of the blue. Greg was inviting me to come visit him up in northern California, his home again, over Valentine's weekend. Not knowing what to expect, I asked what to wear? Was this a date? Found out it was to be a date indeed. Giddy, I went shopping. A red suitcase and red silk nightie were my new acquisitions. Ready for a romantic weekend, I boarded the plane.

When I arrived, he met me at the gate holding a bouquet of flowers. These were days before TSA.

That afternoon we got in his car and drove to Lake Tahoe, to his mother's cabin. The plan was to ski. The first night there he had other plans. We were to have a proper date and see the comedian Dana Carvey at Caesar's Palace. I didn't know such a place existed. Thought there was only one on the Las Vegas strip.

On the car ride, Greg got real. He got his demons off his chest by telling me what I didn't want to hear: that he had been procuring prostitutes. Not knowing that promiscuity was part of his bipolar disorder, I was disgusted and didn't a good job hiding it. I would have been disappointed anyway, even had I known it was a symptom of something more sinister.

That night there was no romance. The next day was a bit tense. By the evening he had worn me down and we relished our first kiss.

We never skied the day after that. We spent it in bed.

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At the end of our weekend, he put a dagger in my heart. "This won't work. We live too far apart. You are geographically undesirable."

What the fuck? I was devastated and returned to LA, tail between my legs and sad, sad, sad.

Years went by. He got back in touch. He wanted to try again. We fought as I didn't feel he was trying hard enough. "Would you let me be the man? Let me take the lead?" he begged. Rather than acquiescing, I took the lead and was aggressive. I wasn't willing to give in.

"I feel like we're married," he would say many times like a broken record.

Finally I realized he needed a friend more than a girlfriend since he wouldn't take his meds. Pushy bitch that I am, I hounded and nagged daily over the phone. "Get yourself to a psychiatrist." It took weeks before he went. He was med complaint for a while. He even had a good years: held down a job, had his own apartment, got himself a girlfriend fifteen years younger than he. His meds made the difference. Lamictal was what kept him alive. For a while.

The relationship broke up. I was pleased as the jealousy had been real.

The phone call came. This time he sounded even more frightened. He'd gone off his meds, lost his job, crashed his car into a wall. He had a cell phone and gave me the number. I called him every day. Then he no longer had a phone. There was no way to reach him.

A few years passed. I was worried. Had no way to get in touch. Did some sleuthing and found his half-brother on Facebook. Pete was reluctant to fill me in. Once I told him I knew his brother well and was familiar with disease, even knew what medication he was on, he opened up. His brother, my friend was homeless. There was no way to reach him, to the man we knew was inside. The illness had taken over his mind.

He wasn't thinking clearly. He didn't know he needed to be on his meds.

Pete was worried that he wouldn't see Greg again. *If he happens to come back, I wrote, put him in the car and drive him straight to the psych ward.*

Greg never came back. Instead, he jumped off a bridge. Forty-four years old.

The day I found out it was on social media, of course. I went to the hair salon. Crying on and off, I kept my appointment. Sitting down a greeting card on a rack caught my eye. *We were better together* it read. A shock wave went through my system. *What if that was right?*

I grieved for my friend. Candles were lit three nights in a row as I sat and prayed for his soul.

A week later I spoke the words out loud: "Greg, if you're out there, come to me."

A few hours later, the doorbell rang. I rushed down the stairs and opened the door. No one was there. The moment my feet touched down upstairs again, it rang again. Back downstairs I went. Again, no one was there.

I laughed and shook my head. "Thanks Greg," I whispered softly.

I think of him often. *Gregeroony*, my pet name for him, I would speak in my mind as I sent him well wishes.

A few months ago I met a woman for a meeting at a mall. The food court was deserted as it was breakfast time. Subway was the only place to dine. Gail and I pondered our options while looking at the menu. There was another man there. I stopped dead in my tracks. He looked so much like Greg I couldn't stop staring.

While I wanted to say something, I didn't. I couldn't. It would have been inappropriate. Standing there, I couldn't believe the resemblance. The man looked like he was around the same age as Greg would've been. He was clean and tidy, completely unlike Greg when he took his last breath. My friend was probably grimy and smelly and most definitely out of his mind.

His friends on Facebook posted photos of a popular kid who was loved by many. Homecoming King at seventeen. Beaming in photos, his sweet and mischievous manner apparent.

The last time I saw him, ten years ago, he wanted to take me on a date. He wanted to take me on many dates as we were spending a weekend together at my home. "My biggest regret was never committing to you" he said earnestly. As far as I was concerned, it was too late. He had blown it. Missed his opportunity. Now he is gone and we'll never have that conversation again. He'll never want to take me on a date.

A psychic once said, "He could be the one. He really cares about you."

Did I blow it? Was he my one great love?

I hope not. I have faith there will be another.

Rest well my friend. Rest well. ♦

What happens to all the little birds that fall from trees?

NICOLE L RESTAURI

Some fall soft and others hard
All fall alone
Pain and tears are mixed with mud
Sometimes a broken bone

A few of us never learned to fly
Others have broken wings
We peck the earth and walk in vain
Forgetting our song to sing

In dark and unsafe places, many of us try to hide
With heads to big and tears to wet and not enough love inside

Some walk on this way for years
Hunched and hungry; quiet and small
A heavy pack of stones and
worn out fears

In a quiet moment, some of us hear a song and
look up to the sky
Shutter- flutter- remembering
Could that place be mine?

Some never listen, others stop and pray
Feel the wind
Taste the rain
Do not run but stay

In that messy stillness
Among the fire and pain
We look into a puddle
and see ourselves again

All this time we were walking
stumbling steps
on some strange land
Never seeing ourselves for what we are
with wings so big and grand

A subtle knowing and returning to soft and primal things
Shakes are gentle bodies; WE FOREGET and flap our wings

Now the world around us is color not black and white
A flip of the switch in gratitude for our willingness to take flight

The sky above she holds us
The sun directs us home
To the tree we once fell from
Now with mended bones

We wonder for a minute
if we could fly all this time
The tree smiles back and says, " You silly thing ",
YOU ALWAYS WERE DIVINE. ♦

Three Months In A Wheelchair: An Accounting

LYNN M PATTISON

I established no school of unique women
who could save the world like Professor X,
solved no murder witnessed from my window
like Jimmy Stewart. I did solve some mysteries:
how to get underpants on whilst standing
on one foot, how to sleep with a leg encased
in lead. I did not command a whaling ship
in a consuming search for a great white,
though I can do a pretty good impression
of Ahab stumping across the deck.
I was proud of reading a poem
at the Art Museum but that was before
I learned that Sarah Bernhardt performed
across America's stages after an amputation.
Didn't even use her wooden leg.
If I'd had the option of inhabiting an avatar
on a distant planet I could have
had an active life. Even here, I might have
finished a manuscript, reread The Iliad.
At least I could have organized files, polished
the silver. I planned projects: closets
I could clean, calls to my children, but
it turned out that's all I did, no day
exactly right for the activity. I forgot.
The cast distracted me. I needed sleep.
Maybe my lameness represents a greater
underlying weakness as Richard III's body
reflects a shortfall where strength of character
is concerned, or an easily damped down
sense of self. Who knows? Months from now
you might find me quiet and shy,
still in this chair, dusting my glass unicorn. ♦

Side Effect

TED VASIN



Seahorse

ANJALI DHURANDHAR



Enaté

TSION D SHIFERAW



Winter

NEHA DASGUPTA

*In the lights and shadows of January afternoons,
you watch winter slow down,
and catch its breath...
enjoying the warmth of sunshine ♦*



Boot

LYNN M PATTISON

Safe haven. Drab plastic case,
armor for a mending limb and rigid prison

place of encumbrance
and wasting, no escape. Where my sympathy

expands for beetle, spider
and snail. Unbearable nakedness

inside a hard keep. I am sister
to the scorpion now, understand her temper,

her sting. Three pounds
in the package, ten in bed. It could be

a scary weapon if I had muscle
left to kick. The boot sets me rocking

like a drunken sailor, my gait
unnatural as a peg-legged pirate

or cast member
in a *Walking Dead* film. It ages me 20 years,
confers official *elderly* status.
I feel myself disappearing. It cost hundreds,

will never be used again, unless
I take it north, store it behind the door

to clobber marauding bears
or rope it to the boat as an extra anchor.

I might burn it in a bonfire
at the end of summer or have it bronzed—

plaque on the side with dates.
Or, grown glad to live protected,

have a body boot made—
my exoskeleton. Days it pinches

and chafes you'd best take care.
My blood turns poison. Mad, I might bite. ♦

Midnight Letter

LYNN M PATTISON

the children are changing your name
I don't know what to think

did you leave some final advice
I haven't found yet, and

what was the question you began
over and over, never finishing

I see you sifting and cutting in lard
when I serve store-bought pie crust

I cut my hair short last week
the way you always liked

where you are there must be
bougainvillea ballrooms ♦

Him

JULIE A HIGHLAND

This is him.

A cry for help
disguised in subtlety.
Skin and bones,
anxious as hell.
Dismal clothes,
lawless hair.
A bitter story
of unimaginable loss.
A famine of words,
afraid of hope.

This is him.

My broken courage,
a siege of thoughts.
Sleep stolen from me,
the strength to feel.
A coup d'état
of tears against pride.
An opportunity,
the chance to heal.
A famine of words,
afraid of hope.

This is him. ♦

Kisses At The Airport

CAROL H EHRLICH

I see farewells in all colors—
a whiff on the cheek,
hasty, eager to go,
embarrassed, even,
some reluctant—
a duty, maybe—
a convention to be suffered,
like the long-obliging husband
lugging her bags from the car,
turning, finally, a
duty goodbye, a
sigh of relief.

A family, three generations--
kisses, hugs—repeated,
insistent, children spilling
in all directions around Momma,
Grandma and Grandpa, connecting,
competing, demanding,
wringing closeness from
touch, voice—
ebullient, irrepressive.

Then the lovers, their silent
circle enclosed in an
island of need,
no more aware of the
people milling around than
the plane climbing overhead
or the guard stopping cars so
people can cross the road.
Self-contained, they embrace
in a hungry, never-to-end kiss,
arms and bodies pressed close
as one, wanting only no end
to their unity.

And the welcomes too—
varied as buttons in a sewing box.
I watch some travelers as they join
tasting the joy in their eyes, their
voices,
when their loved ones arrive.
They rush to kiss, to hold once more
in arms too long empty.

The ties of blood a special case—
Parents to children, young to old—
either way they warm my heart.
My inner eye sees caring, goodness,
so needed in this crazy world.
No performance here.
My eyes well up.
My spirit soars.

Kisses all—
A polyglot of humanity
ties us together. ♦

A Memory

GAYLAN DASCANIO

You came to us a puzzle
We didn't realize how complex.
ED says arrhythmia,
Problem solved.
Sent you home.
But now you're back, still not feeling right
I guess we should admit.
Would look bad to send you home twice.

Next morning I meet you.
Short of breath, on 6 liters?
That wasn't in the sign out.
Reading the nocturnist H&P,
We're missing something
Doesn't add up.

Previously healthy younger man
No prior dyspnea
Active lifestyle
No meds
Wife died of cancer 7 months ago...
I see your face fall, the memory stings...
But no other symptoms
Some palpitations
Some dyspnea, per HPI.

Time for teaching!
Let's brainstorm,
What are we missing?
The thoughts circle from resident to resident,
The attending is excited at the possibility of a new diagnosis
Finally it arrives to us – a PE!
But in *you*? No risk factors, Wells is 0,
We might be missing something – cancer?
The conversation continues.

I tune out for a moment to watch you
I can see the fear building in your eyes
An understanding of what this all means.
But maybe I'm imagining it,
Maybe I'm projecting my own fear.

—
continued on next page...

That word...cancer...what has it done to you?
Has it haunted you every day since you had to say goodbye?
Does it lay in bed next to you where she should be?
Does it echo in the silence of your home,
Drowning out the familiar sound of her footsteps
And her voice calling you from the next room?
What has it done to you?

Back to the moment,
Fast forward through the days
The scans, the therapy
We did it.
PE indeed. A big one.
A sneaky DVT too.
A big one.
But no fear, we've saved you.
Saved you...yes.
But cured you?
No.
You're still a puzzle
With a missing piece
And we all fear the answer.

I came to see you before you left.
I needed to check in
To make sure you were prepared
To make sure you were ok
You weren't.
But you pretended to be
No need to pretend with me.
I'm scared too,
I know what that word has done to you already.

Soon, you saw why I was there
And you let go
You told me, "We were more than just partners.
We were soul mates, best friends.
I'm not afraid if things go wrong.
If I live, I get to see my daughters.
If I don't, I get to see my wife."
And you let the tears come.
My embrace was meant for strength,
Meant for courage, and peace
I hope you will find them all.

You thanked me in that moment,
But now, I want to thank you
For being my patient
For being my teacher
For reminding me of what we sometimes forget.
Thank you for showing me her picture
What she meant to you,
I know it was the world.
I will not forget what you have shared. ♦

Mr. Foo

WARREN MARTIN HERN

In December, 1965, when I was about half way through my internship at Gorgas Hospital in the Canal Zone, I started my Internal Medicine rotation on the Medical Ward. One of the patients to whom I was assigned was Mr. Foo, from Singapore. Mr. Foo had lung cancer.

Mr. Foo was a Chinese sailor on a merchant marine vessel that was going through the Panama Canal when he was put ashore and brought to the hospital. Mr. Foo was the ship's cook.

Gorgas Hospital, at that time, took care of all US military personnel in Panama, Central and South America. All US diplomatic personnel and all Peace Corps volunteers and staff from the region were brought to Gorgas if they needed medical attention. Another source of patients for Gorgas was merchant seamen who were ill while going through the Canal or in the immediate vicinity. Mr. Foo, having become ill just before his ship arrived at the Panama Canal, was brought to us, and he became my patient. It was my job to visit him each day on "rounds" after I had reviewed his x-rays, laboratory work, and nurse's notes on his chart. The cancer in his lungs was growing steadily. His incapacity and death was only a matter of time.

By the time I saw him, Mr. Foo knew what was wrong with him. Each day, I would greet him, ask him how he felt, and prepare to listen to his lungs with my stethoscope. He was unfailingly polite and reasonably cheerful. After I listened to his lungs, he would look up at me with big, mournful eyes, and say, "Bad?" "Bad," I would say, nodding. Sometimes I would sit down and put my arm around his shoulder as I talked with him and asked him how he was doing.

One day, Mr. Foo showed me a letter from his son and told me that his family was in Singapore. He said he wanted to go home to see his family.

The hospital administration had a policy of flying sick merchant seamen home from the Canal Zone as soon as it was determined that they would not get well soon or if they were terminally ill. The tradition was that the intern assigned to the patient would accompany him to his destination. One of my colleagues took a guy back to Afghanistan.

There were several problems in Mr. Foo's case. One was that I was too sick to travel, as I was just recovering from infectious mononucleosis; another was that the hospital had half its usual complement of interns due to the anti-American riots that had occurred in the Canal Zone the previous year; and last, Mr. Foo was regarded as just too sick to travel. The airlines were afraid that he would die en route. This concern was heightened by the lack of available interns to make the trip with him.

On hearing of these problems, I went to the head of the hospital, Colonel Harry Offutt, and asked for him to intercede and make the arrangements for Mr. Foo to go home without the medical chaperone. I said that he was well enough to travel now but might not be in a few weeks, and he would never see his family again or vice versa if this did not happen.

The original airline decision to transport Mr. Foo had been rescinded because of his worsening condition. Now we needed to rescind that decision.

Eventually, Mr. Foo's trip was approved. I did not see him leave because I had been assigned to a Pathology rotation by that time. But several weeks later, I got a letter from Singapore:

*Foo Cheong Kam
Crescent
Singapore, 14 (Blk 20)*

Dear Dr. ...,

How do you do? I am Mr. Foo Kia Wan's son. My parents told me to write this letter to thank you for your good care for him. He reached Singapore on the sixth of January and was admitted to the general hospital. He was in good condition at first, but when he fell one night, in the hospital, he was injected by the doctor to make him sleep so that he won't be in pain. If he had not fall, he is in good condition. Now, he rarely eats and drinks.

The doctor here says that he had cancer in the lung. Now he is glad to be with us again. Thank you.

*Yours sincerely,
(signed) FC Kam*



Submission published previously.

City Streets

ELIZABETH SWIFT

This city is filled with you
and me.
Every corner I turn
or street I follow
unfolds into you
or a memory we've shared.
It's pleasant.
It's painful.
It's pleasant.
This city in relation to you
has shaped me in every way.
This city in relation to me
is necessary
for departure. ♦

You

ELIZABETH SWIFT

You and your power over me
You hijack my thoughts and contort my face into strangeness
when I can feel you looking
I want to look back, to dive into your eyes, but am frozen
out of fear, respect, principle, fear
that I'll lose myself in them.
So I avoid.
I barricade connection,
depriving both of us.
I try to focus.
I am here to focus. ♦

Mary

ELIZABETH SWIFT

A beautiful woman
with brilliant blue eyes
laid on my table today.
I measured her.
I bent and twisted her arm
until her muscles,
her brilliant blue eyes,
and lastly
her voice
told me to stop.
I held her there and asked her to breath
as we chatted about Halloween costumes,
her opposite arm lay resting on her stomach.
Resting in a tremor.
She is strong.
"I couldn't dress up this year
because of this,
but I used to dress up in my Renaissance attire
which I love.
I used to do that much more often
at festivals
with my husband
until he died."
She is strong.
Twist of the forearm and bend of the elbow
until she tells me to stop.
"Do you ski?"
"Snowboard"
"Do *you* ski?"
"Cross country, but not anymore.
My bones are too fragile, I'll fall and break."
She lays on my table as I twist and pull her arm.
Again, I measure.
Her life is so different now
than what it used to be.
Her brilliant blue eyes still sparkle
and her smile still beams
hinting of the life
she has loved to live. ♦

The Gift of Bones

TANYA L FERNANDEZ

I called him Bones.

Tall, lanky, sturdy, strong, sometimes dense with a hardened exterior.
A trebeculated soul that loved travel, seeing the world through adventurous eyes.

Now, her world is clearer with his corneas; another heart loves with his valves;
a liver filters again; his bones support another.

A brother memorialized in death with life. ♦

Dear Cadaver

BRIGIT-ALEXANDRA HIGH



Beneath the White

CAROLYN A HO

Bright fluorescent lights cast across a sterile hallway
Illuminating the purposeful chaos within its boundaries
Revealing the calm, the frantic, and the forever still
And lighting upon the swaying movements of a trailing white coat
As its owner treads swiftly through the blinding corridors

Such a simple piece of clothing
Beautifully flowing in its vibrant white
Yet, cruel in its supposed innocence
In its pristine silence
Never speaking of the pain it has seen
Of the deaths it has encountered

And here, a question is asked
Will you look beneath the white?
At the shoulders that tremble slightly
Under the weight of decisions made
The weight of the living
The weight of the dead

Will you notice the subtle traces
Of silently shed tears?
For every patient lost
For every promise broken
For every moment of helplessness

Will you look beneath the white?
To see beyond the knowledge, the rank, the procedures
To glimpse the healer who now seeks healing
The child who once dreamed
Of protecting and serving
Who once dreamed of saved lives and miracles
Before time took its toll
And the words, "I'm sorry. We tried."
Were no longer enough
Before the hope slowly faded
Like the light that gradually darkens in eyes
Before that final breath is taken

And will you look beneath the white?
Before the once proud head bows in defeat
As shaking fingers grasp at brightly colored pills
Beautiful in their vivid shine
Yet, deadly in their potency
And the dull eyes begin to close
Never to open again

Will you look beneath the white?
Before those feet climb resolutely up the empty staircase
To where the backdrop of the city below
Is eclipsed by the endlessness of the night sky
And that final leap is taken
And the journey is ended where it once began

Will you look beneath the white?
Before unsteady hands wrap around a cold, unyielding hilt
As the dark barrel presses against a trembling temple
And a finger tightens against the trigger
Before a shot disrupts the quiet of the now empty room
A fine spray of crimson across white
To at last mar its imperfect perfection
To make its mark
In remembrance of the heart
That once beat under its cover

Will you look beneath the white? ♦

Strange

HELEN E RYDBERG

There have always been words
Growing inside my chest.
When I was thirteen I let the shadows crawl
Out of the back of my mouth
And slip off the tip of my tongue,
And the world twisted its face at me
And told me I was strange.
So I made my ribs the bars
And I made my teeth the gate
Of a cage large enough to keep them,
And I understood what it meant to be quiet
In a world awash with noise. ♦

Hungry

HELEN E RYDBERG

I think we keep our demons
Because we don't know who we are without them.

My father gave me his on a Tuesday night in a rocks class, neat.
My father gave me his in the way his fingers
Kissed the knees of the woman in the floral dress.

They're burning a hole in the back pocket of my jeans.
In a whisper and with a wink,
They're begging me to hold them.

They're climbing up my spine
And crawling inside my ears.

They are so hungry. ♦

An Execution

MADISON L MOSELY

Evening brings a cold push of wind
Which chills the bones, icing
White cartilage
Your skin: plucked featherless
And bare.

That's the wind that brought you here
Pushed and tumbled until you stopped dead
In the tracks of ghostly men and women
Who snapped –

And the world came rushing back. ♦

Yggdrasil

MADISON L MOSELY

I want to die
But only if it is like falling asleep
And before that I would like to be married
To something
Only, just before that, I want to be carried over the threshold
Into a soft bed to rest
So when I find myself thinking about death,
I follow myself down through these rings of reasoning
Until I stop at the nape of damp earth
Which strings the world together
And breathes so rhythmically
That my longing is indiscernible from the drips of melted snow falling from the gutter
onto our backyard porch ♦

Daylight Savings

MADISON L MOSELY

The commute home now means
Driving through the glow of lofty buildings, blinding headlights,
Dodging cars twisting through the layered veils of dusk.

Closer to the skyscrapers
You can almost feel the buzz
Of fluorescent bulbs humming, echoing
Past papered desks, the glare of dirty coffee pots-
But if you close your eyes, you will see
A kaleidoscope of creation beyond the cracked surface
Of skin and burdened concrete- All
Shadows of the elements blooming in darkening streets. ♦

Iatrogenesis

DEBORAH C SINGER

lines across my skin
bright purple
like jagged rips
please stop
taking my breath away
like nothing has before
until I could barely speak
barely stoop unwinded
so tired
so weak
my toes were ever farther away
when I tried to reach them
my muscles strained
to do the same tasks of yesterday
my hair fell out
it fell out a lot
so much of it suddenly gone
I wept from the shock
and wept
my time of the month
lost count of its clock
a stabbing in my stomach
my heart raced
the pressure built
my blood changed
weight increased
and then so much pain
stretched from my fingertips
across my chest
up my neck
to the small of my back
like being ripped apart
so bad I couldn't sleep
more than two and half hours
per desperate try
for three and half weeks
a month to get all the feeling back in my fingers
and nightmares
and a year a blur
of bad news and test results and little else like I was asleep
and anger boiling for a fight
something's wild inside
rushing learning things I didn't want to know
and confusion
and despair
the world upside down
it was all iatrogenic ♦

Standing In Front Of The Mirror

DEBORAH C SINGER

standing in front of the mirror
touching the wispy locks that remain
my fingers patting and squeezing what's left
measuring reluctantly, I can't help it
wondering, will it grow back
how long and how will I cope until then
if I am so lucky, so strange
a month ago I felt so happy
dismissing the growing thinness
the bundles of loose strands draping across my hands in the shower
and I look at the red-veined, sad, brown eyes
of the shocked lost woman reflected in front of me
and I turn away and cry ♦

Inside My Skin

DEBORAH C SINGER

sun burnt inside my skin
a collection of broken glass
in tender flesh
the cutting press
sharp and thick
as heavy bones
pull against my resolve
my fingers a worn brittle shaking
every movement hurts more
still is no less
these arms crushed
under the weight
of the baggage
strained soured and grating
the damage I carry
from neck to fingertips
shreds me
underneath it all
pain deep and monstrous
tearing me apart
inside ♦

I want to be about big things

NICOLE L RESTAURI

I want to know the hope of a bud about to bloom
Drink in juicy passion
Crazy like the moon

I want to be about big things
When it's my turn to fly
Stick out my tongue at doubt and fear
And crash into the sky

I want to know the small things
Like a soft spring rain
And my comfy blue jean shorts
With the tear and coffee stain

And when my days are fewer than many
Friends are hard to find
I hope all the while I made the choice
To laugh and to be kind

In that final whirling center that cuts to the bone
I will look back and say
My story is all my own ♦

Grace Defined

NICOLE L RESTAURI

Is fearfully moving into the unknown without all the answers
(the other side of this they call courage)
Not forgetting to ask Why?
Finding connection in both a sunset and rainstorm
Smiling at a stranger
Dropping the ball and freeing your two hands to pray
Breathing through heartbreak and happiness and connecting the dots in between
A splash of color in a grey wasteland (maybe in the form of a little white dog)
My mom's homemade wedding soup fusing love and history into a divine elixir for the
body and soul
Writing a poem bundled up on a cold day at the beach while sipping champagne
Watching fire dance in the wind
Speaking your mind through a shaking voice
Crying when you need to and laughing out loud—AND FROM YOUR BELLY—
when you can....

All of this is GRACE.

OR

(a) in christian belief " the free and unmerited favor of God" or (b) a short prayer
—Oxford English Dictionary

♦

Pediatric Research

DIANE M LADELL

concrete forever in my mind
is the consent from your parents

a promise kept
that the link between name and number
would be short lived

a promise hopeful
that the link between you and answers
innovation for the next child
would be forever

you'll have a place in my journey forever
not as a number

your sweet face
concrete forever in my mind ♦

Wildflowers

LARA E CANHAM



Children on the road to Mekelle, Ethiopia.

CRAIG STARK



Beyond the Surface

AMY JONES



10 Mile Canyon

DAVID M WEIL

The ride starts in Frisco, 70 miles west of Denver. Light snow fell last night. The car reads 44 degrees and a hint of a flurry is blowing. It's about 8 miles, all uphill to Copper Mountain. There's a stream alongside the path, rolling over rocks and trees.

Lungs and legs burn, and I stop to guzzle water. The aspens are magnificent and it smells amazing. Forest, leaves, pine needles are damp.

Going back; no pedaling...flying though yellow. ♦



Saraswati's Swan

SARA MARIE L BOTTARO

I

Trill melodies and marauders
Parading through mist their affairs
mince no words but yours.

I'm not present at that gathering
so much as breathed into cornered confines-
themselves slim, reticent, uncaring

II

Glittering between branches
Set apart as oases just
opposite the world's violet
eye, the wrens dive

In the heathrows, traversing bounds
my bones flutter into;
Wakeful, yet reluctantly roused
recountings of what was ecstasy

III

My living trial on round Earth
I separate as milk from water
this inhale held close around me

Taking what's left-
always within
these maddened walls we walk in ♦

Alone in a room

CATHY J STONE

Alone in a room
full of people

The guise I wear
hides the pain
the regret
the need

How can I explain?
The hunger to voice my
vulnerability
want of purpose
nonexistent future

All the while
The hum and the beeps
from the machine
pumping the yellow
liquid into my veins

My warrior holding back the thing
That is claiming my body

Who will understand?
The anguish
I bear alone.

Does the darkness understand?
It creeps inside
of my head
and every living cell.

My silent voice
Bellows out
Leave me be!

But alas to no avail
The shadow casts
It's dark light onto my
eyes.

Can you see me?
You walk past afraid
to expose your
heart.

You turn your head
And cast your eyes
to the floor
and walk away.

The voice inside my head screams
To the emptiness
I am still
HERE!

Alone in a room... ♦

Shadowood

EVAN ZEGIEL

dirty tiles.
dirty tiles leftover from the 80's
or the 70's? it's hard to tell anymore
our parents have surfed
through segmented decades
each one had its own personality
as though they collectively decided
that with each "0"
should come a new culture

dirty tiles.
they are flotsam americana
this movie theater still smells of old secrets
you can hear them whispering if you watch
don't listen, watch
not the films, the waves
the waves over these dirty tiles
these dirty tiles that still shine with the footsteps
of young love, of childish excitement,
of fears and insecurities best hidden

dirty tiles.
am I surfing them even now?
I can feel the 90's washing over me even now
even now, I can think back and say the phrase "the 2000's"
and remember the many first kisses I shared here
I left shining, dirty footsteps behind
I placed my feet upon the dirty tiles
where someone just like me placed his three decades ago
and in the women's room next door,
a young woman placed her feet upon the dirty tiles
where someone just like her placed hers three decades ago. ♦

Blind Man on the Corner of N. Thayer and Washington in Ann Arbor, MI

EVAN ZEGIEL

A stumbling rhythm,
a harmony of purpose,
music inside you.
You hear us, visionless friend,
as the symphony of life.

How does the world feel
in darkness, so persistent?
Are shadows your friends?
Or, is terror a constant,
forcing itself upon you?

Do you understand
the machines that rumble by
as beasts, or as doves?
Snarling jaws and sharpened teeth
or feathers tickling your ears?

I watch a young man
step carefully to your side
and tap your shoulder.
Smiling, your eyes unfocused,
the young man gently guides you.

In moments like these
reminders are delivered,
singing of kindness:
No matter how low we sink,
we can help each other swim. ♦

Microwavable Memory

EVAN ZEGIEL

When I was a kid, my parents used to tell me
that there were starving children in Africa, and that I had better
finish every last bite of food on my plate. My face came to reflect
the microwave sparkling in my peripheral vision
the image of a praying mantis, as I sat there
indignant and full of innumerable eminencies. I swore
into the depths of tropical suburbia
that I would never use the mural of starvation against my children
(which I may never have), and that the children in Africa
could take my unfinished food whenever they wanted to. Of course,
its sound like silence in constant motion
this child's-mind-thought only exacerbated the mantis-looking face I wore,
and I would often stare down at my plate in the hopes that the pieces of strewn-out
food would begin to dance for me like puppets that had broken away from their
strings, or mirrors
caught on fire. I was a growing boy,
too alive to understand the way that wings
float over steam-emitting chunks of flesh on a plate
and my father would often say I needed my strength. And yet, what good
have those few extra bites brought? Furthermore, why should I have been concerned
with yellow birds that seem to land everywhere I look
with strength? Because I would someday be a "man?" ♦

The Song of Elias Montrose

CHRISTINE M RALSTON

Forever shall I stand upon this deck
and reach out for the sea?
The waves are dancing with the wind
I fear they've taken my love from me
Each moment that I live alone
Every ship that docks without her
Brings sorrow to my sunken soul
Mangled roses from the water
Lighthouse do not say goodnight
My love's ship a violent plight
The hands of time like an eagle fly
Each chime echoes a tragic reply
My love at sea I learned did die
And then did I... ♦

It's All So Fragile, You Know

LAURIE B BOGUE

The melancholy low notes of a cello
Muffled laughter of a shared secret
A vibrant brush stroke on a canvas
Ceramic clay delicately sculpted behind glass

We are, all of us, itinerant dreamers
Tenants of a passing vision
Dancers stepping in a whirlwind of sand

What will remain of us once the light fades? ♦

From The Silkworm That Helped Make 1/60th Of Your Comforter

PRIYA KRISHNAN

I settled down for the long haul,
Me and my buddy,
Stomachs full of mulberry leaves.

The wiser worms had told us what came after,
Spoke of singed skin and shriveled corpses, but I still dreamt of wings
Sprouting from my back, breaking up from my safe cocoon to kiss the sky.

But I was too sleepy to think, stomach full of mulberry leaves. I wriggled my
translucent skin against the mirror walls of my cocoon, nuzzling into my safe place.

Today they wake us with an earthquake,
Fingers the size of our bodies grabbing at our gauzy containers.
That's what they want, the wrappings and not the core,
The shell and not the soul.

Later they will fry our bodies in oil. Test the
Mettle of our toughened skins against the
Hardened warfronts of their teeth and
Lick their sticky fingers clean. Really we are
Softer than they want to believe.

They are ready to dip me and my buddy in
The steaming water, boil us to take our
Carefully spun layers away.

A thought comes into my mush brain, a cloudy tendril thought,
Dissolving as fast as it appears:

It's not uncommon to die to make something beautiful.

They drop me, I let my body go.
For this moment I am flying without wings.
For this moment my thready silken self is touching so much sky. ♦

Submission published previously.

The Song You Sing

JENNIE E HAMMETT

The song you sing comes out rowdy,
Like rocks in a jar,
Contagious, like gambling, tension,
smallpox
And out of tune like a pounding hangover.
The only thing that allows it to encircle us
like a rough but loving noose
Is joy in your song,
And a miraculous silence when you do sleep. ♦

Parky Problem

ANNE R GREEN

I tell very few
Who knows my parky problem?
I am in control.

Who am I fooling?
I am shaking like a leaf.
I fool only me. ♦

Size never really mattered that much, more than today *(In memory of my beloved sister)*

PRERNA BAKSHI

Wearing that green and olive color
churidar kameez, dressed in those earthy colors,
you looked like the favorite child of the Mother Earth.
You were the favorite child of our family too.
Though always so humble, never too proud.
My daughter always thinks of me, always thinks of everyone, Papa used to say.
Every time Papa wanted to buy you something, you'd say no.
Your cupboard was filled with old and worn out clothes.
Those that your eight years younger sister once wore.
I had outgrown those clothes, and
you never grew much.
Always weighing 33 kilograms,
the weighing scale outweighed you.
It was hard to find clothes that fit you well.
We were overjoyed that day when we found out that one did.
That green and olive colored one.

As I stand before this wardrobe and stare at your outfit,
with moist eyes, I notice how small it appears,
as if it's shrunk. When it's more likely that I have grown.
Grown older and wider that is.

Yet, right now, there is nothing more that I want
than to somehow fit into this *churidar kameez*.
Even if it means, I'd have to cut my body into half.
I'd do it in a heartbeat, if I could wear it on your behalf.

It's been eleven years since you've been gone
but I know you're still with me.
Your shadow
still in this room, right behind
my shoulder, ever so encouraging,
ever so optimistic,
telling me – I shouldn't lose hope
that I can *still*
fit into your outfit.

Submission published previously.

Sometimes the simplest words are the hardest to say

PRERNA BAKSHI

Does language determine thought?
Or, does thought determine language?
This debate is still not settled.
Still it's fascinating how quickly
does our language change,
how quickly does it accommodate reality,
as soon as someone dies.
Our tongue, suddenly,
rolls out verbs
in the past tense
before our mind
could even form thoughts.
It's as if our tongues have a mind of their own.

Sometimes, in the race between
language and thought,
language finds a way
to get ahead.
But not always.
It's been 11 years since I've lost
my sister to blood cancer, and
yet it's one of the shortest words in
my language, I find
impossible to use.
I guess, I refuse to use.
- – *thi* - Was
(Feminine, singular, past tense)

Submission published previously.

Minor Changes

PRERNA BAKSHI

Everything is still the same
as you left, just with minor changes.
Like this chocolate-brown colored wooden door
that you would ask me to shut
when engrossed in watching TV,
it had stopped getting shut. Lost its shine.
It's now all repaired and polished.

Like this bed you used to sleep on, the one
on which we spent countless hours
whispering and giggling at night.
This bed is now heavy
with the weight of your absence.
Its mattress had stopped providing support
for my orphaned back.
The bed is still the same but the old mattress
has now been replaced with the new firmer one.

Like this little red-colored bed side alarm clock
that had stopped ticking
when you left; refusing
to make the familiar tick-tock sound.
It's now all repaired, it ticks
but just ever so slowly...

Submission published previously.

The Pragmatist and The Idealist Out for a Stroll

FREDRICK R. ABRAMS

Our crosswalk light was clearly seen
For us it was distinctly green
The truck bore down
I swallowed pride
And cravenly I jumped aside

In staunch defense of principle
He thought himself invincible
The final words I heard him say
"Fear not we have the right of way"

Some Point

AMY M BEESON

City Park Jazz:

Everyone and their boyfriend
their four month-old
their golden-doodle
inhaling air seasoned with New Orleans flats and sharps;
it bubbles up in our lungs, then
spills out in irrepressible cadences of laughter.

We, the artists of our fates,
feast greedily on the things we packed for ourselves,
white wine, watermelon, cheese, and eggplant bruschetta for my friends.
A medical resident is sitting by the pond.

We consulted palliative care today
for my patient with AIDS who is losing his mind in the hospital.
At *some point* when people just won't take care of themselves
there is piteous little we can do for them,
she said,
her voice tinged with regret. What a waste.
But what does he have to live for now? I had no answer.

Sliver of moon in the purple sky,
bittersweet wine spilled on the grass.
The jazz winds its way to a sweet saxophone sigh.
Artists, scholars, lovers depart
The authors of our fates. ♦

Willed

KATHLEEN A MCCARTNEY

When I see you standing there
with your day-old daughter
in your arms

You, who could be her grandfather,
You, who willed her into the world

She, with bright eyes looking at
everything new,
and a smile to match yours

I, who lost my father to astrocytoma, at
2 years, 10 months, and 5 days
into my life

I wonder, what is it like to rest in the
arms of a father who loves you
so much

I wonder, what does a father give a daughter?

How long do you have to have a father
to be inoculated against
fear of men as other
belief you don't belong
doubt that someone could love you

I'm a little filled with dread
thinking of when she will be peeled away
from you

many years from now
I hope ♦

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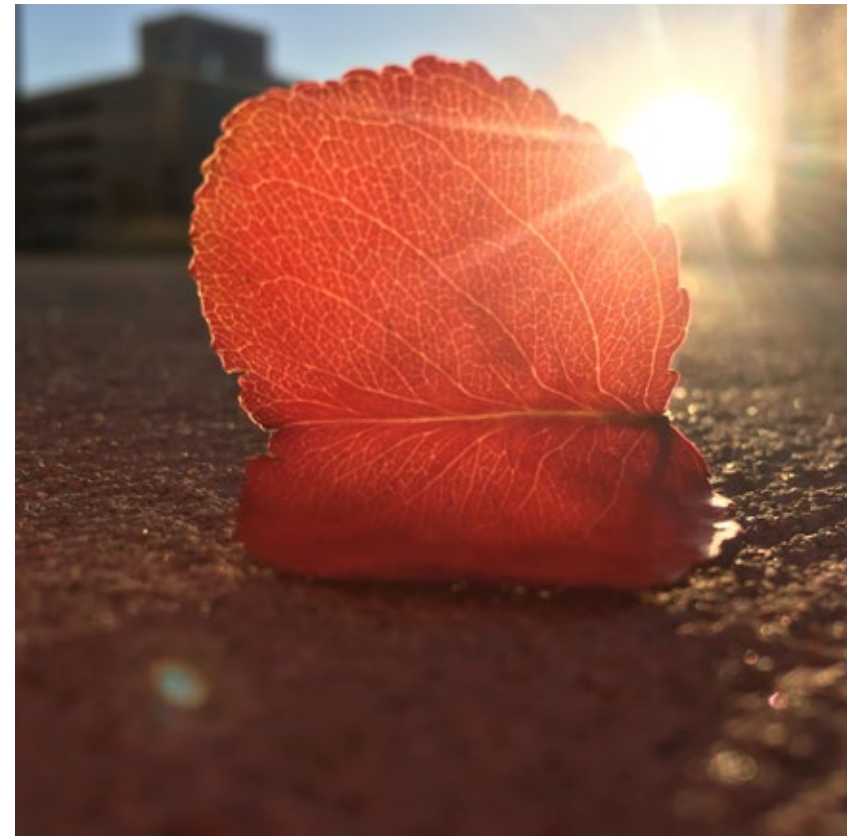
3to1

CAM WASCHKE



Afternoon Inferno

ANNE CAULFIELD



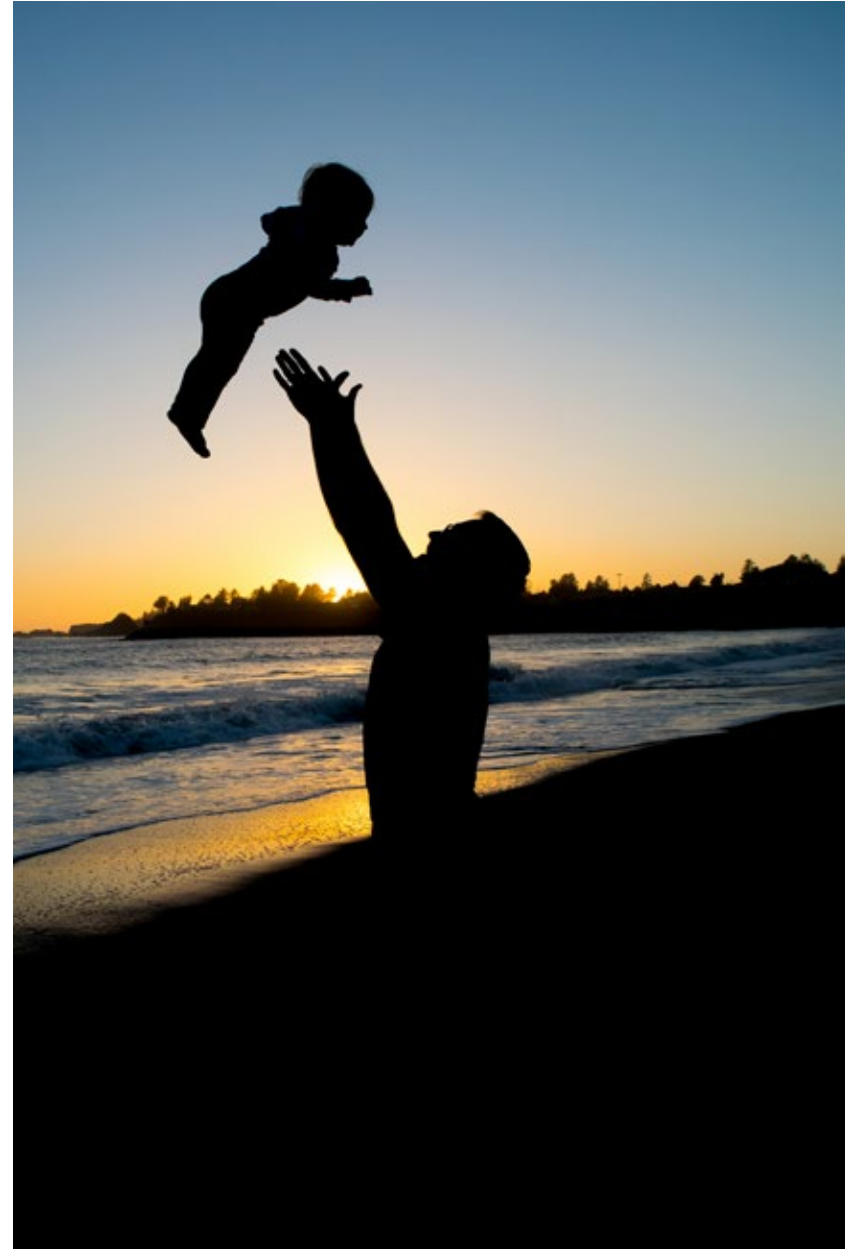
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Arms Always Open

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Aspen Formation Mounts Over Ridgeline

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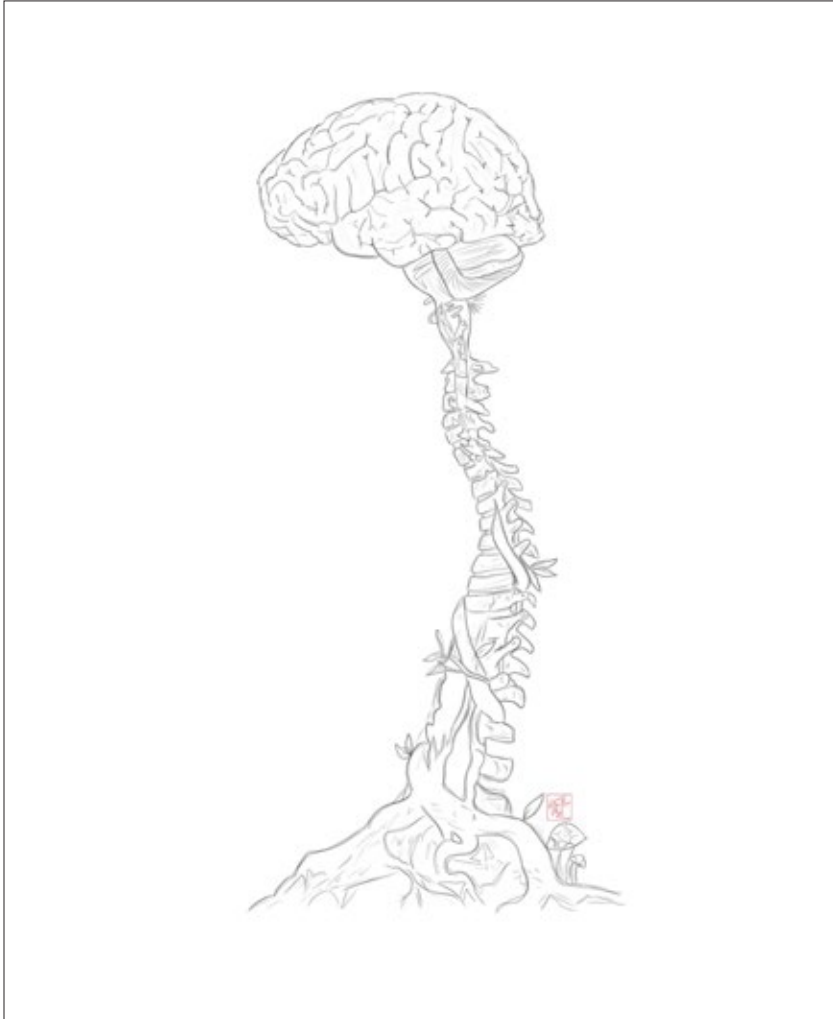
Fields of Gold

ANNE CAULFIELD



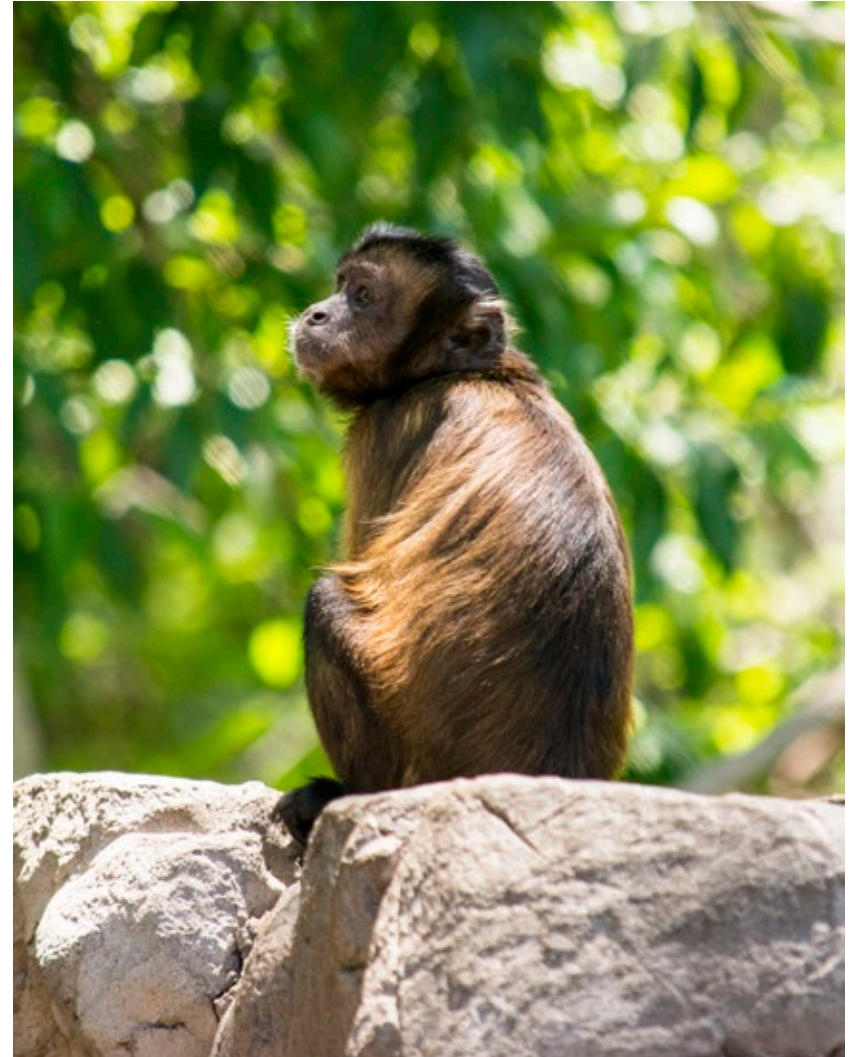
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Grouper

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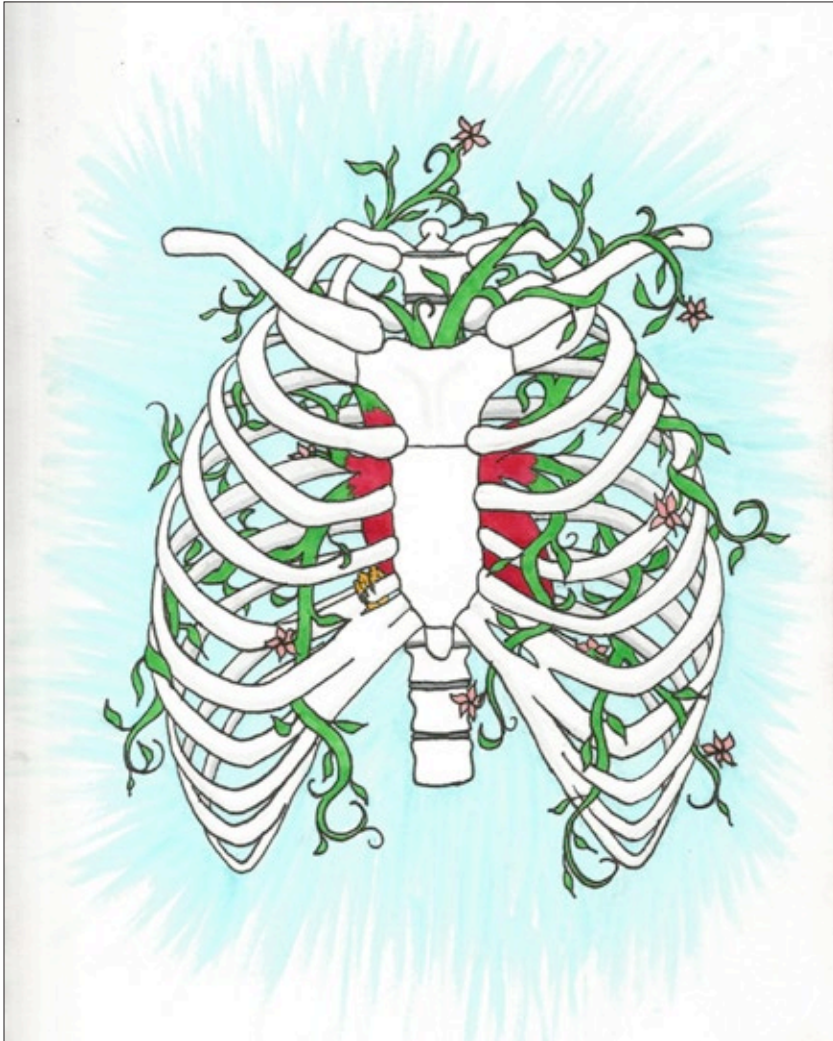
Hard at Work

DANY GAILLARD



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that's why our ribs are cages**

TALIA SCOTT



Hello Mr. Blackbird

MARY CLARK



Innocence

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Kid offers loving nudge to mama goat

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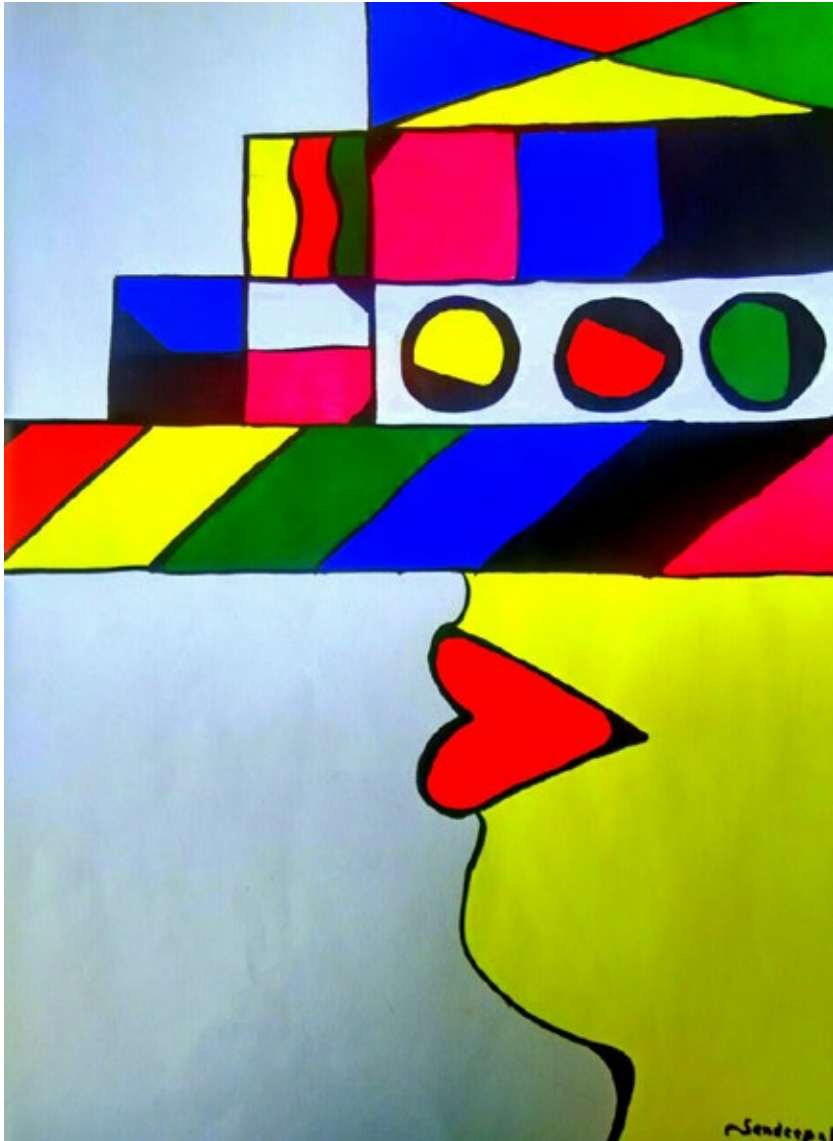
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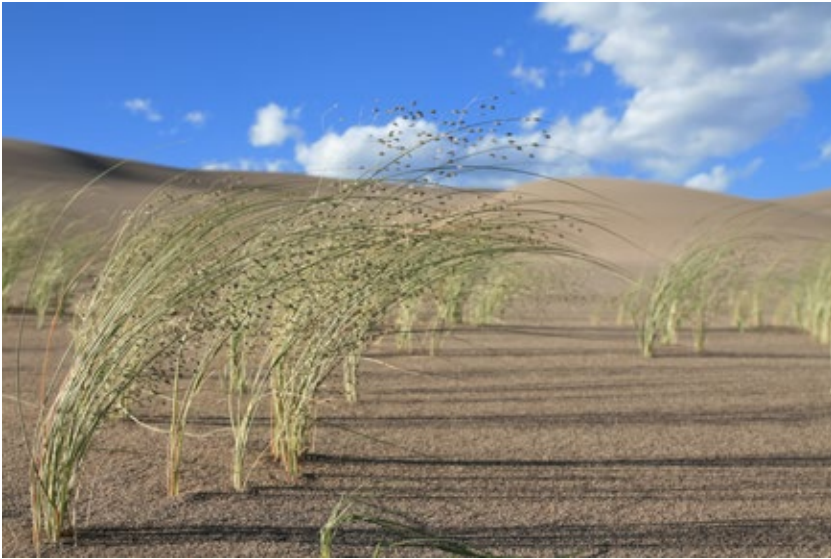
Movement

REAGAN L. MILLER



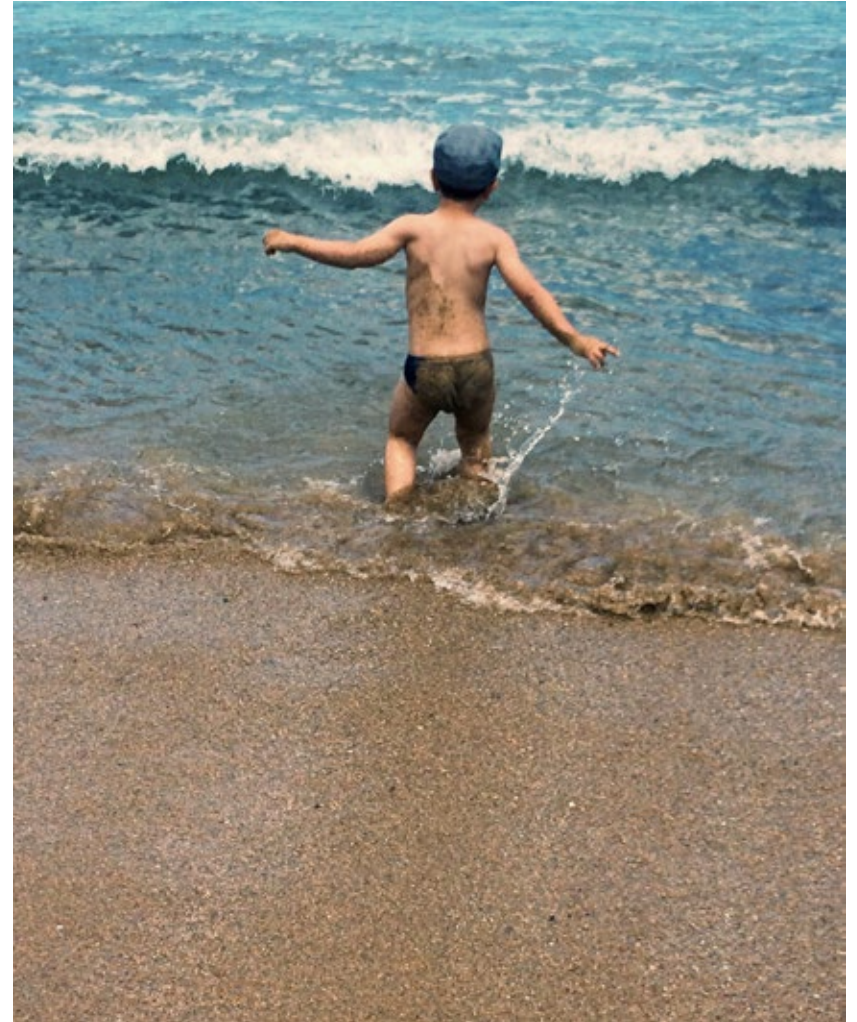
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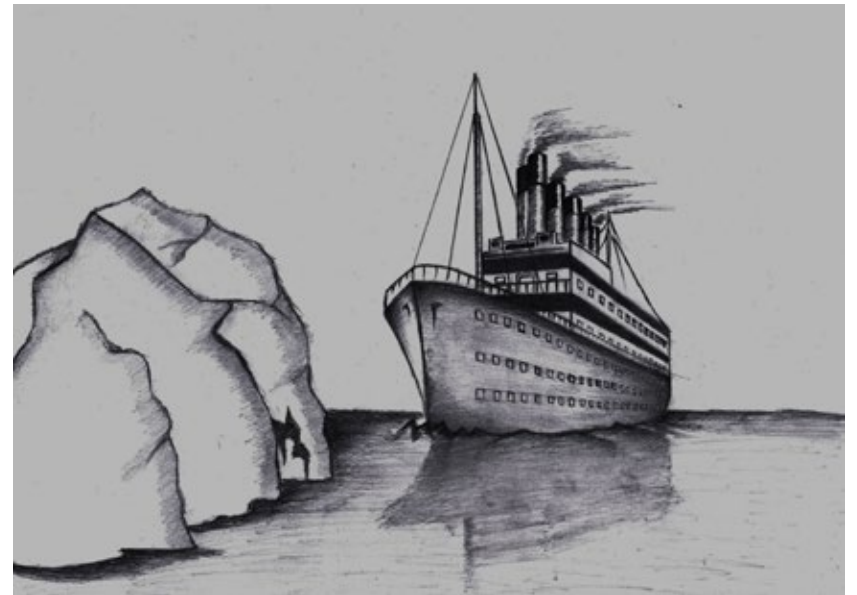
Time In-Between

JULIETTE E. ORR



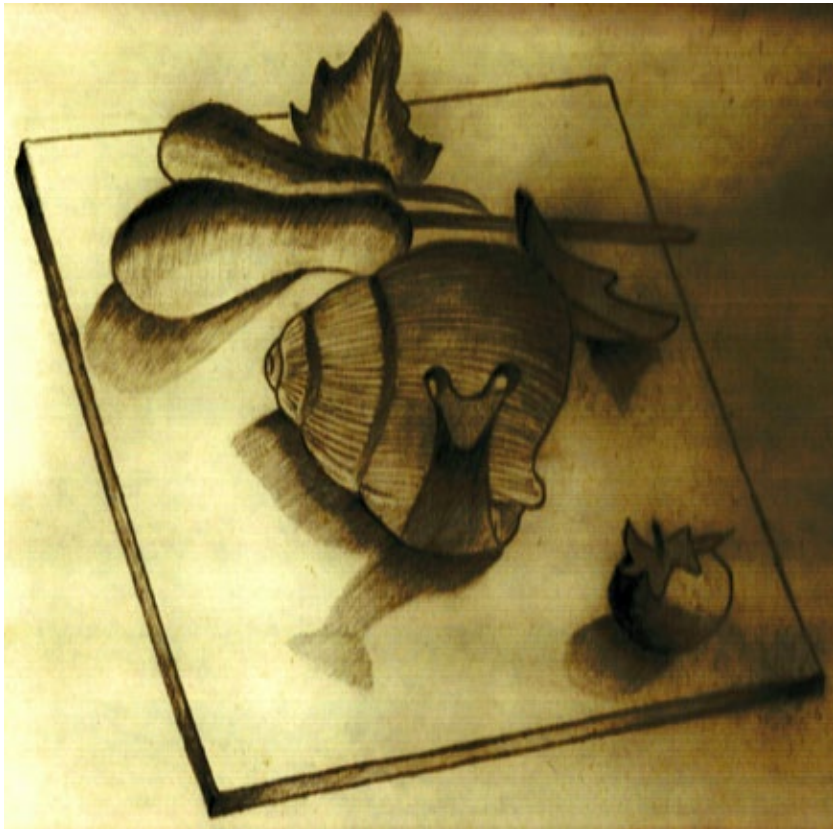
Untitled 2

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Untitled

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Watching Flowers

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What I Didn't Say

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What is Held, What is Let Go

KATIE VAN DEVENTER



Yellowstone's Gentle Giant

ERIC SAWYER





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