



T E M P E R

2002

A LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO

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Editor's Note

Temper gives opportunity for students to reveal their creativity, to have a chance to have their work published. We have worked hard to capture the variety of submissions we received from students at UCSD. We want to thank all those who shared their writing and/or artwork with us. Also, thank you to everyone who participated in the production of this journal. We would like to dedicate this year's Temper to Gordon Chang, our editor-in-chief last year. Thank you, Gordon, for continually guiding us with your jumbled words of wisdom.

Temper is annually funded by the Associated Students UCSD Organization to promote student art and discourse.

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The Tack

by Jeff Alexandre

But I looked and it was.

But only who would leave a tack prick-up
on the floor?

And barefoot slipping from her abdomen, her viscera,
(as from a shower) above the tiled floor and into a prefab blanket
behind a hospital window.

And barefoot climbing through the monkey bars, like a seeing
thing new feeling every scene.

And barefoot walking up the shag stairs to break
in a Rawlings glove and hear Howling Wolf rumbling
in father's room.

Where I had been on sure ground – with scurrying twelve-year old toes –

Where I had absorbed the brown and stucco LA
– and the shocking Vermont green – with company.

Where I had the spectrum of mine – my parents and my grounding –
(ready for dispersion by the prisms of modern versions),

I became suddenly stripped of tight ropes tied to old pilings.

I became tangled in the oakum of prior cords of thought.

Then when the calluses formed under my feet my soles could leave
dry or drier footprints even in swampy lands.

Then when the existential revolution made absurd the simple – like eating
rice or throwing a baseball – my feet stabilized tectonic shocks.

Then;

I read that gray matter thinks for me and my feet shifted.

I read that my mind is an input and output –
with nothing in between (and Descartes and I grabbed a handrail
to stay above that wet tile).

I read that I mean nothing and know no meaning;

But I understand Muddy Waters a little! and the broken glass turned
to sand between my toenails.

So who would leave a tack prick-up?

Someone who thinks you won't look where you walk.

How to Narrate the Malfunction of A Small Airplane from the Ground

by John Rieder

10 a.m. and you're leaning out the window of your third story apartment in a suburb just downwind from the city. You're leaning out, just so, Monday, cracked mug half-full of Darjeeling tea, earthy, honeyed, your face fixed on the

four-story across the street.

You're leaning out, just so, and the sky seems to pop, then roar, a bass-heavy spiraling grind just above you.

An airplane, tiny and white from this distance, a Cessna, a toy almost, is breaking apart against clouds that boast rain.

You're looking up now, straight up, and this whole sequence, this whole linear narrative, plays out in seconds.

The malfunction. Plane breaks in two. Pilot falls to earth.

But this event, and the few moments that comprise it, become yours; you can almost pluck the whole logic of the sequence out of the sky, let it idle in your cupped hands indefinitely.

The malfunction. Plane breaks in two. Pilot falls to earth.

You're looking up now, straight up, and you almost laugh because it all *does* seem to happen in slow motion, the cliché of every bad movie, every related near-death experience, every session of hypnotic regression therapy. The way the little airplane's wings and cockpit diverge from the tail, its fuselage comet-burning, disintegrating against the overcast backdrop.

The way the pilot falls fast, much more quickly than the whirling X of the cockpit and wings. And from where you stand, leaning out of your window, the pilot, for only a fraction of a moment already so fractured, is superimposed against the wings. And you channel a thousand thoughts, an ocean of questions, of angels falling to earth like Garcia-Marquez wrote and who believes in fucking angels anyway? and can he fly now? and are you my angel? and that angel and angle are so close so if he's falling straight downward is that still acute?

And now you're standing outside, just up the street from your apartment. Now you're moving, further up the street. You hear the first sirens, still a few minutes away, and you're suddenly aghast, this gently cupped moment swatted from your hands; who could've called? Who else saw the plane come apart, saw the white-heat of the fuselage bloom against the gray, the man tumbling downward, faster even than the front half of the airplane,

saw the superimposition of man against spinning wreckage overhead?
But now you're there, on a side street just a block past your apartment, where the pilot is sprawled out on the sidewalk next to a dry shrub. He's fully intact, not a bloody splat, not the dramatic crimson smear that you thought would be the result of such a great fall.

You're closer now, and his body at rest reminds you of a book of Civil War daguerreotypes you once saw, the way the battlefield dead lay in contortion. A leg crossed over the other. Torso half-turned at the hips. Arms bent behind the head, the head resting in the crook of an elbow. A hand bent slightly back at the wrist.

You're standing over him now.

Now you're kneeling beside him. Kneeling in the blood that is pouring from his head and stomach, his intestines pushing through tears in his skin. And one thing that surprises you the most about this dead pilot, besides his moustache, which reminds you of your father's, all bristly and dirty-blonde, is that his watch, a silver-plated thing, is still audibly ticking.

You give your synopsis to a local reporter, a woman with a smart suit and perfect teeth, and to a buff young cop with no hair: the unseen malfunction, the plane splitting in two, the pilot falling.

You go home and sleep for 17 hours.

You dream deeply, vividly. Civil War dead that bleed Darjeeling tea. Silver-plated teeth that bite the rain from clouds.

A comet cupped gently in the palm of your hand.

When you wake, blood in your hair, under your fingernails, you stumble over to the late-model Macintosh that you couldn't quite afford, and with the index finger of each hand, you type sentences that convey nothing.

grafting

by Cathlin Goulding

grandfather
gardener by profession
after internment
he planted many trees

a sharp knife necessary
to slice gently the bud
of two strains of peach trees
conjoining scion and rootstock
wrapping them in firm cradle of wax
veins bark intertwine
union

I am the madama butterfly daughter
two disparate continents
perhaps it was just
West beating down East
into submission how my mother so smallquiet
father so whiteblueeyed
I my slanted hazel eyes
I my muted yellowness
I my brown hair

grandfather
transplanted tree from its little pot
it grew as I grew
in spring the tree its bursting
firecracker blossoms
pale pink with spray of magenta
people stop stare
ask how what produced such a tree
alone
among bland birch trees lawns ground cover

i am misunderstood

bicolored blossoms
my sometime asian face
a discomfoting reminder
of perception bred from assumption
imposed expectations
dividing

flower
from peach

I cannot divide myself
split myself into either/or
pale pink magenta flowers bright full
already integrated into ambiguity
I of one vein one stem

before the petals shut themselves up
I break off a branch and let
petals crumble in my own hand
let petals fall from my own hand
I the mother/father daughter and then again neither of
both
I will not be taken apart

grandfather
gardener by profession
was a planter of many trees

The Natural Life

by Marisa Daniels

There's a storm outside, and the wind is howling like some wild, crazy animal. I've heard those cries in nature firsthand; my father took me hunting once. Crouching through bunches of trees in the backwoods of Michigan, we shot at feathery blurs until they were dead. BANG, it left my ears ringing and my insides reeling, and the animals fell to the ground in slow motion, and landed with thuds and crunches. Pop used to show me how one should sneak up on freshly shot creatures; he had the stealth (and paranoia, I observed) of a wartime soldier. The animals you thought were so friendly and pure are your main enemies, my boy! We took them back to Grandpa's cabin, and Ma screamed at the sight of all that blood on me.

Speaking of screams, someone's screaming right now, outside my office. I open the door. It looks like Sue is scared of lightning. My God, can that woman scream! I'm thinking in here, I tell them. My coworkers are all staring at me. Oh well, I'm going back in, and I'm locking my door this time. No more of that nonsense.

I look into the long mirror behind the office door, but the light's bad in here. Every morning at the same hour the sun used to shine directly into my office windows and the glare was terribly distracting, so last month I boarded them up. A few rays still leak in from the holes in the roof where the ceiling was (it was removed for repair), and now I am never distracted. The planks also keep the pollution out. This city's air has really gone bad.

I adjust my hat in the mirror. It's a Khaki-colored pith hat I saw half-price in a store window the other day. It's a good, sturdy hat, too, the kind that's just right for hunting. You know, my father took me hunting once. He was a real outdoorsman. Not me, though. I'm an office type. I can sit at a desk for hours, without even stretching. I've learned to do that over the years; to work hard is the most important thing in life.

Sue's knocking. Oh, Jesus, hold on, I'm coming! I get up and unlock the door, and I open it a crack. I'd rather not have her in here. She's always very nosy.

She asks if I want the files to be completed today. I tell her anytime, anytime, and I move to shut the door. Sir, she says, are you all right? Of course I'm all right, never been better, just sitting here, working busily, busily working, the way you ought to be. She walks away.

Jesus, how nosy. I really should get a new secretary. My wife was nosy in the same way, and I knew she had to go. It's unnatural to be so nosy. I live alone now, and it's far easier on the nerves.

Knocking again!

What, what is it? I open the door a smaller crack than before and Nosy Sue holds out two small green pills and a Dixiecup full of water. I take them, thank her, and shut the door. The pills ease my nerves, a little. I yell that maybe she could adjust the thermostat a little; in the mirror, I can see the sweat coating my torso.

I move toward my bookcase, which is full of these ugly nature books and magazines that were left by the last person to use this office. I never read any of them. I'm really not the nature type; give me an office over sunshine any day! I like to be orderly. I don't like to have to hunt through bunches of paper to find what I want. My father took me hunting once. We searched through fields and fields to find an animal within range. Uncontrollable, chaotic the natural world is. It is not for me.

I give the rest of my water to the withering plant in the corner. That damn thing, after a whole year, has barely grown at all. No green thumbs on this man, no sir! Actually, I guess I should say no green *thumb*, since I only have one now. I lost the other one in an accident as a very small boy. My father took me hunting once. The tiny deer he aimed at that evening, what he said would be the final shot of the day, must have been rabid or something because it began to charge straight at us. Pop let the gun slip, and it fell to the ground, and it went off, and got my thumb.

I walk away from the bookcase and sit down at my little desk. It's neat and orderly, just the way I like it. I pick up a small ceramic lion from the desk, and I make it growl. AURRGGGHHH! GRRRAWWW! NRRALLL! It dances and shakes in the air.

I stop and look up. Sue has the door open, but she is still outside. She clears her throat. I thought I locked the door, Sue. (Sue the nose, nosy, Nosy Sue.) She says I must have pushed the button too lightly, and that she thought she heard odd noises, so she came to check on me.

I rise, and tell her that, in the future, I do *not* need to be "checked" on, no matter what she thinks she hears, and that maybe her ears should be checked instead, and I shut the door again, taking care to lock it this time.

I notice something below my feet, and look down, squinting to see in the meager rays of light from where the ceiling used to be. There is a lone paperclip on the green shag carpet, and I maneuver with my toes to pick it up and drop it in the wastebasket.

The sky is getting more and more cloudy, so I have less and less light. In fact, I am in total blackness all of a sudden, and the complete darkness is too much. I move to open the door, but the lock sticks. Please, someone! Someone open the door! Help me please, help!

I hear a growling noise behind me, and I peer into the darkness.

As my eyes adjust I can make out silhouettes, and then color, and then...a large lion stands before me, and there's dense shrubbery all around us, and I still can't get the door open! Can't get out! I scream, and throw my helmet at him, but he keeps growling and snarling.

I remember the gun hidden behind the bookcase. I knew it would come in handy. I knew it when I bought it the other day. I fumble for it, pull it out, and aim at the lion. He can't have me. I will kill him first. I work here, I tell him. I'm an excellent worker, and I have to keep working! I think that maybe he understands, because he begins to back off, but I'm not letting him get away that easily.

I skitter around on the mossy floor, flatten myself against the wall of vegetation, sneak up on him, and...BANG, it leaves my ears ringing, and the animal falls in slow motion, and lands with a loud thud.

I got him!

But, as I look, there are more animals in the dark that I couldn't see before. I begin shooting all around me, trying to get them all, when I feel a stabbing warmth in my chest, and the backwoods fade softly away.

Sue stepped into the office, and stopped just barely through the doorway, holding her breath. She picked up the ragged pith helmet, and turned to the two policemen behind her.

"No," she said quietly, "I had no idea *how* bad his office was getting. I would have said *something*. My god," she muttered, wading through dead plants strewn all around and animal pictures cut out from magazines, "this is nuts. He tore his carpet out and planted *grass*, Jesus."

The hole in the pipe had allowed water to leak onto the floor. Now tiny rivers formed at their feet, and a mud puddle was developing around the bottom of the file cabinets. The officer moved toward it and opened a drawer.

"Dirt," he said, "in all the cabinets."

She shook her head. "I think he had a nervous condition, or something. I gave him his pills each day, since he said he worked too hard to remember when to take them, but I didn't know exactly what they were for. I would have asked his wife, but I only met her once." The officers looked at each other.

"She hasn't been seen in a month," one said, "and apparently their apartment was sold before she disappeared. Is there anything else you can tell us?"

"I don't know." Sue blinked, wondering if he'd simply been living in the office. She cleared her throat and continued. "Well, I suspect that he didn't usually wear clothes. At least, not on his arms or feet, the only parts

of him I saw. I was the only one he'd ever open his office door for, though, so it was never really a problem." She sighed. "His father owns this business. He hired me in the first place. I asked him about his son one time, and all he said was, 'That boy's a natural-born worker.'" She looked at where the body had been. "So what happened?"

"One of the bullets he fired ricocheted off the exposed piping where the ceiling used to be," the policeman answered, gesturing overhead, "and it got him in the heart."

Shattered

by Rachel C. Wood

Backwards goes the time in the minds of lonely souls
Tiptoeing through the world of laughter and whispers and kisses and tears and...

I am drowning in what was and what will be but what is not now
Emptiness finds the quivering body of partial being
Hearts make enemies with change

Cut my skin with the delicacy of your touch
And it will bleed the salty tears of a desperate soul

Tear at my seams with your confusion
And pull out the shattered pieces of my rosecolored glass house

Cry with me as I fall apart
Hold me as I drown so slowly
Kiss me as my eyes close softly...

And save me from myself.

She is Not Your Mother...

by Alisa Dodge

She is not your mother's new tiffany lamp, fragile, shattered if turned upside down
She does not drown her solitude in crystal tears and wither within her porcelain façade

I am the voice of Artemis, screaming independent spirit, warning that I do not exist,
exist for you alone

She is not insight lost in your mother's petticoat, intelligence suffocated by her corset
She is not chained in an emotive tower, waiting for her sane saviour

I am the body of Artemis, self-pleasured nudity, dancing around your lust, lust you
expect me to venerate

She is not your mother's cross-stitch, tender to every pull and tug, ready to unravel at
any moment
She is not fragility in femininity, yet you skirt around her sex

I am the mind of Artemis, swift self-determination, sovereignty you attempt to trip
with condescension

And so,

She fights with silver arrows, while dancing in moonlight and seduces you with
subtleties

She entangles you with whispering leaves of self-deception

She watches you swim in her moat, allowing you to drown in disillusion

While you believe you keep her afloat

She watches from her fortress, where she sings in seclusion and waits

Waits for you to realize that she dresses herself in clandestine cloth

A stitch of Demeter, a knot of Athena, a thread of Aphrodite

Secret strength sewn inside, transformed at night

She keeps her loom warm, her womb warm

And her tapestry does not come undone

But only intensifies, thickens, to keep you warm

When you fall apart

Leaves

by Christina Mun

B – Look at that autumn.

A - I once was lost in your hollow.

B - My what?

A - You're hollow. In your neck. Sometimes it was so warm that the air tasted sweet. I must have been wrong about the taste.

B – I've hurt you. Forgive me. (More demanding) Forgive me.

A - I heard you. I always hear you the first time.

B - Remember when we made that pot...

A - And it collapsed? No.

B - You don't listen. That's the difference.

A - Between what?

B - Between pots and hollows.

A - Pots are hollow. Think about that one.

B - I already have. It's not true. It can't be.

A - Do you hear that? The leaves are rustling. I used to think that leaves were more graceful at falling than rain.

B – when will you return?

A – don't you understand? Those leaves, they know me more than you do. They know my name better than you ever did.

B – I know your name.

A – you never said it. In all that time, you never said it. You might as well have called me the rain.

B – some things are better left unsaid.

A – Leave God out of this.

B – But you're leaving me out of this.

A – you never wanted in. And now the air is crisp and I am a leaf wafting, falling.

B – I promised I'd catch you.

A – But you didn't. That's the difference.

B – I didn't think you were falling so fast. Difference between right and wrong?

A – no. Between your word and your actions. So maybe things *are* better left unsaid.

And you're wrong about that – I'm falling slowly, slower than ever before.

B – I'll allow you to go. Only if you tell me when you're returning.

A – slowly

B – when the flowers bloom?

A – Time is your god.

B – Only because I need you. How will I stay myself until then?

A – you won't. That's the treat.

And you thought I needed you.

B – you do. You just haven't realized it yet.

A – you don't know my name. You speak of flowers when it's raining leaves. God will change you.

B – I don't want god. You know what I want.

A – You're wrong. Maybe I'm wrong too.

B – I'm never wrong.

A - Look at that autumn. My autumn.

The catastrophe of the caterpillar

by Jessa Lingel

I didn't really understand until the morning I saw the caterpillar. Mom had said that there was some kind of mold growing underneath the windowsill. It was a blacky-brownish mass, clinging malignantly to the white wood. It looked like a very fuzzy caterpillar, only somehow sinister, full of corruption and malice. The fact that it so obviously didn't belong in the cleanliness of the room, the cleanliness of the house, made you want to avert your eyes. But I couldn't. Couldn't ignore it. Couldn't walk into the room without my eyes glued to that spot. This grotesque fascination gripped me, and my muscles shifted without my consent. Later that day, Dad cleaned it up. But there were still these little black spots after, a permanent testament of resentful resistance, regardless of how hard he scrubbed away at it. And I always pictured the tumor behind his eye as a bunch of blacky-brownish mold, just eating away. Eating away at his vision, his pride, his dignity, at the delicate intricacies so carefully woven throughout my family.

Mom told me, not Dad. She told me one night as she drove me home from work. I don't remember the exact words she used, but I do remember that she said I caught on the fastest. I took it as a sign that I should take other things on quickly too. The fear consumed me only for a short while. Mom told me, we drove home, I went upstairs, took a shower, went to my room, and collapsed on the floor in a heap of towels and wet hair and choked up terror. They say that your blood turns to ice when you're scared. Mine felt more like vomit – or blacky-brownish mold. Even though it seemed like forever, it was only a few minutes before I was up, dressed, downstairs, and setting the table. From that point I was mechanical, robotic, perfunctory, but calm and capable. And strong. I only told four people. I called Charlene that night, but couldn't say anything. I made her give me the notebook and then drive away. I wrote it all down. The fear, the prayers, the blatant terror of the numbers. Cancer will convert you to a passion for numbers. A certain number of successes, such and such percentage of expected retained vision, the number of patients this doctor treats, the numerical likelihood of this cancer spreading into that one. And then the arbitrary numbers. The number of letters in malignant melanoma. The number of words you can get from cancer (twelve). If you let it, numbers will rule your life when your life involves cancer. I told Sylvia the next day as we were walking away from class. I could feel her sympathy, as if it were more than an emotion, but something tangible, like a thick and hazy smoke

that she was desperate to wrap around me. I was desperate too. About a week later, I told two people at work, first Katrina, and then Ryan. I think because I wanted an excuse for what I anticipated to be bitchiness.

That's what surprised me; how easy this was to hide. When something so integral to your life changes so dramatically, you expect it to be obvious. But no one knew, which I have to admit has been a source of pride. It makes me feel strong, and I know that's not right. I feel strong because I have not cried for my father. Have not cried when I see his eye bandaged and red. Have not cried when I see him struggle to read. Have not cried when I see him staring out the window, and I know he's thinking about all those years of sight that were taken for granted. Because in spite of all the babble about strength in the acceptance of tears, strength in the ability to cry, I know that crying is weakness. To cry is to give in, and I can never give in. Even when I hear people, usually middle aged women, ask him how he is, ask him how he feels. My father did not tell these women. And when he replies so lightly, and when they stupidly think that they must have been misinformed at the disease's severity – I can see them think it, I can see them underestimate him – and when they say, "you're lucky" it's all I can do not to hit them. Hit them so hard, like a cat's cry, like a fallen cradle, like a Beethoven cadenza. They do not know. But I say nothing, I stand and smile, act like I'm grateful for their pathetic presumptions. Because that is what my parents need.

That is what lies underneath my mother's looks and words. She says, "It took them a bit longer to understand." She means, "We need you to explain, to be there, to be strong." It means don't talk back, don't push, don't pull. One mother is not enough in this battle. And so I cook, and clean, and put them to bed and smile and keep these secrets. I answer questions that have no answers, smile and sing when all I want to do is collapse and cry. And they tell me I'm strongest. Everyone says I'm strongest. And I see those spots on the windowsill, and pray that the cancer is gone. Pray that the proton therapy worked. Pray that my father falls into that percentage of successes. Pray that he loses vision, not an eye. Mostly, I pray for strength. Strength for my family. For my father, and for myself. And perhaps admitting that I need that strength is enough. Perhaps that will be enough to fight this evil black mess that has invaded our home, and perhaps then I will be able to look at the windowsill without fear. Because that's what the real enemy is. We are not fighting cancer – we are fighting fear.

Thirty-Four Flights

by Ted Eckmann

Roughly one year ago, I received my first jury summons in the mail. Luckily, the annoying pink form listed my appearance date as some time in late September. I would be in school. I called to explain this, and conjured up a few excuses for why I couldn't report during winter or spring breaks either. So they rescheduled me for late June.

I hoped they would forget, or that computer databases and shuffling paperwork and bureaucratic disorganization would conspire to lose the record of my postponed assignment. They didn't forget.

In May, I found another summons waiting in my mailbox. But another alibi proffered itself: I would take a summer school class. They asked when it would be over. The mail surprisingly came through again, and so I found myself out of exemptions, and sitting in the San Diego Superior Court's jury lounge at 7:45 this morning.

The unsuccessful escape attempts provided a year of amusement, at least.

I grimaced as the jury clerk read my name in the very first batch: early in the day so that even if I wasn't selected for the final twelve on the morning case, I'd probably have to face voir dire again for an afternoon panel-choosing process.

Three hours later, after enduring through the jury questioning, I found myself excused to go down to the juror's office and sign-in for another go. I thought better of this.

I exited past the metal detectors and bounded down Broadway, knowing they couldn't call me if I didn't report back to the lounge. The whole process would soon shut down for a lunch break anyway. According to their scheduling computers I'd still be sitting obediently in the courtroom, with no way for them to know where I really was.

My jaunt took me past some very tall buildings, a few of which I decided to explore. I strolled right through the lobby of the US Bank building, boarded an elevator and swiftly punched the top button. The silent ride whisked me up to a floor numbered in the high twenties, and I twisted through a few boring corridors to find another elevator - this one covering

the higher floors, up to thirty-two. Again, I thumbed the top button, and the doors parted for another hallway. I skulked past a few doors and found my way into the service elevator, walled with stained-white padding, instead of the opulently decorative mirrors and polished wood-grain of the elevator cars on the main shafts. But it did offer two additional options for ascending travel: button circles for thirty-three and thirty-four now appeared at the top of the selection panel as possible destinations.

I arrived at number thirty-four, and crept through tight passageways clogged with large cardboard boxes and employees doing work-related service activities. I hastily moved down a darkened artery towards the stairwell, and then turned upwards, expecting to find the roof-access door locked. My assumption was correct.

I sighed, and plodded down the stairs to a white placard labeled with a black number: thirty-three. I reached for the door and attempted to turn the handle, but it didn't budge.

I tried again at thirty-two with the same unsuccessful result. And at thirty-one. And thirty. And twenty-nine.

At this point, I considered making a retreat to the thirty-fourth floor, where I'd entered the stairwell. But I reasoned that my chances were about the same up there: all the doors were conveniently locked from the outside, for security reasons, I'm sure (though what good is that if the elevators will gladly open at any floor). I continued down a few more flights. And found the doors were still locked.

Twenty-five. Twenty-four. Twenty-three.

I knew I was in for a bit of a walk.

As I passed the third floor, it occurred to me that I'd be mighty upset if the door on the first floor was also locked. But it did open, onto a long, mazy corridor. Which ended in another door. Through this, I found another service tunnel, followed by a double-door, followed by another hallway. As I approached each potentially-locked exit, I paused to reflect on what a silly misadventure I was having, and the potential for things to get much sillier should the next handle click firmly in place instead of turning open.

I started to make contingent plans for what I'd do if I were indeed completely locked inside the stairwell. No cell phone. Thick, soundproof

concrete walls and heavy doors imprisoning me. With the exception of a final security check before closing time, I didn't expect to meet anyone else in the stairway; I'm sure no one ever really uses it. No emergency buttons like those provided in elevators. It had the makings of a rather bad situation.

Finally, I saw a crack of daylight effusing through the final obstacle. I addressed the building: "I promise I'll be more careful in my future urban exploring, but please, please, please, let this last door be unlocked."

It opened. I pushed the last double door apart, and casually walked past two large cargo trucks, wooden crates, some loading dock equipment, and back onto the sidewalk.

I ducked into the lobby of the Emerald Towers Hotel, and explored the much more adventure-friendly building. After riding the glass-walled elevators and admiring the skyline views for a while, I grabbed a stale chocolate-chip cookie from a company gathering on the third floor, and did something completely brainless: I returned to the jury building and checked-in. I have no idea why I did that.

Twenty minutes earlier, while sitting in a plush chair, comfortably reading my book in a quiet section of the upper hotel lobby, I decided that I'd return to the jury lounge around 3:30 or so, when it would be too late in the day to put me on another panel. I knew I'd have to go back eventually to check-out, but I dumbly forgot to verify the time before returning. It was only 2:45. This unfortunately allowed plenty of time for me to be summoned back to the courtrooms. They called my name just a few minutes later. I sat. I sat. I slept. I was excused. I went home.

All through that final wasted hour, I thought of how I could've been romping about the lobbies and salad bars of any hotel in the area, or sitting in the afternoon sun at seaport village, or riding elevators to the top of a skyscraper, or pluckily trooping down thirty-four flights of another locked stairwell. I'm a dork.

Spell it out for me (ten commandments)

by Damon Hill

one. i want the taste of
your time - flavored now
-n- laters melting across my tongue &
you with an IV loaded
just to make sure i get enough. thus
explains my malnutrition.

two. you want the fragrant bath towel
embalmed in newspaper print.
painting photographs across the
street from the corner &
a bag of Flaming Hot Cheetos®

three. i want to feel the privilege
of transparent flesh stretching across
me & my arm transforming into
a beating heart. and you still don't
understand me.

four. i masturbate my
emotions for you night after

five. night after
night after night
after- go to five.

six. hanging myself alongside
prides gallows. offer your needs
wrapped cleanly in love &
i will ingest it as you wish.

seven. you want the vindicated
lubrication of birth control pills.
sea water burning in a forest of ivory.

eight. sometimes i watch my heart
trying to beat down your door. &
you, hiding behind Venetian eyelids. i
watch my heart knocking & wish
it would stop.

nine. sometimes i follow tears rising
over the horizon to fall
from the sky at midnight.

ten. & you, trapped in your
own illiteracy, concealing the key behind
the truth in your words.

The Privilege of the Dead

by J Salvadori

Hadrian, alabaster devil-sculpture born without horns.
Electric Holly, fallen angel blessed with spiraling madness.

1: Electric Holly doesn't remember how she got here, but she knows that she's missing her wings. As she goes limp, she finds strength in her weakness, when the current in the ground around her flows in unchecked. She stares upwards at a streetlight. Her pupils are pinpoints, looking out across a vast blank space. She collapses in a heap on the floor, in a blood-muddied puddle.

2: Hadrian would be a merman if he could, because he's golden and pale. When he walks he's walking on water all the time. He notices the puddle of blood dripping around the corner, but thinks it's only the blood of a martyr. He slows as he gets to the edge because he's rematerializing—from nothingness to nothingness again.

3: H: Have you fallen?
His hands are shaking and he's ghost white as all of his blood drains outwards when he's touching her. Hadrian's eyes look down upon a woman he knows he's seen before. She turns to face him with a singular gaze, pleading honesty, her eyes blinking broken and clear.

4: He looks down at her, and runs his fingers through the dust in front of him, inscribing the surface with symbols and electric silences.

H: How long have you been down—

But he cuts himself off deliberately, he doesn't want to make her skin crawl like that, and he remembers his first time facing this.

5: EH: I'm *sick-tired-defamed-and-starved*. When Holly's hand touches Hadrian, she implants all of her feelings into him, a gut-punch of raw loss that brings a tear to his eye.

H: Please don't project on me like that again. He begs, afraid of her intensities.

Electric Holly squirms around on the ground that she's nailing herself to.

EH: Take me home. She looks up at him unblinking.

6: H: Give me the last time you kissed someone true love and I'll

bring you straight to your voudon.

EH: He's not a priest since they defrocked him last year for violating his vows of silence.

H: He speaks to you—a privilege.

Hadrian stands tall, jerked by her thoughts into a monument to the moment, his posture approaching the limits of infinite ecstasy—she breathes in:

7: *(electric holly's voice)*

Because you were dark and solid and built from melted caramel stretched violently I kissed you on tangy lips. Your tongue was furious with me for daring you to play these games with me but your hands grabbed me tightly and pulled me towards you. I left deep scratchmarks in you from the sharp edges of my fingertips as I glissanded from vertebrae to vertebrae. Your eyes grew as wide as mine had been when you recognized how I knew you from before this and after this and during this.

8: Hadrian says nothing and picks her up, gently. She's warm where she presses against him and he likes the feel of her flesh. She leans her forehead against him and he stops because the world is unfolding as she sees it now:

A kinetic sculpture with three beams of light and a metaphorical halo.

10: Holly is flushed with her own mind bringing frenzy into frenzy, but the one thing that might help her can't be found. Neither sees through the haze they're making.

EH: I need something to end this right now or I'm going to spill myself onto the world again.

She motions her eyes downwards, then her hands downwards, then leans down to vomit, afraid to open or close her eyes, crawling up inside herself, her mind desperately trying to reel itself backwards.

11: She's melting up and covering the room in steam. He can't believe she's gone this long but he knows she's coming apart from the inside again already. He goes back to the place where they'd been huddling together. Whenever he touches her he feels static on every level.

Interlude of dialog for two voices in a whirlwind:

H: You're doing it.

EH: I don't mean to.

H: You're pushing everything at me.

EH: I can't tell.

H: Stop doing it.

EH: I'm just being.

H: You're selling.

EH: You can have what you want.

H: I don't want it.

EH: Why not?

H: I don't need all of you.

EH: You want me around, though.

H: Not if it's going to cost me like this.

EH: I don't understand.

H: When you touch me...

EH: My skin touches your skin.

Anything else you feel belongs to you.

12: H: You have to learn to think through it.

EH: I can't think. There's no way I could think. It's too much. I need something.

H: You need to learn who you are.

She clenches her fist. She feels herself dissolve into conscious consonance, then floats out of her clothing as Hadrian watches, enraptured.

13: He watches her naked on the bed, privileged to touch her while she's dreaming of angels—and safe. Her ribcage juts proudly through her skin as she breathes slowly. He pulls the sheet down the swell of her spine and feels the scars that run along both of her shoulder blades. A tear runs down his nose and onto her back, where it takes on a life of its own and runs down her spine and then down the curve of her leg.

14: EH: I'm not projecting.

H: I know.

EH: You're crying.

H: I know.

15: Electric Holly feels Hadrian running his thumbs over the scars on her shoulders, and she spreads out comfortably underneath his weight.

H: You've fallen.

She smiles and blinks, discarding his remark.

EH: Don't speak.

16: Hadrian feels a trickle of blood running down his arms where the

chains encircling are cutting into him, but ignores it, deciding that he enjoys the warmth and flow. With his fingertips he feels every kink and stretch and pop inside her and feels her pouring everything she can into him. His mind fills up with joy and with joy and with joy and then he is spinning into joy, stopped atop her with his fingertips splayed over her skin.

EH: There's more.

17: H: I don't know if I can take much more of that—it's too intense—it's too much.

EH: It's not enough, though, is it?

Electric Holly laughs in Hadrian's direction but he doesn't feel it, it goes right through him. He's staring off into space, his eyes half-closed, trying to recapture the feeling that this fallen child had given him.

18: H: I could never get enough of knowing that joy.

She smirks to herself and he wonders why but won't ask because he's misapplying probability theory. Finally he notices because her smile keeps growing wider and her gaze-implicit laughter stronger and stronger.

H: What?—and she touches him:

19: (*electric holly's voice*)

You were made of sculpted milk and muscle, and too proud to kneel. I might have flown had I not seen the sights that you had shown me, the blinking lights and heights unknown. I fell a thousand fathoms, through universe and atoms, was shorn of wings and robbed of name, and woke up crying on the corner. Do not mourn.

20: Hadrian stands still in the corner of the alley, trying to forget her image, instead standing steadily as the mist around him grows to a rain which becomes fast enough to wash off his tears of blood. Electric Holly stands at the end of the road and moves forward into the night, then back. He holds her hand in his own, then brings it to his lips. She reaches around his back and runs her fingers over his own scars.

Untitled

by andy lee

the daily ritual of
consumption
deviates not far from one's routine.
this constant desire to take in,
over abundance, leads even the
strongest of men to stray—
he is a victim himself.
follow his inner justifications
and you will see the path.
as sin grabs his throat and
leads him down onto his knees.
lacking will, overcome by his own pains,
the feeble soul diminishes into
the pit of despair
which denies the purity of truth
and restraint.
he has no choice now but to
follow through;
where he has chosen to walk
he cannot deny the inevitable.
pounding, thrusting, unrelentless motion.
the resistance to his force undaunting to his fury—
the residual effect, a common one.
he's familiar with the scene:
darkness pierced by bitter cold,
bitter cold soothed by burning iniquity.
seeing nothing, fearing everything
he continues this dreary march.
from this point,
he's not too far...
close, near to what is necessary
close, near to his release
close, near to his preservation of sanity.
the last few steps approach with
anticipation.
the hand released from the pulsing throat;
he inhales consistently.
a torch is seen burning and
his breaths do not cease.
what he has lusted,
he has now received.
what he has received,

he will want again.
that day, another time,
an instance lying restlessly
in front of his future treks.
his face now lit
but his eyes still shut,
undoubtedly trembling.
in regret and contempt,
his head bowed low
in shame and contemplation.
self understanding delivers
the message—
the sin unquestionably unwarranted,
but one which will forever be the fire
in his burning soul.
the tears drip from the bloodshot eyes
which roll heavily back
as primal sedation takes bite.
he awakes and wipes the tears,
he didn't mean to afflict any pain
but the tears still flow.
understand that "remorse"
remains just a sound, a word without meaning.
he whispers he is sorry but
the tears, hers, play on.

dreamin on a glacier

by Andrew Vennari

After waking inside of a rind
I peel myself out and reeling
 am blind
smelling citrus and yelling
feeling phallic clitoris swelling

and belly to the ground
slinking darkly around downtown
the lowly dredges drudging
 doldrum bound
 suddenly am found
 in a scattered tangled tattered mess
 traces of stress no more no less

wandering
 sky high wilderness
 above all trees
 thin air curing disease

water falls within white granite walls
icy dreams of turquoise lakes
 and clear clean streams
 which gurgle and gleam serene

underneath the
 stretching vast and blue amazing sky
 embedded with mountains that slowly die
motionless weathered slate, like the state
 cracking and crumbling
 glaciers grumbling rumbling
 as the suns effects diminish

we muse
 bearing witness to maternal abuse
 drowning in refuse piled loose
 slacking purpose and lacking use

II
Being chased by gnarly snaggle-toothed grizzly
galloping fiercely, bounding
 through meadows of pines and green
running rampant through scree
 and slipping
 as majestic claws are ripping
 flipping earth
 and me screaming

breath steaming
ferocious roar deafening din
grinning and sinning
scratching stone
tearing bone
wondering full of awesome ambivalent angst
and radical reciprocity

Bear, baring it all
never will fall
to consider the sad clowns
in outcast tiny towns
which become lucid traps
while flaccid unblinking eyelids flap
and warped time defying naps
wrap and slap conscious thinking

So setting sail to float a boat to the sky
while far away people die
wondering why
it is that the truths seems to be veiled
as our awkward emotions never prevailed

Everlasting a splintered sliver to the heart
making us shiver and fall apart

The status quo is for sheep to follow
forever
in subterranean depths do we wallow

Untitled

by Stacy Eisenberg

In Malibu where celebrities live
we stop at a beach where
the water discreetly laps
against orange sand and
all is quiet except for the
telltale pitter of helicopters.

In Haight outside a coffee shop
a man exudes hostility
sharpening the desperation
that permeates the air
and down the street the ocean broods
heaving and misty in the dark night.

In Santa Barbara the shore is square
a box for the sea
and we sit on the pier and point out
a brunette waitress and big ugly birds
sweeping peanut shells on the floor.

In a small fish market in Chinatown
small people pay small prices for fish
crowded in small fish tanks
and go home and drink condensed milk
and eat condensed ocean
and are full.

Carmel's senior citizens jog past us
starving for a decaf cappuccino
as we roll up our jeans
and head down to the shore
the wind tousling our hair
the frothy waves bathing
the chocolate brown rocks
in perfect, passionate beauty

Are they understood only by us?
Will they leave scars that we will hide?
Or do scars heal and we will forget?
Is that what has been painted over?
Is that what they mean when they say

that our future is a blank canvas?

We don't know
so we get in the car
and keep
driving.

dolores de la primavera y el calor de agosto

by José Felipe Alvergue

I was there the day that Dolores de la Primavera surrendered her civility to the morning heat of August, and bit that old politician through his white suit like a dog while he drank his coffee in the company of his associates at the grand opening of the new Sanburns across the street. And, although it wasn't the first time that I'd seen someone forget themselves during the hot days of August, the way I lost her has caused in me an insecurity that, because of the condition of my age, I've been unable to ignore.

Had I been aware that I was three years older than I actually was, and that it was possible for many realities to exist at once, I might have been able to warn myself so that I would have been prepared, or maybe killed myself beforehand. Then I would have at least tried, and although this all happened in a world I couldn't control, I wouldn't feel as guilty or confused as I do now. But either way, I still would have had no way of stopping the heat from taking her. The heat has become famous among those more prudent citizens along the Tijuana River Valley to the plateaus of Otay, who stay in their homes and watch the streets through screen doors and windows perspiring from air-conditioning, wherever they are lucky enough to have it, how the heat plays with people's lives. Even bachelor priests have made it customary to deliver sermons that make examples of the methods of August in the hopes of instilling an aversion to all acts that result in a rise in temperature, declaring them acts of the devil. And as I saw Dolores de la Primavera standing in front of the old politician in the white suit, holding his European cup using only his thumb and index finger, a foot from his face without taking a sip on the patio of the new Sanburns, I got the sense of a sacrilege being committed. And realized that, perhaps, our priests' sermons weren't much less realistic than our stories.

I have been hearing the stories of August since I was a child. Like the one about the woman who killed her husband with a child's toy dangerously sharpened into a fierce point on the soles of her mother-in-law's therapeutic shoes made rough like grating boards from walking on pot hole ridden sidewalks during her mid morning errand runs in August. A story I heard, the first time, from my mother as I fumbled with my father's wool tie on the night I had decided to ask some girl a question I can't remember. The stories would do that to a person. Like the stories of children who play in the streets after dark being carried away by the thickness of the hot air, and being reborn as mongrel puppies to homeless mother dogs with ground-scraping tits in September.

The stories that I remember exciting my father were those that dealt with the state of the city. The stories he told me always related to the actions of those workers thirteen-years-old and younger who were given half days off from the maquilas. A condition that made for dangerous parks and supermarkets tyrannically over run by roving gangs of temporarily unemployed kids made desperate from inoccupation, and government offices overflowing with North

American lawyers making demands on behalf of NAFTA corporations. I'm sure of it, that because of these stories it has become a requirement for ice-cream vendors to carry switchblades during the month of August, lest children, uniformed in industrial blue capes and their American institutionalizers overtake them.

But the story of Dolores de la Primavera has always been the heaviest on my heart. I've never liked retelling it. I've always preferred remembering her as she was before the heat claimed. Retelling her story only reminds me of my confused body that grows old and never dies, but only reminds me of death. Especially now, I want to go back to the time when I was a child, and take her from that fatal moment she remembered what that man had taken from her, in her new gray linen suit, with her hair done unprofessionally for the first time, and bring her back with me, and have her hold me in her lap on the hottest day of August, and wave the heat from my face, and massage the sweat on my chest with her dark reassuring fingers. I want to be, eternally, at an age defined by the way she holds me. And, I want to feel what it would feel like to be her, holding me as a child forever in a memory of an intimate moment between two victims of the confusing progress of many realities within the same existence. But, when I saw Dolores de la Primavera kneel down in front of that old politician in the white suit, who draped his left hand over the delicate rail of the small metal fence separating the patio of the new Sanburns from the sidewalk, where people had their coffee and sugar cookies while they read the paper, and the latest book by Carlos Fuentes, and as I saw her hold his hand in her dark fingers, startling the man at first, but then amusing him, and then bring her mouth wearing lipstick for the first time uncomfortably, to the fleshy part of his arm, I thought of when she was real and not a memory for me to play with, and selfishly keep for myself, protected from the reality of the heat.

Dolores de la Primavera was twenty-seven when she bit that old politician she has taught me to hate. A man I had also met years ago when he came with his associates and American lawyers to make a speech about developing the field that stood a few blocks away, where the maquiladoras have been built. But, she was really only twenty-four from where I saw her, and when I had come to know her well enough to believe I had made her out of meat, and peppered lime juice one night, drunk and alone behind my curtain of smoke like some selfish overgrown child with the habit of creating life. She had come north when she was sixteen to find work, and was given a job in one of the factories in the industrial park a few blocks away. It was a small maquiladora then, and she worked in one of the eighteen assembly lines where she glued a clear plastic strip to an aluminum placard in a vinyl sleeve alongside seven other women in blue frocks. The work itself wasn't challenging, but keeping one's concentration so as to minimize error, while maintaining the right level of mental detachment, was enough to soak her clothes in sweat by the time the fourth bell rang. Compared to the life she had left behind, this sort of mechanized animation at least offered her a security and a humanity she had been robbed of as a child by the man in the white suit who had sealed all our fates with his ambition.

She never lingered with the other women to gossip over the affairs of their supervisors, or allowed herself to be carried along the scenery created by the

small shops, taco stands, and graffiti covered walls on the words of the young men from other factories in the industrial park, whose hair smelled of gelatin flowers, and shone with an unnatural brightness compared to the thick black of their eyebrows. She walked to work in the morning, and walked home in the evening. The time in between was reserved for the glue and plastic strips that came together in her delicate Sunday school fingers to make something she would never use or see, and which God himself never imagined would be made. This allowed her to work efficiently. Efficiency. It was what drove her. Something in her past had taught her that an efficient creature is a human creature. So she ordered her life around it: in her work, in the way she ate, in the way she slept, in the way she stood with a urine bloated belly for twelve hours a day. And, in how she thought of the past with the way she walked.

Quickly, always, even though she was new to the city, and I imagine would have wanted to walk slowly, and eat up everything around her. I have seen a lot of different people walk by my torta stand, according to their lives. An old man walking reluctantly to his one-roomed loneliness, stopping at every opportunity to be seen, and pitied, maybe even be invited for a drink, a conversation, walking slow, but sad. His smile only making him look that much more pathetic. And I've seen young men and women after love making also walking slow, but with promise. With a satisfaction in the direction of their lives. But before sex, on their way to sex, the same young men and women walk fast, in deep concentration, in the psychological state of a pitcher in the middle of a routine, making sure to successfully complete each step, maneuver each corner, each pot hole in order to reach their destination in the quickest way possible, but without compromising their safety or performance. Sometimes, I wished that I could step out from behind the darkness of the grill and walk with them to wherever they were going, and because I felt that I understood the reality of their walk, I could accept the responsibility of sharing the experience with them – giving as much as I took.

But, the way Dolores de la Primavera walked was different than all of these. And, the spirit of her walk, as I understood it, intimidated me. She walked fast, but not towards anyone who would touch her back. It wasn't a careless speed either. She was aware of the colored breeze of earthly hues being emitted from the crystalline prisms that trapped the people and ceramic pigs in cowboy hats bouncing off each other in the life that blurred by her vision with each precise stride of her short brown legs ticking like a metronome. She just didn't care about her surroundings, at least not as much as she cared about the memory of the first time she met the politician, which she dangled in front of herself like a carrot for a donkey, on a stick in her mind.

She ran past my torta stand like the shadow of a sundial elapsing an entire day behind the curtain of fragrant smoke that held me in the second it took for her to tick by. On that other side of the smoke she had already become nineteen-years-old, but for me she was still sixteen, which is what happens when the spirit of one's walk is truly more powerful than the spirit of the earth's rotation. Out of a necessity to preserve both our lives, I dedicated myself in finding a way to either catch up to her and die together, or stop her and keep her with me. When

I sensed her steps approaching, I would throw as much meat my fingers could hold onto the grill, and would wave the smoke out onto the sidewalk hoping to catch her in my net that froze time, and then either walk out of it together, or live forever inside of it. At first, she walked through it without faltering in her beat, and the meat burned in seconds. I had to throw it to the dogs; it was wasted. One day though, because of the number of dogs that had learned to gather around the sidewalk at that time, or maybe because of her curiosity about the empty torta stand that always had a busy grill, time stopped, and she appeared through the thick smoke. I wished she had never existed for me to waste. The dogs salivated.

I felt guilty once I knew what I was taking from her by stopping her, and what would happen to her if I kept her in the heat of the grill for too long while we talked, but I couldn't help myself from doing it every time she walked by. We talked about our lives, and about the history of our professions. She told me about the South, among other things. And I told her about meat. Neither of us cared about what we had to say, and much less actually paid attention. Sometimes, I'm still not even sure she talked about the South, or her family, and I think I've just imagined it to give her a voice that I calms me when I find myself stumbling across the cobblestones of anxiety, drunk, that wrap around my small planet from the torta stand to the bar three years in the future. Back to back on my wandering rock, my world is an uncelebrated routine, the anonymity of which negates its terminality.

But while she was here it was different. We became related through the existence we shared in our conversations, and that was it. That was all. She wasn't exactly attractive, but one could say that she was real, and that her aesthetic sincerity gave one a reassuring sense of self that became an addiction to a man like me. Her skin was a collage of discolored spots playing into blotches of over-coloration, creating the effect of not really knowing for sure which was her true color. Her scalp hinted down the sides of her face, and trickled across her brow and upper lip, which made a mask of continuous kiwi fuzz, broken up only by the clusters of thicket that sprouted from the occasional mole. In fact, compared to the politician, she was quite ugly, and he, as a man, was beautiful. Only two areas of skin and of his actual self showed. But the tone and texture were enough to make any other older man jealous and look at his cracked leather shoes and put his gray hands in his pockets as he walked past the white suited man on the street. His face, although unmistakably one of an older man, was distinguished, with sharp features, and his hands were smoothly wrinkled, and looked almost like silicone moldings of anatomic precision, unblemished, clean, faultless – perfect.

She was a small poor woman staring into the light heartless eyes of a mannequin in a display window far from her sidewalk, and wondering what it had done to be so lucky as to have flawless skin romantically covered in exquisite clothes, and a cascade of silky white hair blessing its head so regally.

I stared at the woman, and the mannequin in its pose, holding a cup of coffee in its right hand positioned at an angle slightly in front of its face, titled away from the sidewalk, and towards the table. Its left hand extended out towards the street, in front of Dolores de la Primavera, in her way. I knew she was asking herself what made the mannequin so lucky, and that she would eventually

remember what that mannequin had taken from her, and what kind of man it was. And, I knew that catching up to herself, plus the heat of August, which most likely had burned through the string she had used to tie that memory up years ago when she decided to leave him behind, and take only his memory with her, would destroy her, and that with her went any chance of me dying with the rest of the world that existed beyond my smoke, and that now seemed to have caught up to her walk, and was aging three elusive years faster than me. But, she was twenty-seven when she bit him, and only twenty-four to me, and she disappeared from my life before I saw her do it, before I even had a chance to stop her.

Dolores de la Primavera saw the old politician untie the string from his ankle and pick himself up off the dirt, and dust off his white suit like a gentleman. He stretched his back, and cracked his neck, which had cramped from years of being hung upside down, before jogging up to a group of men in black suits. Most of the men carried small notepads; some carried brief cases, which they held tightly. There were even two men with cameras, who circled the group snapping shots from different angles, swooping in to confer with the men with notepads, then buzzing out into their orbits again. They all played close attention to the man in the white suit, and he spoke eloquently, and dramatically. He pointed to an empty field that had stood since forever. He made motions with his arms and hands towards the horizons, and then towards the sky, ending his charade with a smile and a pose for the cameras. When one of the men with a small notepad pointed to a little girl, who was lying on the ground, the politician put his hands on his waist and looked disappointedly at the child, and grew ashamed in front of the men with briefcases.

Dolores de la Primavera knew the little girl, and knew that she liked to lie on the stones by the field when the sun was out, and feel the heat of the earth, and know that, like a loaf of bread, the world was cooking her. She knew that the little girl did this while her mother worked in one of the small factories the politician owned. She knew that the man, as I also knew, owned the buildings where everyone she knew worked. He's always been this sort of man. The little girl, however, had never thought of anything more in life than the heat, and how it aged her according to the will of the earth. She didn't run away, or stop the man when he walked over to where she lay on her stomach, with her dark nose in her paws. Dolores de la Primavera reached out to pull the little girl off the floor before the man could touch her, but she couldn't fight her away from the heat and the stones. So she watched the man pick up a hubcap from the road, and pour cold water from a flask he kept in his coat during the hotter days of the year in to the dish. He placed it down in front of the little girl's face. And she saw the confusion in the little girl's eyes, and the man's hand on the little girl's head, and she saw the little girl grow into a woman, and the hot stones become the hot pavement, and the tight skin of the man's hand become wrinkled and spotted, and the girl's play dress turn into the executive suit of a supervisor for one of the largest maquiladoras in Tijuana, and she saw the man's hand fall from her head down to meet hers in a handshake that sank the woman's heart into her colon, and Dolores de la Primavera saw her let go, and wipe the age off her hand on her firm womanly thigh, and walk past the old man, who became older as she passed, so much so

that his back hunched, and his knees buckled, and his hair blew away in the thick wind and landed as cinders on the sidewalk, and his head sank into his chest, which sagged and crumpled like a humid paper bag, but he never fell, or died. He just aged enough to remember time and death.

The same happened to my body three years prior to that August, when, from behind the curtain of smoke, I saw Dolores de la Primavera bite that old politician like a dog through his white suit and walk past me forever.

The 513

by Jennifer Easterday

The squeak and push of
windshield wipers
is enough to push me back to my dreams,
but when the ding
of a demanded stop interrupts,
I look up to notice
I don't know where we are.
The guy with the headphones
is here again today, pushing out
the sound of the world
with his own method of dreaming.
The girl who tried to sleep
against the pull and sway
of fogged windows yesterday,
must have snoozed her alarm
and missed the bus this morning.
Now I hear the rain on the roof
as I'm watching the
golden trees crawl by,
and I gather my coat close.
The streets are made of umbrellas today.

Blue Rum, Red Rum

by Stephen Bak

red white and blue flames fizzing at the party of the South, rocking the party, rocking the clubs, rocking the drunks, rockin the girls, while your mesmerized by the flashing lights whether you're on or off the e. partake inhale feel the shit in your veins. give in sell out find the path to a glory they proclaim, and you see and you wanna screw and you wanna feel affection because you've been missing out and it looks soooooo damn good you know you got a piece of that and you gotta have a piece of that. that drug, that feel, feel in in your brain your eyes fading in the light of the sunset sunrise sunshine glory of the old glory days of the glorious majesty of king vodka and seniorita tequila and the flame turned upside down and i look at what has become of my life so wonderful as is but so torturous, so tormentous, so hellish freakish sadness i cried so much i cried so much and i want to cry now, but i've been holding it in way to long and i dunno how much longer i can hold on as they whip and whip and whip away at my conciousness and my guilt to their faded wasted reality that is the norm for them that is business for them that is school for them that is life for them and the think they can swim but i can only see my self drowning by the corona beach the pacifico oceano drowning down to the ocean floor lying beneath my grandfather and my forefathers and the suffering as look at my mother, mother ever so suffering mother bleeding through her hands and teeth and crying tears of blood. how could i? ever? how? i think about it and i undo my fathers work. i try and i sip, and i slap my mother, i gulp and take the shot as i cancer along with my grandfather, i become it which i despise and my world as it is combusts, explodes, deludes and ceases to exist.

Roommates

by Jay Richards

It was ten in the evening, it was dark outside the kitchen window. Roger looked out that window, to his left, as he waited. He saw the lights of other homes, and he wondered if they had roommates just as he did. If they did, they wouldn't talk about it, just as he didn't talk about. He wasn't ashamed of it, he didn't even mind it so much anymore, he just thought it would be better not to talk about it.

Rogers double pane, small kitchen window was bordered by a dull white and chipped wooden frame. The curtains were a drab yellow, apparently once white but stained with nicotine. The walls were covered with lime green wallpaper with little blue painted on lace patterns. The wall paper peeled everywhere, and curled up like a snails shell near the top. Under the window was a plain, metal sink that sat upon an extension of the counter to the left. The faucet was a plain long necked metal one with a dark black buildup around the opening. The handles for each water valve, were single long metal protrusions. They were long and unlabeled, though it was of little consequence since the only water options in this house were cold and not so cold.

His cabinets were wooden boxes nailed to the ceiling. They looked as though they had one time been quasi-presentable, but now they hung crooked, and the varnish had worn thin in places. The edges stuck out jaggedly, begging to stick you in the head with a splinter the size of a cigarette. They ran along his wall, on either side of the window for three feet, the one on the right wedged into the corner and continuing along his wall towards the back door for another three feet. The cabinets that ran to the left, turned out from the wall, and hovered over the counter that stretched into the kitchen five feet. The one on the end at the left hung crooked, and the door was always hanging wide open. Inside, were tall and short cylindrical plastic spice containers that leaned to the left. The counter was wood with a thin plastic layer over it designed to make it look like flecked stone, but the edges were square and the edges of the plastic were painfully obvious from the accumulation of brown crust between them.

His stove and oven combination rested on the floor just under the cabinets to the right. It was originally a bright, white, general electric beauty purchased from Sears by one of the earlier inhabitants, but years of neglect had seen the brown streaks and crust of grease creep down over its sides and over the once clear black glass that served as the oven window. It still worked fine, but like everything else in this kitchen, it

looked like it didn't. By the stove, to the right, was a scratched up, carved up, chipped up old wooden door with a basic turn lock near the tarnished brass doorknob. On the other side was a strong metal security door, but with his room mates, Roger wondered why he bothered to put up the security door at all. Behind Roger, beyond the crusty counter, there was a large open spot in the construction of the kitchen. Low from the ceiling in the middle of this spot hung a pseudo chandelier with eight brass arms and light bulbs shaped like flames on the ends of each arm. Three of the light bulbs worked, the others had burnt out a little less than a month ago. Roger only replaced the light bulbs a few at a time, so they frequently had staggered life spans. The large open spot, presumably, had been left as the dining area, but Roger had moved the table into the middle of the kitchen to get it closer to the kitchen sink and stove. The wall that ended the open space in the kitchen ran perpendicular to the one window in the room, and led to a small walk space between it, and the wall that ran parallel to the window and began just beside the wooden door.

Roger was tall and muscularly skinny. His face was oval, and his hair was short, and cut in a buzz style fashion. His goatee and mustache were well trimmed, and the rest of his face was clean shaven. Roger had a steep nose, and strong cheek and jaw bones. His eyebrows were neither bushy nor delinquent, and his brown eyes were devoid of any red streaks. His white skin was tanned slightly, and he was wearing a grey Wilson's t-shirt, and a pair of grey shorts. He was not wearing any shoes.

Roger sighed nervously, and his right foot bobbed up and down pivoting on his toes. It had been an accident, and it was his day in the living room anyways. He hoped the shaved rat would be enough smooth things over. They must still be having their meeting, Roger thought. Probably debating on what sort of peace offering would be appropriate, and whether or not they could get around the "It was my day in the living room," argument. Roger looked up to the ceiling, there were fist sized holes, here and there, in the paneling, one just above the middle of his cheap, four legged, square wooden table. Then Roger saw it, the negotiator, out of the corner of his eye. He looked towards the upper corner near the door, and saw the large, black spider skitter out of the hole just behind the peeling wall paper. It had the body of a black widow, though Roger could not tell for sure from this distance. The spider climbed up onto the ceiling, and crawled along it towards the table. Roger watched its rod like legs pivot and blur as it deftly maneuvered at a speed incomparable to most humans, once the scale difference was taken into account of course. Then it stopped, just above the end of the table opposite Roger. It pivoted its abdomen and then dropped itself from the ceiling suspended by one long thread of silk. The spider lowered itself

quickly, legs fanned out, onto the table, and sat there, immobile, staring at Roger. Roger had to admire the spiders, they had sent out their most outwardly menacing negotiator. They wanted to play hardball, even though they probably knew they didn't have a leg to stand on. Roger smiled at his mental pun, and the spiders front legs twitched furiously.

"No, not you. I'm sorry, I just thought of something funny." Roger said apologetically. Great, he thought to himself, I've offended them already. The black widows two front legs continued to twitch feverishly, its bulbous body bouncing up and down.

"No, I told you." Roger continued. "Yes, very seriously." He watched the legs for a moment longer. "Okay, okay, can we begin? I have an eight o'clock tomorrow." The spider paused for a moment, and then moved her front two legs again, though slowly and more deliberately this time.

"Yes, I am very sorry." Roger apologized sincerely. "It was an accident. But I do feel compelled to remind you that it was my day in the living room, and he *was* on the floor. I can't be expected to constantly be on the lookout for every one of you, it would exhaust my senses." The spider began twitching her two front legs furiously, and from out of the various holes in the walls Roger noticed several spiders climb out onto the walls. They stayed near the holes. From the hole in roof, just above the middle of the table, Roger saw two black spiders dangle themselves down slightly out of the hole. Roger swallowed.

"Is this necessary?!" Roger asked angrily. "You know the circumstances, it wasn't my fault! I shouldn't even have to have this meeting with you, but I am, out of respect and my desire to maintain a safe and loving partnership." The negotiator began to move her legs but Roger continued right over her. "Do I bring a can of Raid to our meetings? Have I ever, since the first one, met you with any sort of weapon at all?! I don't even wear shoes in the house any more!" The black widow briefly twitched her front legs. "Fine, then lets drop this whole intimidation thing, and discuss this. Roger looked at the spiders on the walls and the two hanging from the ceiling. After a moment, the black widow twitched her front legs again, and the spiders swiftly retreated back into the walls. Roger smiled with relief and satisfaction.

"Thank you. Now," Roger said, reaching over to the two cardboard boxes on the table. One was a small, white necklace box from Zales and the other was from a local pet shop with holes punched in the top. The white box sat atop the brown. Roger put the larger pet box on his lap. Movement could be heard from inside the box, and it shifted under the weight of something moving around inside it. "I kept his body for you, in this nice little box." Roger placed the necklace box on the table and

removed the lid. Inside, on the white cotton padding, lay the crushed body of a small, hairy, brown spider. Its green and red juices had leaked onto the cotton. Roger waited while the black widow skittered to the box and inspected the body.

“All the legs are there,” Roger said, “I took extra care to make sure that I got as much as I could.” Roger paused for a bit, and watched the black widow, her legs caressing the carcass of the crushed spider. She moved her front legs at him again. “Good. I’m glad.” Roger said. “I am sorry, and to help smooth things over, I went to the pet shop.” Roger pulled the lid off of the box and reached inside. His arm darted around, as though he was trying to catch something elusive, and finally he pulled a large, pink, hairless rat out of the box. He held it up by its tail and its wrinkly body spasmed and shook as it tried to get its pointy teeth to the fingertips pinching its tail. Roger hated shaving them, they always looked like demonic fetuses when he was done. Roger looked at the rat and smiled, and then looked at the black widow.

“What do you think? Eh? Last you a week wouldn’t it?” Roger said trying to sound like he enjoyed rats himself. He watched as the black widow quickly waved her legs at him.

“Oh come on,” Roger said, “it’s better than good.” The spider waved her legs at Roger.

“That’s what I thought.” Roger said. From the hole in the roof a large net of silk, big enough to hold a bagel, slowly began to sink into the kitchen. It was supported at its four corners by ropes of silk made by the weaving together of many individual strands of silk. Roger watched the net lower.

“Shall I?” Roger asked, looking at the spider with a big smile on his face. He was happy, he had appeased them. The spider waved her front legs at him enthusiastically. Roger nodded. “Very well.” With that, Roger lifted the rat high into the air, and then swiftly swung it down onto the thin, peeling tile floor. There was a loud crack, and a small spray of blood fell onto the small circular accumulation of crusty, dried blood on the floor. Roger held the rat up, its head and legs twitching occasionally. It’s mouth hung open and blood dripped off of its pointed head. Roger smiled, and looked at the black widow.

“Looks good, don’t it?” Roger asked. The spider waved her legs again, and in a moment the net was at Rogers eye level. He placed the bleeding, twitching rat in the net, and it wrapped around the rats body as it stretched under its weight. Slowly the net began to rise. Crimson quickly spread along the bottom of the net, and as it neared the hole in the roof, a slow but steady dripping stream of blood began to fall onto his table. Once the rat disappeared into the roof, Roger could barely hear the spiders

dragging it around. Roger waited, and then another, but much smaller net, was lowered. It looked perhaps strong enough to lift a large raisin, or maybe a grape. The net quickly sank onto the table, and spread open.

The black widow skittered over to the open box, and with her mandibles began to pull at the crushed spider. In a few short trips, she had moved many of the disattached legs to the net, and then struggled to remove the body from the cotton. Its juices had stuck the body to the cotton, like a band-aid on an oozing wound. Roger watched for a moment as the black widow tugged and pulled on the body.

“Here, let me.” Roger said. He reached over to the box, and the black widow backed away. With his fingertips, he gently pulled at the body and held the cotton down. In a moment, the body ripped free. Roger gently cupped the body in his fingertips and dropped the body in the small net.

“There you go.” Roger said, wiping his fingers on his pant leg. The net began to withdraw into the ceiling, and Roger put the lids back on his boxes. He leaned over to the counter and set them down, and then looked at the spider.

“We good now?” Roger asked. The spiders legs twitched. “Good. Oh, thank you, I’ll try to be more careful as well.” Roger said. “Good night.” Roger waved a small wave at the black widow as she climbed back up her silk towards the ceiling. In a moment, both her and the net had disappeared from sight into the hole in the ceiling. Roger looked around at the walls, and at the ceiling. They were all gone. Good. Roger sighed.

“Wonder what’s on Comedy Central?” Roger said, and stood up from the table and walked out of the kitchen.

A Song of Parting

by Cathlin Goulding

I was for years now dead. (I lament not, I am content).

Did I write I was content? How should I have written “sweet, peaceful, welcome Death?” Once I was content to leave my corpse behind me. Living always. Passing always. But now it is as if I cannot end. And I wish to end, to depart somewhere gladly beyond this nothingness. Purgatory, it would seem, exists in these Camden sidewalks. I walk these streets alone, pass through the tree lined shadows and I think of the ocean, where I once did shout the bard Shakespeare into the waves. Did I shout into those waves, did they pass over my body, did they engulf my spirit as they cannot do now...I cannot remember, I lament. I can no longer pass along the wharf and see the fishermen toss the morning’s catch from their nets. Nor see the lovers pass ‘neath the still, bold stars? I who once rode the Camden ferry, solely for the Joy of watching the splintering wake of waves, the people upon the deck. I now recalling in my Endlessness, that I never exited upon the opposing shore...No, I cannot walk again through the city streets, swim in it as if in the sea (as I have already said once). No Death, I should never have welcomed you.

I sit on a front porch in this Jersey city where I have wandered for the past hundred and ten years. It was not a good death: stroke, battered, wrecked old man—must I retell it? I am buried in Harleigh Cemetery, two blocks from this house, in an old enormous catacomb now co’vered in corpses of Leaves (no one cares to tend to my poor grave). On Mickle Street (where I was borne so many years ago) is the house of Melanie Peters, who I have known since she was but a small serious girl. The children of Camden lov’d me in life, and I continued to play with them in Death. Melanie, she jump’d rope (with other small Camden queens) upon the Mickle Street sidewalks, and I in passing, jump’d in concord with the chorus of their chantings (*Cinderella dressed in yellow*, My Fancy Melanie dressed in yellow, *went upstairs to kiss a ‘fella*). As the rare child-seer of the spirits of the Dead, she, unlike the other small Camden queens, saw me and lov’ed me (she said to me, “You, Mister, can I wear your hat?”). Oh she was a child brightening these desolate Camden streets, where the houses decayed and yards filled with litter. Her and I, who rode the Camden Ferry back and forth; Her to whom I recited my beloved Leaves, and my Leaves that she too, lov’d. But she grew, as children are to, and she did not ask to wear my old hat anymore. She did not see me, Dead and Wandering, as she grew older. She forgot me.

My Fancy is coming home again; her father is dying. She has not come to these leaf littered streets for twenty years; twenty years since she and her father last saw each other, since I too last saw my Fancy. At that time, she so young and foolhardy, screaming at her father while running from decaying Camden. And now, twenty years in passing (but a small part of my Death), it is raining on this same Camden street, water gathering in the gutter, dampening the autumn leaves. These leaves: wet and sloppy and golden. I do not want to think

of leaves, leaves of grass, leaves of death, leaves of Camden streets. I roll a cigarette and crouch under the eave of this porch. I watch the crows sitting atop the telephone poll; one, two, three fat bellied ravens conversing. I begin to compose:

“The belly of a crow—“

No. That is not right.

“A’bandoned atop—“

I can write no longer. What does it matter, I cannot write it down upon a piece of paper, but why do the words not come to me? The fat bellied crow, who speaks to me of death, holds in his jerking neck the secret to my final passage. Is this a poem? I think not. It matters not, a dead man cannot write upon the page. The pen does not stay in the hand of the Dead.

My Fancy, she arrives and walks towards the house, sloshing through puddles that do warily re’flect the dark rimmed circles ‘neath her eyes. She has aged since when I have last seen her (twenty five and she had long forgotten me). And I know she is old (how I hate her for aging) because she does not run too seek protection from the rain—for only the old walk slowly within raindrops. I smoke my cigarette and she walks towards me. I think (I hope, I pray) she sees, gazes intersecting, but she does (how the girl has died in her—she takes my soul as she passes me by, drowning me in the atoms she displaces, nothing is left of me each time I see her (did I write this?)) not. I grab for her ankle as she moves past me on the stair, but like sand through the sieve, she evades me. I watch her shadow as it moves tandem to her form upon the wet ground, how her shadow passes through my own shadowlessness. I am a man with no shadow, things have come to that: a man who cannot block the sun’s light.

I continue to puff away at my cigarette and hear her knock upon the door. The door, banging, her mother answering.

“Mom?”

“Melanie. You’re home.”

“Has Dad been smoking out here?”

“Heavens no. Why?”

“It smells like smoke out here.” My Fancy begins to turn around upon the step, and pauses in the pause that recollection demands, but she does not turn to see me (I lament, she has forgotten).

“No, you know he can’t smoke anymore. Come in—it’s freezing out there.”

“How’s Dad?” Muffles, door closing.

I am lucky (such Fortune to be had in Death); I can enter the house and no one knows. This is an old house, and I know it smells strange to her, I can see as she takes in the air of the house, remembering. Can she smell the Death in the air? They are walking through hallways (always through narrow hallways, always entering doorways, into rooms dusky with melancholy—is this to be my fate?), wood paneled and dusty pictures crook’ed upon the wall. Her father sits in an

armchair in the corner, blanketed lap. He sees her and turns away from my Fancy as she enters.

Melanie, she smiles despite (such a strange smile, how does she smile at Death, at me?). “Dad, how are you feeling?”

I compose: “Silence covered over with Leaves”

No. That is not right.

“Her Absence has Left Leaves of Silence”

“Now David, for God sakes, would you please talk to her!” says the mother.

Melanie (hesitates) takes up her father’s hand and tosses it back and forth between her own (slapping, slapping upon my Odd beating Heart). “What are you eating?”

Her father does not respond, but instead takes his spoon and lets a soupy green liquid dribble from it (I have not eaten since I died).

She laughs, nothing like I had once heard from that jump roping Camden Queen: “It’s been years.”

“Twenty years.” Twenty years, I too, have been missing my Fancy.

“I came home...Jonah called me, he said...he told me about the test results.”

“You come here, don’t call, don’t write, and now you come here to ease your conscience.”

I watch Melanie (her wrists are thin, I think, where does one place arms when conversing?). “How can you accuse me, do you know how hard it was to come home again?”

“You—you have no respect. I won’t have this!”

“Dad, I didn’t have a choice, you left me no choice.”

“You shouldn’t have ran off with him!”

“But it’s my life.”

“You’re not even married still! You’re alone and no better off!”

“No, I’m not, you’re right. I’m not.”

Melanie she bends next to him, pleading (to whom do I plead, to whom do I request an End?). “Dad, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. It was a mistake, and I’m sorry.”

The father waves his hand, dismissing (the air ripples, and slaps my Fancy across the face) her. “I’m dying, I want to die in peace.”

And so he will die in peace, in resolution? He will die, will be allowed leave from this world, and I will remain, and my Fancy will remain, both irresolute. I do not understand: What of forgetting, what of ending?

Melanie, she Leaves from the room and walks the stair. I wrap my arms around her waist and follow her slow step (one by one, with the rhythm of its creaks). I find comfort in her scent, her human warmth that Death does not offer. We have long been apart, been in passing, but I have returned to her again, and she to me. As each step passes I feel my long beard reversing in length, my wrinkles smoothing, youth reawakening. I am the phantom that has caress’d her, an apparition like a vague mist; yet clear to the soul (I think I had once said).

We enter the room of her childhood, and I see out the window, the corpses of Leaves on Mickle Street. Her shoulders, they shake and sobbing she is now. “Oh God, Oh God forgive me, forgive me.”

I take into my own wrinkled hands her face and press my thumbs ‘neath her wet lashes.

“I have love’d you for all of your life, my Fancy.”

She takes my hands into hers, grasps onto them (tightly) and sees me, sees me she finally does—she has not forgotten.

“He’s dying. And I left him for so long, and I was too proud to come back again.”

“But you are here now, Fancy.”

“What is this Leaving, the drawing to a close? How do we end?”

“I’m not sure if we ever do.”

“Promise me something.”

“What?”

“You will watch for him, help him.”

(*I remember I say only that woman who passionately clung to me—* these words once invoked, seem familiar).

And she takes the brim of my old felt hat, and pulls it over my face, then grasps my hands again.

“‘Again we wander,’” I pause (pause that recollection demands), wanting to recite, but alas, I cannot.

She releases my hands and lets them drop. (*Again we wander, we love, we separate—what was it?—Again she holds me by the hand I must not go... What is the end of it? I cannot remember, my heart aches*). My body feels old again.

“And I am forgetting my Leaves, why do I forget, my Fancy?”

“The entrance of men to sing,” she says to me, choking on sadness.

“What is it?” (As I once wrote? Again the words evading like sand through the sieve).

She smiles (not without our despair) and I think she must be remembering her jump rope upon Mickle street sidewalks. “You must leave now, but you will take care of him?”

I must not go, but she tells me to leave and so I begin to end. I nod at my Fancy, who takes my hands once again, and we both, long apart, together again.

Morning. In her father’s room, she sits. The father is sleeping and silent, but not Dead. The light of the morn moves across her face and I see her open a book (the Leaves, Leaves of...). She reads:

‘As they draw to a close

Of what underlies the precedent songs—of my aims in them...

Of joy, sweet joy, through many a year, in them

Of many an aspiration fond, of many a dream and plan;

The entrance of men to sing; To compact you, ye parted, diverse lives...
With you O soul.'

Did I write this? What words that strike me at blindsides!

Her father opens one of his eyes and peers at her. "Who wrote this?"

"Whitman."

"I like it. Is that the end?"

"No, no there's more. Do you want me to read more?" (No, they have not reached the End. I lament not, I am content).

"Yes, please." He coughs and takes her hand in his.

She continues reading, her voice soft and ebbing. Is this what it is like to forget what you have written? What it is not to recognize my own words, which once poured so willingly from my soul? Each day, a page takes flight from memory. It is almost over now, I am coming to the end of my *Leaves of Grass*, and I have begun to lose its last annexes. *Songs of Parting*. *Sands of Seventy*. *Goodbye my Fancy*. One line at a time, taken away from me. *Leaves*, forgive me. When I forget my *Leaves*, is that when I will pass through the Universe to the comfort of *Beyond*? Can I forget my *Leaves*, Must I forget them?

I will shout, "I celebrate myself, and I sing myself."

I will say, "As I ebb'd with the ocean of life."

I will whisper, "This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless."

Free flight into the wordless. I have forgotten it all already. I have not the strength to lament once again. You will not forget my words as I have forgotten them—could you too love a poet who has forgotten his own words?

"You, my *Fancy*, light of my late afterlife, you sweet and fine in my strange *Death*...goodbye."

I pass my hand over the slight wisps of her hair. She does not know I am gone, but then again, does she shiver at the pass of my hand? No my *Fancy*, I will not return to you again. Gladly, I cannot do you that honor. My *Camden Queen*: there is something that speaks of heaven in your face. Your father, I think, will join me soon—I hope he will not suffer the fate of waiting for the End as I have. How do we end, you ask me, and so I say: I do not know how we end. Some strange and lonely journey it is. You will see your father again someday return to him when your soul is ready—somewhere at the end, somewhere just *Beyond* jump rope upon *Mickle Street* sidewalks. How do we end, you my *Fancy* asks, and now I am ending.

So my queen of *Leaves*, I would as lief leave you now as stay on walking in these sad places: I will walk to the wharf, cross the old *Delaware* upon my *Camden Ferry*, but when it reaches the shore, this time—I will exit. *Departure*, it is time, now that I have forgotten and am ready to leave. *Camden Queen*: alas she has let me go, flying like a singing crow into the heavens. Goodbye these desolate *Camden streets*, I do not wish to ever return here, not as an invisible, shadowless man. "Ever with a pleas'd smile I may keep on"—my words?

No, it was you who said this now.

I walk down the front porch, felt hat upon my head, and the autumn leaves falling down upon me. I think of leaves, leaves of grass, leaves of death, leaves of these Camden streets. Leaving among Leaves—as it should be.

I slap at them with my hand. I say: we must forget that which we most love to pass on.

Shades of Porcelain

by Blake Benson

ideas materialize
in shades of porcelain
like rodin models
minus bodies

average time:

approximately 7 minutes
3-4 times a day
(not including #1)
allotting roughly 25 minutes
to wander in pools
of shit that
are gold that
are silver that
are abstract &
have no color &
don't exist until voices
communicate an agreed upon
language

there is a routine of action:

3-4 wipes
thorough wipes
caressing simultaneously
like sandpaper and clouds
but taking the clouds
that ground
shades of porcelain which
would otherwise float
away like the imagination of
a rocket awaiting
human destruction

now
destruction has never been the aim
maybe
manipulation
of body—impossible
of appearance—questionable
of mind—do-able

and the ants go marching 1 by 1

hurrah hurrah
sniffing out scents of human survival
hurrah hurrah

will the rocket kill all 93
or leave the little-one to wander free
as the ant goes marching down
to the ground
to find a way. . .

Rainbows & Ceremonies creep. . .
but they are quickly vanquished

meditative:

translated
stocks of clouds like
corn but clouds
buy & sell promises
the promise of change
the promise of cleansing
the promise of blood imprints
rationalizing
essential questions
BIG WHYS & IAMS am i?
which
there are really no words that describe
the futility of searching for forgotten? answers
yet
i need

& all clouds cyclone
down tunnels of filth
& wealth (for a tiny some or sum). . .

[we will meet again porcelain shades
& these thoughts will be added to our inquiry
i mean song
i mean thouht
i thought i meant
but i forgot]

V

by Kirk Eardley

Across the street, a blonde,
No, her hair's a bit too light.
Of her hue I'm not so fond,
Only you have it just right.

Surely her laugh's not the same,
Lacking your musical lilt
No doubt her smile is too tame,
Without that tiny hint of guilt.

Amongst friends, I laugh it off.
I am not in any trance.
I hide love behind a cough,
Until I catch you in a glance.

My voice trails off mid-sentence,
I descend into a deep stare.
I can state, with some repentance,
I look for you everywhere.

A Clear Christmas Eve

by Lindsay Lockhart

I waited in the lazy line and hugged my eggs to my chest as I surveyed my fellow patrons in the gas station on Christmas Eve. It was nearly eleven, and I had spent the last few hours listening to people drown on about cellular phones before getting smashed, so my quirky fellow late night shoppers were a splash of color in an otherwise drab evening [hellishly so]. The two young men in front of me were loaded with beer. They carried two 12-packs apiece, one under each arm, and clenched the ring of a six-pack in their teeth. “Someone is going to have a holly jolly Christmas,” I thought to myself with a mental sigh. I could never understand the desire to celebrate a holiday by getting so trashed you could never remember it. Tipsy to let the evening flow more smoothly? Now that’s practically essential to survival – especially when your family is as ludicrous as mine.

I had to admit the antics of my inebriated relatives certainly amused me for a little [read: VERY little] while, but after a certain point, it was just plain overdone. Sure, it was all fun and games when Uncle Leo made speculations about the cup sizes of the women in the holiday movies that babbled out of the television, but at other times, it just got nasty. My aunts and uncles ended up playing strip poker in a shed somewhere on my grandparents’ property. When they’d invited me along, I had had decided my mom wanted me home by midnight [how convenient] and made my hasty exit to the banged up Toyota that waited for me in the clear night. I couldn’t blame them for reliving their youth, but I had no desire to start mine.

The man who approached the counter next asked for a jar of chewing tobacco and paid for a full tank of gas in an old Chevy. I glanced behind me. Condoms [in a very optimistic size]. An armload of Twinkies. More booze. In a rare moment of optimism, I decided it was a good character study if nothing else, but then I noticed the old guy with the condoms eyeing me up. I clutched the eggs to my chest and wondered if the thought of fresh omelets in the morning was really worth the trouble. After a few more moments passed by, I took my place in the front of the line, and the cashier shot me a smile and asked for a dollar and ninety eight cents [stores have never quite got the hang of rounding it seems]. “Two dollars for eggs?” I thought, scrounging my pocket for change. “I wish I was a chicken.”

The whining screech of the cash register reminded me of the voice of my grandmother. I had always sworn that her voice was only slightly lower than the pitch of scraping nails down a chalkboard, and she was at least twice as loud [more likely a hundred times]. My greatest mistake of the evening had been volunteering to help her set the table, which I only did after the fifth person asked me what kind of cell phone I owned. I thought perhaps I should tattoo Nokia to my forehead and point to it whenever they asked, but I realized they’d still find some sort of a way to ask me about it. When my grandmother stalked out of the kitchen with her burly woodland woman legs covered in large wool socks, I’d immediately

volunteered to help her for a moment of respite from talking technology with people who knew nothing about the subject.

“You can set the table,” she said with a bit of disgust. My darkly colored clothing and habit of send poetry written by men who died of syphilis instead of Hallmark left me far down her list of favorite grandchild. Her favorite, the cherub-like Angela [with perfect golden curls and pom-poms to match], was somewhere in an unobtrusive household getting blasted and taken advantage of by linemen who didn’t know her last name. I thought it quite ironic that my relatives thought me something lesser than Angela, but I wasn’t bitter. Oh no, I was never bitter. I resolved to set the table better than anyone had ever set it before. Simply, so, I could shove it in my grandmother’s face that I could do anything with the right motivation. I simply lacked that motivation 99.9% of the time.

I had taken a moment to survey the room. It was the epitome of perfection. Each of the cut crystal glasses twinkled as they snatched rays of light from the chandelier that hung above the table. The china shone provocatively. The silver was painfully polished and not a smudge disturbed the table’s surface. I found the pattern of my thoughts drifting toward that of a Sears catalog and decided I hadn’t finished a moment too soon.

“Jane!” cried a woman from the kitchen. I winced. I was afraid that my grandmother’s voice would shatter the glass I had taken so long to arrange.

“Yes Grandma?” I asked wearily.

“Is the table ready?”

“Yes Grandma.”

“Are you sure? Remember. If it’s smudged, it’s fudged.”

“I know that Grandma. There’s not a single smudge in this entire room.”

“I better check, just to make sure.”

The whine of my grandmother’s voice halted as the cash register finished, and the clerk handed me my change [a whole two pennies]. He’d been having trouble with it, and as I glanced over the dirty surface, I was reminded of my grandmother’s phrase. “If it’s smudged, it’s fudged.”

“Merry Christmas,” he said.

“Merry Christmas,” I responded. I turned and was suddenly aware of a flash of metal as the man behind me lifted a gun into the air and pointed it at the head of the cashier. My ears registered everything from the scream of the fat woman with the Twinkies to the cracking of the eggs as they hit the floor.

My grandfather had a shotgun tucked away in the closet at the end of the hall. I recalled the year I’d followed behind the boys to get a glimpse of it. He’d only invited them to come [how typical], but I was curious to see the weapon he kept locked away like a dirty secret. Angela had made fun of me for it later, but in the instants I observed him interact with it, I’d learned more about my grandfather than she could ever hope to. He hoisted it tenderly and raised the barrel once, aiming at an invisible enemy. Then, slowly, he had placed it back in the closet and shut it away with a pat. My grandfather had fought in World War 2 and never spoken of his experiences. They remained a mystery even to my grandmother. He shut every secret behind his tired blue eyes.

“Everybody down,” shouted the man [who really could only be called a

boy.]

I obeyed immediately and landed smack dab in the middle of my shattered eggs. After another bark from the man, I scooted back over the eggs in the opposite direction, smearing them on the green polyester pants that I had worn specifically to scare my relations. I pressed myself against the chips, listening to them crinkle and snap as I hit.

I thought once again to curse my mother for the call I had received earlier that night. “We need eggs,” she said to me as I pressed my hand against my other ear to block out howling Christmas music and the roar of my drunken uncles trying to do a Russian dance.

“Do we really need eggs?” I asked. “Or do we just want eggs?”

“We need eggs,” she said. “I don’t have time to get any tonight so you’ll have to.” I sighed. The conversation following had been brief, and I’d reluctantly agreed to spend my last few bucks on eggs. Now my mother waited, alone, at home [or so I thought, could this have been a way of stalling me to hide a secret lover?]. My father was the one with all of the relatives, and he’d even taken them from her when they divorced. I was the only person she spent Christmas with. She had a sister somewhere in Cleveland who sent us letters and a box of candy every holiday, but the two kept their distance because of a “falling out” some years before. The fear that she would now be spending Christmas completely alone entered my mind.

It seemed like an eternity passed between when the man drew the gun and when he finally started making demands. He seemed to be taking his time arranging us all. “You, with the Twinkies, get your ass back in the candy aisle!” he shouted at the large woman. She scooted back with a whimper, clutching her Twinkies [now smashed, no doubt] even still. “Egg girl,” he said to me as I flinched inwardly and tried to immerse myself in some sort of Zen calm. “You, uh, stay there.” I let out a long breath as he moved the threatening barrel away from me.

He finally pointed it back toward the man at the counter with frightened desperation. I decided now that this had to be the kid’s first time, and he really had no idea what he was doing. He’d gotten himself into more than he had anticipated. Mayhaps he thought it would be completely empty on Christmas Eve, and we were unanticipated factors. I wasn’t sure whether his fear was a good thing or a bad thing.

“Just give me the money,” said the kid. The barrel of the gun was now shaking [bad thing]. I scooted further back into the chips, trying to get to the point where there was a bit of metal between the gun and myself. I could hear every crunch of the chips as I moved across them slowly.

I remembered the crunch, crunch of Santa Claus the year he had come to visit our holiday bash. Everyone knew it was Uncle Leo, but we all wanted to believe it was the jolly old fat man so badly, that for that night, Uncle Leo really was Old Saint Nick. I’d seen him coming first. My customary perch on the window seat granted me a quick glimpse of the red clad figure approaching in the darkness. I let out a happy squeal and ran out into the night. It had been snowing for days before hand, and the ground was covered with a thin sheet of white majesty. I

watched, frozen with glee, as he approached carrying a giant black bag. It was perfect. Never mind the fact that Santa's dusty brown boots were the same that I had seen on Uncle Leo's feet dozens of times, and disregard how he had said [slightly slurred] "Get off me kids!" more than "Ho ho ho!" Christmas could convince me of nearly anything if it was wrapped in a bow.

I tried to picture the gun wrapped in a glistening gold bow. It didn't work. In fact, it seemed all the more grotesque.

The clerk obeyed patiently, opening the cash register slowly. It began blitzing again, and the kid, who had just started to look relaxed, started trembling again. "What's the fuck is going on?" he asked.

"Sorry, I just have some problems with it sometimes," stammered the clerk. His fear made the kid afraid, and all this scared me to death. The screech of the cash register reminded me of another occurrence with my grandmother.

My grandmother is an extremely burly woman. While my grandfather could be characterized by quiet desperation, grandma didn't know the meaning of either of those two words [separately, much less together]. She never drank a drop of alcohol during the family Christmas parties, but it was well known she kept a bottle of gin in the pantry. However, the year of my eleventh Christmas, one of my newer uncles had challenged my grandmother's alcohol tolerance and accused her of refraining from drinking because she would spend all of Christmas passed out in a chair. The comment had simply been a jest, but my grandmother is the sort of woman who takes everything to heart. She took that boy to the table, and he didn't even last half the rounds she would have. When she rose with a bit of a wobble, she announced that this was the last time any of us would see her drink, so she hoped we'd taken photos of such a Kodak moment. Grandma and I might have been best friends were we not from two different worlds. I'd always considered her a contradiction. The alcoholic who never drank. The burly woman who ate from china and said, "If it's smudged, it's fudged." I guess that's what happens when you live with my grandfather for forty years.

The clerk's hand trembled as he handed the boy a bag full of money. "There's almost nothin' in here," said the gunman as he looked into the paper sack.

"Sorry, we never keep much cash in the register," explained the clerk quickly. "And on Christmas Eve there isn't a lot of business."

"Well, I need more, so I'm going to have to ask for some from your customers," he said, waving the gun at the three of us. The man with the condoms had already taken his wallet out, and he tossed it at the kid quickly. The gun moved on to the fat woman. She let out a hysterical sob as it pointed at her face.

"Just give him the money for Christ's sake," said condom man. "It'll all be over when you do." With a little more coaxing, the woman slowly withdrew from her ball and shoved her purse toward the boy. The moment she had finished, she curled back up and sobbed into her hands.

I hadn't been able to stand seeing older people cry for five years. That was the year my Uncle Chester lost his job and couldn't afford presents for his family. When they arrived at the Christmas party, they found a huge pile of presents resting by the couch with their names on them. Chester had started

crying right then and there, told us all we'd insulted his dignity, and spent the rest of the night sitting on the porch, staring into the clear, starry sky. I told my father that I thought Chester was being ungrateful, and he didn't chastise me for it. Angela, the angel, had even agreed. When I heard her confirm what I'd said [for possibly the first and last time], I'd taken time to reevaluate my position and decided that maybe he had his reasons. I still couldn't understand how our giving him presents could be beneath his dignity, yet crying in front of us all was not. At a point, my grandmother vanished, and when I glanced outside from my window seat, I noticed the two of them talking. Though Chester still didn't return to the warmth of the inside, the family did take the presents with them when they left.

I decided that now I could understand him, and I would send my grandmother one of her stupid Hallmark cards in the morning.

I swallowed slowly as the gun finally rested on me, and a tear slipped down my face. "Well?" he asked. "Egg-girl, what do you got?" I didn't have anything. My wallet was completely empty of anything of value – even the two pennies, which had fallen into the eggs.

"I... I don't have anything," I said. "I spent it all on eggs, and now I don't even have them... Here, you can check." Pulling out my wallet, I tossed it toward him. He caught it and gave me a suspicious look but glanced in.

"Jane Doe," he said, reading my license with a laugh. "What kind of name is that?" I usually reamed people inside and out if they made fun of my name, but I simply stared at him silently [clenching my teeth]. He seemed disarmed by that, and he attempted to return the look for a moment with his cold hazel eyes. I wondered what secrets were locked behind them. The stare down didn't last. He tossed my wallet back to me, and then it was over. No one tried to play the hero. No one completely freaked out. It just sort of happened, and the man vanished into the night like a twisted Santa Claus.

The police were called, and they recorded all of our statements right there at the gas station. They decided not to make us do anything further since we all had families to get home to, but our information was recorded, and they promised us a call in the New Year. By the time we had finished, it was well past midnight, and we were all dazed by the experience. As I was getting ready to leave, the clerk handed me a new carton of eggs. "Merry Christmas," he said again – this time with a much weaker smile.

"Merry Christmas," I repeated, and I gave the young guy a hug [a rare action].

The memory of the smell of omelets as I rushed down the stairs to pour out my stocking and tear open my presents lingered in my brain. I recalled the year that a puppy scratched at a ribbon tied around its head. I'd yelled because I wanted a cat but adored the creature anyway. The images of a million other wishes made into realities assaulted me as they jumped around an ever-changing tree. The tree that used to be so impressive when I had to climb up on something to place the star at the top and had such a power over me that I would sometimes just sit and stare at it, breathing it in like a vapor for the heart. My grandparents always had the largest tree of anyone in the family. It was a massive old evergreen that stood in their front yard, and every year they somehow managed to cover it in

balls and lights. When I was a kid, it seemed like a phenomenon. For the last few years, it had just seemed excessive. I felt like looking at it, right now, and breathing in its aura.

I made my way out into the clear Christmas Eve. I suddenly realized I couldn't call it Christmas "Eve" anymore. It was already Christmas day. Instead of beginning with a rush for the stockings, my Christmas began in the parking lot of a gas station that had just been held up. I'd just been threatened at gunpoint, robbed, mocked for my name [not like that hadn't happened before], and my pants were sticky with the coat of egg slime.

As I collapsed into my car, I let out the sigh that I must have been holding all night. Though I'd spent the last few years denying Christmas as anything but a materialistic excuse to re-knot loose family ties, tonight I realized how much I miss it. I miss being awed by excess and spelled by faux fur.

I miss the magic of childhood Christmases. Dreams came in packages and problems could be hidden with a nice piece of ribbon.

I wish life were still that easy.

A Dialogue:

Irene Lee and Jessica Gliddon

—High anxiety time due to state of the unaligned I
hypersensitive to all that is around me .question the stability.
foundation of any intangible thing. a feeling of discomfort I want to
designate the wrongdoers to the lack a sickening rotting smell seeped
through to my sensual memory soaked through to soggy
stench. .nocturnally aromatic flowers. cut up sold
for them. .and I sit. focused so intensely on a parcel
filled with dense burnt amber aged to no avail. .inclined to cry in the
menstrual walls monthly and. .what you do know I castigate what you can
never know I look downward and up. below all description. a strong voice
promises unspoken good. I hang on, .But moments I cut the
thread knotted with my
snarled braced—straightened teeth. ::to believe I could be free yet sadly so
but still a sense of individual that desires push-up. kept across yesterday!
s yesterday!

—that fear that seeped me now melts into shining
eyes of him and stalls, a tear on the brink-
now lost to him, all emotion and shudders, all
anticipation
is only shaking of my future, but milks to him in
present, in here sweet tongue
that i cannot feel but now but in memory, in knowledge
that my heart is held in his chest,
that only time's denial of flesh makes
my innards wrench,
like one, as sex, i am made woman, and without, i
feel cold,
blood that streams down my legs in tears of absence,
open womb-
me, once straight-backed
alone, now find,
i am placeless without your sex

— and love justbehind a blurry veil as sex lives justnextdoor. I did
not cry about my last mistake yes, now That girl walking in swiftly,
daftly boys do the .285 half turn, the pupils dilate & other places mind
encompassing' coldcut turkey boys and girls seek to
be tailor-made better suited for the world so
the more we all know what to find in the Western
mirrors Even the basement comes with its own in-house tailor .a suitor
for everyyou. and niceone two / Three waited so patiently
until you sobered . This boy
tells me he has trouble being \. I smile. He

looks away. and so; explain those days ::I never believed in Santa Claus,,
but I believed in God and you

—We traipsed on buildings in the sun,
to me, beings divine concrete solidity/
in separation, a girl I was in 1929
cut her foot on the glass and sand, I
Longing for you, the sweetest of things, I
tore from my bearings,
and i, here, give you all i have
left with your memory, effervescent ghost against the
wall

Tiny layers, pulled back and stretched and twisting
Like. Suspended. Planes. I travel to the other side
of the room

Doors keep opening
my dreams molten and oozing to breathe
because there's no definition like the touch of your hand
visions of your eyes like beacons ache in me
echoing, most precious of beings
make a nest for us in the ceiling, make you come, make
these nations fall down in tears for us
build one lone rail, across America,
across the continent, across the sea- sweet soft certainty
that makes me lust for railways breathing through a
megaphone I've found we had. Everything.
Only. Miles. Can. Bring.

The half I lost.

that now I shudder, looking at this wall
while skyscrapers fall in shards I wonder where we
are
against the field plain there
with broken phonelines, can't find my feet when
you're not here.

—brokenglass boy: i Your volcanic words you know
not their meaning
all pain emerge through crystal globe i feel coming
from heart clamping the
jug i cannot touch. you in person a question mark knotted
up rusted broken glassed
sponges and nails I am your siamese severed by piercing eyes
your hurt is glittered foam treasure cakey hardened
i bleed for you think your scarlet iron
your name chiseled there now
shiver cry dangerously safe in red charcoaled
hardshell suitcase blockaded diamond defense
weakcowardly ways at one angry death per

slowed motion moment
so
safety first
so
disconnect using camera techniques
pick up a gun to make funerals but
Hear that i am floating around only you
about to lose both of us. we lose. the hope i put in
becomes poison for us
your mistakes become our wrongs turn them into blank shots
you still will . i dream you opened and naked finally
facing your wasted past,
you with considerate thought go, on dimly so brilliant
awake: your suicidal recipes carefully arranged, pricking
neatly poking, cozy into skinny flesh
since that early hour you became convinced you center of
all
everything against this center . your immense beauty
turned to filthy
gold dust
—Nothing is more beautiful than this naked
human man I love
nothing so sweet as the taste of his warmth
the shimmering electric touch of his skin.

Nothing smells as divine as his scent left behind on
his worn shirt after he leaves

he is every piano violin guitar
in every shimmering skyline on every beautiful waning day

as roses melt through our bodies in wisps of sunlight
and sheets-
flesh blended in mine, most precious of beings
intricacies of my insides open to be
part of you

every memory of mine is a memory of him
as he was there with me
since I began

— maybe you were there
maybe you always been
maybe slipping from my breath
turned to sneezes you religiously blessed
words there picket fenced flyer flopping ill timed in the still air

words written when we did not talk about how I never could say
except so
leave me yes along with the girl of your magazine dreams for
the fence white
and sturdy. there waiting so far away. I have decided
you will give up
and when you turn, around I have gone

If Only I Were Cummings

by Alisa Dodge

if mr. running too fast
comes (over)
me like a meteor shower
fall does he like a cow jumping the moon?
for he who tries
never reaches the sky

if mr. running too fast
comes (over,under,around,by)
me like happy rabbit pre(position)
jump does he pre-emptive(lye)?
this gun to say
stick 'em up, son

and,

if mr. running too fast
comes (over,over)
me like checking one,two,three,four
dance his music does
with the static
of my old ex(res)istance

Untitled

by Damon Hill

enduring, taffy lips,
flavored summer strawberries,
crafted for the discriminating
connoisseur of such things.
& my engorged tongue
ready to taste perfection.

lips. flinging phrases i laminate &
plant in boxes among my closet's
hibernating clothes.

lips. concealing a licorice tongue
experienced in romance, &
a supple waltz i always enjoy.
twisting tongue, breathing Je'
Tames & Te Amos. but

my pillow rejected the implant.

lips, caked in lies & the inebriating
smell of halitosis gallivanting
across my skin to
assault my ears &
the futile effects of those breath mints.
i wish i knew karate.

she wields her tongue like a hammer
& her imposed Je'Tames, so
i could hear
every-
single-
word- smoothly impaling my eardrums
with regurgitated love &
broken words under a
cumbersome tongue. Te Amo.

actions speak louder than words
& i'm sick of the yelling.

& occasionally i pummel
the wall bloody, waiting

for it to admit defeat.

It Starts with a Kiss

by Sarah Iantosca

She was thirteen-years-old the first time she kissed a boy. And it's funny because she didn't even like it. Some boy's wet tongue poking into her mouth was a sensation she never thought she would be able to describe as sexual, or even pleasant. She had held out, too. Six months before that kiss, a boy a full year older than her had wanted to kiss her. But she didn't do it. Not because she didn't want to, she wasn't a prude. In fact, she had wanted to badly; it seemed to her that she was the last girl in the world who hadn't been kissed. He *asked* her if she would kiss him. She didn't want to be asked, she wanted to be kissed. He blew it. They discussed the potential kiss for 30 minutes in her front yard when her parents weren't home, and by that point they were both so fed up with the subject and each other that their brief romance ended. Her first kiss didn't ask, he just did it. It was a disaster. Messy and off center. "What happened?" he had asked her and she just blushed. He was her boyfriend, they were "going" together and he seemed understanding and told her that practice makes perfect. Four days later he dumped her because, as his friends told her friends who told her, she didn't "put out." She was thirteen-years-old.

She didn't really enjoy kissing until about a year later. She was "going" with this other boy and they taught each other to make out. Really make out though, in that fourteen-year-old sort of way, which seems so intense with tongues jammed down each other's throats but really, so innocent because they weren't doing anything else. It wasn't even going to lead anywhere because they didn't know where to take it. She had never understood how girls got hickeys until her boyfriend gave her one. Her friends gaped at the dark purple stains on her neck, touched them gingerly. They didn't hurt. Ha, and she had been the last to be kissed. Now she was ahead. Oh god how she loved when he kissed her neck, but then her father saw one of the hickeys and it wasn't so fun anymore. Not so fun for her father either, one would assume. She was grounded for two weeks and her father looked at her with different eyes. "For Christ's sake," he told her mother, "she's only fourteen-years-old."

When she was fifteen, she allowed her next boyfriend to go down on her. Although they were the same age, it seemed he knew more about what he was doing than she knew about how she was supposed to feel. It was weird for her, having his head down there, and she didn't quite understand why anyone would want to do that. For some reason it just seemed like the next step. She had never touched a penis, actually she had

never even seen one in real life. Just the cross-sectioned ones in biology books, and at swim meets she still didn't understand what was going on in the boys' Speedos, what was what. Her boyfriend passed her a note one day in history class that said he would never want them to "make love" (his wording) unless they a) had a condom and b) were really, really sure they loved each other... OR c) if she wanted them to. And she told her friends how sweet and understanding he was. She wasn't ready to have sex, she told them. They agreed that they, too, wanted to remain virgins. Besides, they had their whole lives ahead of them and didn't want to get pregnant and ruin their futures! They were only fifteen years old!

By the time she was sixteen, two of her four best friends had lost their virginity and she was the third to go. The three of them giggled together and felt mature talking about whether they liked it better on bottom or on top. Megan lost hers in the McDonald's bathroom, Ashley in the front seat of a pickup truck and she, most scandalously, in her parents' bed during a keg party at her house. Fortunately, she hadn't bled. It hurt though. Her newest boyfriend was gentle and grateful. After that, it had only gotten better and their dates, which used to consist of movies and concerts, now included smoking pot and fucking in the backseat of his car at the park near her house. The first time he made her come she felt their relationship ascend to a whole new level. He told her he didn't know what love was so he couldn't tell her that he loved her. Because he only wanted to say it if he was sure he really meant it. But what he felt for her was close. She told this to all her friends and they told her how lucky she was. She thought so too. But she knew she loved him. She didn't care what love was. They had been together for ten months and two pregnancy scares when he decided to break it off. "I just can't have a girlfriend right now," he said as she sobbed. "It's too much commitment. I want to have fun. I mean, I'm sixteen."

By the time she was seventeen she had had sex with seven different boys. Four of them were one night stands and only two of those four used condoms. Her doctor had put her on the pill, and she felt sexually liberated to have sex with whomever she desired. At least that's what she told herself. Her parents' conservative Catholic views didn't apply in the real world, she realized. This was the 90's and she was a progressive woman. The boys that liked her, the ones she wouldn't have sex with, called her a slut. Actually, some of the boys she had sex with called her that too. But she didn't care because she knew she wasn't. Just because she had casual sex with numerous boys did not make her a slut. She was a sexual being and no one should try to suppress that side of her. It's not like she was trying to prove something to herself, or that she wanted to feel desirable, or that in some twisted way she needed boys to have sex with

her in order to feel worthy or loved. It was nothing like that, she told herself. She was a woman and she had needs, she told herself. She was just like any other seventeen-year-old girl.

After about a year she realized that she *was* a slut. She would tempt boys, luring them in with immediate sex and when they actually fell in love with her she would break it off completely. She felt like she needed a boyfriend to keep her from being considered a raging whore. So she had boyfriends, brief relationships in quick succession. She only cheated on one of them. Well, technically two but she figured one of them was probably already cheating on her so it didn't really count. Not technically. This thing she had used to assert her power was no longer what she had believed it to be. She realized that sex was a game, sex was a tool, sex was a weapon. It had begun taking power over her, and sometimes she would find tears running down her cheeks while her boyfriend thrust into her. What happened to making love and making babies, she wondered, butterfly kisses and holding hands? She felt tired and old. Already. And she was only eighteen.

Detached

by Gina Quintiliani

Sitting alone in the deserted room
I think of you.
Outside phantom feet file past

Staring ahead
there's a chalkboard,
black,
ambushed
by white lines
forming Chinese characters
reminding me of you
and the lives you destroyed
before your own.
Your ghost-like figure suddenly flits before my eyes
But it is only the shadow of a student upon the Great Wall.

Slouching in silence in the cold room
watching silhouettes float by
Alone, undisturbed, I sit meditating on
your ghost.
And I wait for the nightmare to pass from reality into nothingness.

A Wife's Remark

by Jeff Alexandre

I died yesterday, in
the pristine clasp of some
one else: my father. In the anti-
septic halls. I didn't see you,
and you know all of this, even if
it was a prick at the
apex of your head – between
small glasses of bourbon.

Now you kneel at my
stone, after they burst my skin
in that slick kiln.

Don't weep over my mealy
ashes; I still remember, dearest.
Why let Amazing Grace run
and run a skirted circuit?

You don't know how sweet it
is to be rid of you.

PreConception

by Grace C.

Born
Mold my heart
lie to it
to the point where you believe the lies
yourself.
Protect me, poison me
So that I never wake up
Sleeping Beauty
living a dream of Disneyland proportion
Hold my hand
and lead me away, astray, as straight
as an arrow
Pierce my heart.
These oh-so-rebel thoughts
divergent from your daily regimen
where else to go
but back inside
my tortoise shell, I enter
Desert tortoise
crawling from one mirage to another
Feed me sand when I ask for water,
for sweet, sweet nectar.
Parched mouth
I cannot speak anymore
Cannot express who I am
Who am
I?
Well, you wrote the script
Made me the star
of your dark comedy block-buster production.
Wearing your black director glasses
filter my Unconventional ways,
my god-forsaken self
Cancer to your skin.
The words I choose
I speak, at too high of a decibal
They shatter your beautiful, glass idea
Sorry mother
but the slipper doesn't fit.
You say an eye-for-an-eye
Well, we don't see eye-to-eye.
Do not weep

Don't hurt.
I cannot help the pain I inflict on you
So I won't speak
a silent observer.

Choking, Crying
Me, myself, My Self
What is real, no
Who is real?
I love you
I hate you
my Mother
don't cry
I love you
I hate you
I love you.

Trading Magnolias for Blood

by Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi

Melancholy and Silence fester
like blisters expanding their voluptuous bodies
expanding like toads in the deadly-desert-heat
expanding-adjusting into every ally-crack
where diamonds were once laid.

Melancholy and Silence fester
tormenting ancient souls
till satisfied with the rattling of bones
till satisfied with the smell of decrepit skin
till satisfied with the countless footprints on countless graves
where kisses and rose water were once laid.

Melancholy and Silence fester
like rotting blisters expanding impatiently
expanding their poison bodies
expanding with the clasp of mullah army boots
growing with every loading of a gun.

Melancholy and Silence fester
trading Magnolias for Blood!
1979-Iran-
and from then-
from then only
Melancholy and Silence!!
Melancholy and Silence!
Melancholy and Silence.

Blue is for boys

by Holly Ourso

1

Getting ready at home before the party, Janie debated on pants or a skirt. It came to mid-thigh, the pink-orange skirt she chose, flared, and clingy like a dancer might wear.

She sat down in the chair in front of the mirror and checked the look again: not obscene. Crossed her legs, careful not to show a spot of white panty crotch.

She tucked her dark curly hair behind her ears. Her hand continued running lightly down her neck and lingering on her shoulder. She imagined the hand was Johnnie's, the boy who'd be her date tonight and feeling his touch viscerally, she shuddered.

Her eyes closed and she imagined him kissing her, at the doorstep perhaps, pressing against her lips, running her finger across them. She noticed they felt dry and breathed in through her mouth.

Johnnie would pull her upper body toward him with an insistent hand. He'd bury the other hand in her hair, stroking the back of her neck. Imagining his touch enlivened her.

He would say: "I can't think when I'm around you," or "You are the most exciting girl I've ever known," and she would feel complete. She felt sure of this.

She would shut the door and put her back to it, leaning on it briefly. He would accidentally ring the doorbell leaning on the other side. He'd endear himself to her with his small errors of awkwardness, perhaps rooted in nervousness around her.

She would run upstairs to her room and dream of his touches as she looked in the mirror trying to discover exactly what he might see in her.

2

Beads of sweat collected on Johnnie's upper lip before the party as he masturbated thinking of Janie. She looked like a Mediterranean pop singer. Wide eyes, olive skin, her long legs lean and tan. He stroked himself, eyes closed and imagined her naked. Imagined her touching her own nipples, then kneeling, one knee on each side of his hips. He'd place his hand on her shoulder and she'd lean back, still trembling. He'd bend his knees and place his mouth on her mouth, her chest, her stomach, her crotch. (He jammed his hand over his own mouth.) He imagined inhaling her intoxicating scent and with his tongue, gave a gentle flick (which he felt damp on his palm) With that, he climaxed.

He was still tingling from his last sexual experience, could still relive the sex vividly, taste the other girl's tastes, smell her smells, still feel how smooth her skin was and how slippery she felt inside. How powerful he felt swimming in her sea. Even now, with her out of his picture, the memory hung on like an octopus, like a two year old to a cookie, like a teacher to an unanswered question.

He was able to relive it all. He could play it over like a Realtime video clip.

It had sounded like she would drown in pleasure with each stroke. Her body had quivered underneath him as she made amazing sounds and clutched at him. First tugging on his hips then stationing her hand on the small of his back, pulling him to her.

He could almost feel it now. His lust resurged. He began the touching anew playing the in-head video in slow motion. She kept repeating one word: *yes*. "Yes, moan, grumble, oh," she'd say, then another luscious *yes*. He could drown in her delectable *yeses*. He imagined pushing into her and climaxed again. Merely recalling it intoxicated him beyond sobering.

As they walked into the party together, Janie wondered if Johnnie's friends were watching them, if they created a scene worthy of spectators.

She was not afraid of them watching her. She put her shoulders back, leaned into him. The whole appearance thing was so bogus. She did so little to look good. It didn't seem like any big deal to her for its own sake. But it bought her entrance into places not everyone could go and she needed that invitation in this God-forsaken town where no one knew her. How could they have moved here where she was a fish in an ocean? Not even a fish, a solitary strand of seaweed. Not noticed by others, or, if she was, perceived as unimportant.

She felt like a piece of bruised fruit. Attracting not humans but worms which would soon be crawling too near, invading her flesh.

She had almost managed to merge with another local, Randy. He had very nearly seduced her on that basis, but there was something false about him and she realized it in time.

He had some childish objection to wearing a condom. She was not prepared to have sex without one despite his promise to withdraw.

"You know what they call people who just pull out?" she said angrily. She placed her fingertips along his hairline.

He stone-faced her, silent.

"Parents," she spit out, pushing his head away.

She put her own head in her hand then, deciding what to do. *Everyone uses condoms now. This guy is lame.*

His tone and demeanor angled to smooth things out, but she would have none of it.

He stood up, wound his arm around her, "I just want to be close to you." He pulled his shirt slightly up touching their stomachs skin to skin. "Nothing between you and me." She still wore her bra and jeans.

"But there *is* something between you and me," she countered, "your lack of intelligence." She grabbed her top, pushed him away, stepped into her sneakers and walked home, a distance of over two miles. He drove past her, leaving her to her own devices.

Sex was something she wanted to try, something she thought could be good under the right circumstances – with the right guy. She felt sort of sad it wasn't him.

She was curious, liked the way she felt when boys touched her. Touched herself a bit at home to no avail. She'd just get to the verge of a pink flush, then as she sped up, her hand would tire just shy of the prize. She tried switching hands, then switching back. There was pleasure, but it was never quite enough to push her over the edge. She never noticed that as she got closer, her thighs caved in, denying herself access to a continuous stream of climaxes at intervals like highway speed bumps.

She wondered if a lover's hands would help her there, help her see the other side. She could watch, mentally note and later repeat what he did, whatever that was.

That's one reason she had chosen Randy, because he seemed self-assured. Some guys might not know what to do. He had been a good candidate, but a disappointment. It had taken her time to re-group. She might have waited longer to try again, but she could not stand having no friends. She thought one more night of staring out the window hitting sleeping birds with M&Ms would send her over the edge.

She wanted to be a part of the hubbub. She needed it. She thought that being a part of all that noise-making would somehow set her free.

cups, one with each hand.

“For the babe?” Scottie confirmed.

Johnnie said “duh” with his eyes. Scottie started filling one.

Scottie looked over to where Johnnie’s date stood. He gave a face of approval.

“Looks like she’s ready to go,” Scottie said.

Johnnie gave no reaction, brushed back his chin-length hair with both hands. It hung down like parentheses. His eyes were plus signs separated by a tab.

His shoulders abruptly knotted with tension. He met Scottie’s eyes, put his drink to his lips, and gulped about half of it.

Scottie’s focus shifted to a spike-haired guy who loomed over Johnnie, his broad shoulders eclipsing Johnnie’s medium frame, which he assessed as small. The square-jawed hulk slammed his brother gently in the shoulder. Scottie replied by pouring him a drink. The blonde passed by and touched Scottie on the arm, said hi to his brother with a light cheek kiss. Scottie gave her a cool look, his prior look minus the smile. Johnnie felt about one inch tall as Scottie ran his open hand from the blonde’s neck down between her breasts and she smiled, a wry look overtaking her face. She put her open palms on her waist and slid them slowly down her hips. Rachel Morgan. The name itself inspired awe in a guy like Johnnie. She didn’t even glance in Johnnie’s direction. To her, he was one notch below Scottie’s imaginary friend.

Johnnie didn’t want to focus in on the situation, didn’t want to think about his prospects, but the thought barged in, hypnotic. His mind began turning it over and over again. Although Johnnie did not move outwardly, his mind raced. *Janie did seem to want him. She quivered when he touched her like she might melt. Her eyes locked onto his, holding the look, her silence speaking volumes.* But Johnnie could not decipher the hieroglyphics.

Sex wasn’t the only thing Johnnie thought about. He also thought about problems with his ever more demanding parents, fitting in with his friends and drawing. He liked nude pictures drawn or photographed, invariably female, thin and fragile looking, like they might break.

He wanted to capture more than Janie’s image on paper. He wanted to be that vessel that could contain the sea, to split her soft peach flesh open, tonguing the space left empty by the pit. Thinking of the rough nubby texture hardened his body, a receptacle for the newfound tension. He soaked it up like a sponge. His mind swelled with the lifelike pictures playing on its screen. He was imagining it all, vividly.

On the other side of the table used as a makeshift bar, Scottie pulled Rachel to him roughly. Johnnie looked away, stared into space, lost in his thoughts.

The sexual sounds girls made, like waves are crashing down within them, challenging the integrity of their beaches. His hands began to shake. *Like something’s in there straining to get out,* he grasped the table, leaning in to steady himself. *Let it out.* His eyes began to water. *Let it rampage.*

He squinted his eyes shut. He shook his head like a dog just out of a pond, trying unsuccessfully to blank his mind. He breathed out in frustration, pushed back his hair again, twisted his face even more. People across the room laughed. The Pixies played on in the background. He leaned against the table to steady himself. He felt like he was losing his mind. *Just wait it out.* Mechanically, he breathed out.

Only one drink was made and Janie was still talking to a popular girl who tapped her chin with slender fingers. *She impressed Janie. Did Johnnie?*

He glanced at Rachel kissing Scottie, then he looked away. He wondered what she would be like to get busy with. He could hardly imagine.

He imagined anyway. His thoughts twisted like a snake. What would she *sound*

like? He could not get over the sounds girls' bodies made when aroused. No girlie magazine could compete with an auditory soundtrack. He thought perhaps there should be an edition of Playboy or Penthouse that included sounds, like those musical greeting cards.

And the body spasms, like something explosive is happening in there, something soul-wrenching. Something worth provoking, hell, even worth witnessing. Johnnie raked a hand across his eyes as he brushed his hair away. There's something about cracking the erotic code of a woman, it brings a sense of satisfaction, tangible proof of a guy's cleverness.

"She is one wild thing," Scottie said panting and shuddering deliberately, breaking Johnnie's trance. Rachel made her way, drink in hand, alone to the dance floor.

"Word up," Johnnie had no objection.

Scottie motioned to Janie with a turn of his head. "You hittin' that shit?"

"We be getting down." Johnnie tried to look hard with his eyes, to stare him down with confidence.

"Tonight?" Scottie licked his lips. "She's ready to go?" Somehow that was a question.

Johnnie didn't answer. No words existed to save face and only an idiot would lie in a semi-public setting.

Scottie glanced to one side then eyed Johnnie strongly.

"Sooner's better than later. Why not make it *sooner*?" Scottie laughed derisively, just a little.

Johnnie broke eye contact, deliberately smoothed out his face and scanned the room for Janie. "What's it to you?" he was losing his position, but Scottie had always held all four aces.

Charmed with the singer, Janie tapped her foot in time with the music and moved her body ever so slightly back and forth. She was itching to dance. Her legs were smooth, thighs inviting like a dock he'd like to sail his boat into.

As she listened intently to the straight haired blonde who could be her ticket out of obscurity, Janie's nearly bare shoulders were caressed by her own hair which she stroked with a steady rhythm. She seemed to sense him watching her, glanced up and smiled.

Johnnie began to imagine that silky hair on *his* shoulders, then to imagine her touching him. Hands moved down his torso. His imagination conjured up her breasts, her nubby nipples. For a moment, she morphed into Rachel, her torso shortening to do so, her waist thickening, her small breasts swelling. Then he pushed a mental button and switched back.

He almost closed his eyes as he imagined his hand behind her head and pulling on her silky straight hair until she lay on her back. Then, in his mind, he plunged in. He replayed the scene a second time, only her back was arched, her pebbly nipples pointing in different directions. Was the face Rachel's? No matter. Then a third replay, where her ankles were hooked behind his back, her legs drawing him in closer, squeezing him tighter. In an instant, he ignited.

"You don't strike me as the waiting type, Johnnie boy." Scottie had a way of saying it, an intonation that implied fiercely that any breathing guy would want it now – any *straight* guy. That undercurrent resonated loud and clear. Gasoline fueled Johnnie's mental fire.

He did not turn his head to look at Scottie so as not to give his hand away. He leaned his weight into his left leg. *He could be the kind to wait.* He *had* waited. It's not like he'd never scored.

Women were *always* after Scottie, though. His pants half falling off, buckled with an irreverent seatbelt, Scottie was no poser, he was a real man. Was Johnnie?

Johnnie tugged his black jeans a little farther. His striped boxers peeked over the edge.

On the other side of the room he heard a loud crash. A tipped lamp and a spilled drink summoned the fraternal hulk who raised a hand and snapped his fingers. The essence of cool. Scottie disappeared, then resurfaced with a roll of paper towels he tossed to his brother.

A glowing ember, Johnnie relaxed into the carnal fantasy, replaying it. He had tuned out the usual din of the party without effort, but suddenly, he realized in his mental movie: *the sound was muted.*

Girls always sound in near orgasmic moments like a cross between gasping for breath and cooing. The rest of the world drops away. The intense sexual feelings replace reason and in that madness it seems there is nothing in the world for her but him. What would *she* be like?

Johnnie changed in that moment. He would not be the one who waits. His manhood was on the line, after all. He had to hear those sounds she would make, whatever it took. And he *knew* he would.

He relaxed just knowing that.

“Nothing to see, break it up,” Scottie’s brother called, waving away the gathering crowd. He rubbed his knuckle into the clumsy drunk guy’s scalp and extracted keys. Johnnie turned back to the makeshift bar.

“Some days I am,” Johnnie said, as he faced Scottie, a new kind of confidence in his stance, “some days I’m not.”

Scottie swung his arm to the front like a discus player. His upper body followed.

“Today is a good day to die,” Johnnie mumbled under his breath.

Scottie raised a questioning eyebrow.

“I’m in,” Johnnie spoke up.

“I’m your answer man.” Scottie took over, eyes glassy, voice silky smooth gliding into action like a vulture lowering itself to its motionless prey.

Scottie took one of the cups and put it under the table briefly, like he was putting more ice in it. He added a small white pill to it, which merged with the liquid instantly, vanishing. He placed the drink down next to Johnnie’s drink.

“Take a sip of yours, Johnnie,” Scottie said low-voiced with a grin. Johnnie reached for a drink without looking down. Scottie shook his head. “The red cup is hers, the blue one yours. Blue is for boys, Johnnie.” Scottie refilled the blue cup with rum and coke.

Johnnie returned to that soundless pornographic image, getting a bit erect at the thought, torturing himself. He leaned forward slightly. Holding the thought in his mind a little too long, turning it over a little too frequently to keep sane, like the thought of Christmas presents in the middle of summer.

Johnnie started to take the cup. Scottie covered the cup with his hand. Then he raised his other palm to face Johnnie, and spread its fingers. Scottie widened his eyes. Closed lips hid his crossed front teeth.

The desperation crawled over the edge of his brain like insects. Johnnie coughed up the fiver. He was set on his plan by now. There was no turning back. He would not shift into waiting mode. The neurons in his brain were firing overtime.

Johnnie did not move except to squint his eyes asking a silent question. The two exchanged looks until Scottie managed to read him.

“Half an hour tops, usually less,” Scottie said. Johnnie stuck out his chin.

“Get her alone then.” Scottie punched Johnnie lightly in the shoulder. Some of the blue drink spilled out.

“Thanks man,” he said to the pusher. Scottie’s eyes held thin lines of red like

secretly somewhere blood was being shed.

“Have a *nice* evening,” Scottie said winking, mocking his parents’ phrase of politeness. They wouldn’t be back until Sunday night.

Johnnie would repeat the events of tonight in his mind at least that long. For now, he repeated in his mind: *blue is for boys, blue is for boys, blue is for boys*, and lowered his center of gravity to stabilize himself as he paced slowly over to his prey.

5

He held the drink out to her.

She shook her head.

He shrugged and took a sip of his drink.

He set her drink down on the ledge of the wooden patio, freeing up a hand to touch her bare waist. As he did, she shivered in the moonlight.

The chill penetrated her slight body. She wore almost nothing.

She touched two fingers to his goatee. He smiled, his mouth became a V.

Madonna’s voice filled the patio drowning out the din of the crowd. Janie said, “Let’s dance.”

Johnnie said yes by setting down his drink. Her figure was almost boyish except for the indentation at the waist and widening at the hips. He gawked at her perfect round ass as she led the way to the dance floor.

She thought dancing would warm her up. He hoped it would open her up. She moved smoothly across the dance floor. He followed her, giving Scottie a high five as they crossed paths. Janie looked the slack-jawed punk over. He stumbled by, his hands attached as if by suction to a blonde in a skintight dress.

“Homey,” they both said. Scottie raised an eyebrow. Johnnie half-smiled.

Johnnie danced awkwardly, stirring feelings of empathetic embarrassment in Janie, intensifying the attraction, solidifying her image of him as just a little lost, needing something to be complete. After a moment, she lost herself in the music, barely even still in the room, no longer sensing her surroundings. She focused on the words, “We can fly” singing them over and over in her head. He focused in on her. She gyrated her hips in a figure eight and he stopped dancing to watch her undulate. She did not notice. Her hands turned in circles. A surfer riding waves of the beat. And she created the waves as well. She was the sea.

The next song was slow. Johnnie pulled Janie to him confidently, pressing her small breasts into his chest. She ran her fingers down her throat and looked to one side. Janie smiled to herself. *Everyone is watching us now*. Her ego swelled like a wave. Scott had one hand in the blond’s dress, the back zipper half undone. Janie turned her head to the side, so as not to look at them or at Johnnie. Seeing Johnnie was too much, overload. Feeling his touch was different. She could simply disappear.

Johnnie looked at Janie’s lightly freckled face and neck. Her skin shone. He feather touched her neck with his fingertips, then stroked down past her collarbone to the top edge of her shirt and back up again, his nails against her soft skin. She quivered as he traced the path again. Then he pressed his knuckle benignly under her chin, nudging her head to vertical. He shifted his gaze to her lips, pale coral, she breathed through them sharply. She looked right at him. Her eyes sparkled like the sea. He envisioned her pressing up her hips to meet his hand rocking on her clit. He paused and gawked, taken aback. She looked like an exotic ripe fruit ready to be plucked. He anticipated the pleasure of a feast. He flicked his tongue across her lips, then dove in for the kiss.

There was a moment where she held her breath, no longer in this world.

He slowly ran a knuckle down her neck and between her breasts. Her body

tightened, a strained look overtook her face. His hand kept moving, down, down. Her facial expression relaxed as his hand reached its destination. He replaced it on her waist, an intenseness to his touch.

She could feel her body respond to his fingertips. The tingling began in her crotch and crept through her. An uneasy feeling swept through her body. She feared she had semipermeable skin and at any moment he could bend a finger and touch the inside of her body, her blood vessels, her bones. He could invade her, meld with her. Suddenly uncomfortable in her own skin, she had an instinct to run away. *No*, a part of her screamed. She would not jailbreak from this paradise for another night of torture at home. She could not stand to be alone again. Her anxious eyes met his briefly. The feeling dimmed. Then she closed them and it faded like disappearing ink.

After that dance, he peeled his hands off her and picked up the two drinks, handing one to her. She felt a tug in a place deep within her, a small aching, like an emptiness needing to be filled. He touched her waist with his free hand. The skin warm, sweaty, moved in and out with the insistent tide of her breath. A wave crashing on the beach.

As if in slow motion, she raised the tainted cup to her lips. Johnnie held his breath as he mirrored the slowness of her movement. When at last the cup touched her lips, they both drank.

A silence spread between them like a fog. Out of things to say for the moment, although they had not heard each others' stories. Johnnie pushed his hair away from his face, watching her.

Janie met his eye. They both acted like the room was empty rather than brimming with loud music and chattering teens. He slid his hands down her hips, outside. When he did not look away, she studied him, trying to read him. She did not want to say what she felt, wanted him to talk first. She watched him, curious, waiting to see what he'd do. She felt like he could see through her blank face through the portals of her shining eyes and into her thoughts.

He did nothing. He was a vessel aimed at collecting the ocean from the safety of the shore. She was the tide. He smiled then. Something special about his grin.

6

When she turned down the drink the first time, he did not want to seem anxious. Thought the dancing would heat her up. It did, but good.

There was so much going on in his head. He wanted her, borderline needed to insure she was ripe for the plucking.

Janie drank a little at the party although it didn't interest her much. Johnnie didn't push, but she could tell it was important to him by the way he referred to it with gestures, never words. Except for the occasional word or two to initiate a toast, he never *said* anything about it.

Yet she knew.

When Janie finished her drink, Johnnie didn't offer her another one. She didn't mention it. Nor did he get another for himself. There was a certain tension in his shoulders that seemed to melt away. He relaxed into the evening, shmoozing with this friend and that, introducing her around. This was his scene.

A scrawny twig of a guy pulled him aside. Janie faced his date. "Cute necklace," one said. "Thanks," the other replied.

Janie toyed with the hem of her skirt in the silence, nervous again. She had retrieved her jacket, to fend off the cool lapping at her damp skin and zipped it halfway up. "Have you known Johnnie long?" the twig's date asked.

"Not long." *Since Tuesday?* she wondered. *Since summer started? How long*

has it been? She could not be sure. Janie had an odd feeling.

“Where’d you meet?” the auburn haired girl continued.

“Around.” Janie felt embarrassed she could not remember.

“He’s certainly been around,” came the reply.

As the boys returned, Janie’s blank look contrasted with the surrounding smiles. Her new friend’s date was telling a funny story. Janie stared off in space, not acknowledging the speaker.

Janie’s thoughts had blurred and now her vision did too. Nearby birch trees were large pale squiggles weaving toward the sky. Johnnie looked at his watch and nodded.

The twig handed Johnnie his car keys and Johnnie led Janie outside. Just Jack and Jill. The hungry boy and his witless peach. Ripe fruit easily subdued with the gentle pressure of an insistent thumb.

Johnnie leaned Janie against the car. She welcomed the passionate kiss, his hand not on her back, but one hand in her hair just as she dreamed. She accepted the compromise.

“Oh,” she said, breathing out sharply.

He kissed her neck, his hand a liquid stream running over her breasts and heading south. She wrapped the fingers of her closest hand around his wrist and held on. One thigh parted hers.

His ship eased toward the slippery dock.

She blacked out.

atlasinas

by Erin Simonitch

she's got the weight upon her shoulders
she fights the storm inside her head
and she knows she's getting colder
she's afraid she might be dead
she meets the devil in the mirror
she reads the future in her eyes
and nothing's getting clearer
and she's drowning in our lies

*hey little girl
you're carrying the world
you'll give until you've given up
more than you can take
you stand as if it's not okay to break
you live as if you think it's not enough
hey little girl
you'll be here when all the rest are gone
hey atlasina, carry on*

she locks her fragments into darkness
she saves her fallen tears
she dances in the abyss
and she yearns to disappear
she's full of empty promise
she pretends she doesn't care
and she slits her soul with sadness
she's almost sure she's there

*hey little girl
you're carrying the world
but you'll be here when all the rest are gone
atlasina hides the secret that she's strong
atlasina's right where she belongs
hey atlasina, carry on*

she keeps him wrapped around her finger
she hears his thoughts inside her mind
she lives to be his answer
and she wants to love him blind
she's dreaming fears he cannot shatter
she covets truths they cannot face
and she believes no one else matters

she's only free when trapped in his embrace

*hey little girl
you're carrying the world
you'll give until you've given up
more than you can take
you stand as if it's not okay to break
you live as if you think it's not enough
hey little girl
you're carrying the world
but you'll be here when all the rest are gone
atlasina hides the secret that she's strong
atlasina's right where she belongs
hey atlasina, carry on*

here, you guys call title this anything you want. maybe “beach of death” even though it’s not the beach, it was the cliffs.

by Ousheng Dai (but i pretty much rewrote lorie’s dialogue)

we went to the beach. no, wait, it was the cliffs. that’s right—we went to the cliffs. beautiful, peaceful, fresh and clean smelling cliffs. but something was wrong. there was a guy sitting in our special spot! our meditation spot. the bastard. he thought he was the shit with his skateboard and sketchpad. i stared at him menacingly.

hey. (she tugged on my jacket.)

there’s something coming down the dirt path. it’s like a gopher thing. (yup there was a gopher thing coming down the dirt path.)

i think it’s hurt. it’s moving all funky. are gophers supposed to move like that??

why is he moving so fast?! (she jumped out of the way.)

oh my god what’s that thing moving in the bushes?! (we looked to the left at some dried grass swaying back and forth.)

oh god it’s the thing that killed the other thing! (we looked back at the gopher lumbering towards us.)

where are you going, little gopher? are you looking for your hole? (we followed him while he struggled and stumbled across the dry grass.)

he’s not looking for his hole! i think he came up here to die! look, there’re already flies on him! (indeed there were flies on him. or maybe just one.)

now there’s two! (there were two flies on him.)

how?! how could it come outside to face the elements?! oh god is it bleeding?? go check. (i poked him with a stick.)

don’t poke him with that stick! maybe he’s still looking for his hole. (he laid still in a gopher sized ditch.)

is that his hole?? (we waited. nothing happened.)

i think we should just leave and let nature take it’s course. (and that’s what we did.)

The Leopard and the Zebra

by Ian Nicastro

In a desert land that kissed the sea
A sad leopard and a bitter zebra met
Amid the eucalyptus and noisy metal trees
A place carefully guarded by the feathered sun
And shaped by the slithering of a cold serpent

It happened so fast
The two were left wondering
What exactly did happen that mysterious night
They didn't even know anything about each other's past

Would she ever even see this odd zebra again?
After how he acted would the leopard even want to talk to him now?
Or should the two just nod, make amends and write it off as a very weird night

They decided to meet again and within time grew close
She helped to sooth his horribly troubled nerves
He helped her to enjoy the desolate place in which they toiled

In the black of night they walked beneath the sacred sun
The trail was not always fun and they encountered many conflicts
As time wore on things gradually fell more into their proper places
Especially after the Zebra learned a few important things
Such as using his common sense and overcoming his shouldered burden
The Leopard learned to trust him more and see the things that they shared

She guided him through a door that he had never seen
He introduced her to something that she had never tasted before

Through mud the two ran smiling
Leaving a wake of brown droplets
Trying desperately to reach the sky
Like dusty wings sprouting from their backs
Lifting them high into the fresh air

Together beneath cleansing hot showers
Playfully bathing each other and splashing about
Paying special attention to the other's tender spots and stripes

Now they lay curled peacefully beside each other
Sleeping like two shimmering silver fish
Hovering high in the dark heavens above

A Close Call

by David Klein

Donald never even saw the Visitor enter. The day was ending and he was focused on wrapping up some paper work; when he raised his eyes from his desk, he saw this stranger just casually leaning against the closed double doors of his office.

But despite his quiet unassuming entrance, the Visitor was far from welcome. Actually, nobody was welcome without Donald's express permission, and even his own mother would have had trouble getting that.

Donald should have buzzed security the minute he laid eyes on the intruder, but this arrival was far from expected and shocked him into inaction; when you had the power he did, it was easy to grow accustomed to simply ordering others to do what needed to be done quickly. But it was probably a moot point; if the stranger had already gotten past security, Donald doubted they were competent enough to be of any assistance. Thinking along these lines, his shock quickly changed into rage. He was paying a small army of armed and dangerous, highly trained security personnel that were supposed to be able to kill a guy three times before they knew they were dead, and this guy just *walked* on in here... There should have been alarms and gunfire and even explosions before his security allowed this type of thing to happen.

Oh well, at least the newcomer didn't *look* like the kind of person who could cause any trouble. He looked harmless enough. His face was wrinkled and creased, his hair was thin and silvery, and he had a sparkle in his eye that gave him more the aspect of a beloved grandfather than some crotchety old man. Wearing a green sweater and white slacks, he looked like a retired professional enjoying a weekend in the city. In Donald's past negotiations he had learned how to assess people very quickly, and what he saw before him looked like an average senior citizen, probably subject to bouts with memory loss and incontinence. Donald would have him for breakfast. Nobody just barged into his inner sanctum like this. Nobody. He would deal with the invader himself.

Donald stood up and stepped from behind his massive mahogany desk. He approached the unwanted guest, getting within striking distance; not that Donald was going to hit the guy, but the potential threat would add some power to his words. "Who the Hell are you? You have thirty seconds to get out of my building or so help me you are in for some serious trouble... Why in the Hell are you smiling like that?" Donald stood there fuming. Here he was, raging like a bear with rabies, and this guy looked like he was amused, standing there with his arms crossed and his head cocked. It was flustering. Donald's voice returned to him, in an even more authoritarian tone. "Well then, I guess it's time to call security."

At this the Visitor responded by simply unfolding his arms and proffering a business card. Donald took it reluctantly. This better not be a damned sales man. Those guys were real pieces of work. It figured that the only person who could get past his security was a tenacious sales man. He read the card. "G. R. Claims Services" was printed neatly in black ink. That was all. Donald handed it back to the salesman with a look of disdain. "Claims Services... what, are you a debt collector or something? Listen buddy, I don't owe you anything. So I suggest--"

“To the contrary Mr. Adams. You owe me much more than you could possibly comprehend. Something that was never even yours to begin with.” The Visitor spoke in a deep rich voice, surprising Donald, who was expecting the raspy or thin voice of the aged. Regardless, Donald wished that the guy had kept his mouth shut after hearing what he just said. What kind of company would hire a salesman like this?

“I’m not even going to listen to this type of talk. Get out of here.”

Donald turned back to his desk, with every intention of calling security. Incompetent as they were, they should be able to handle this guy...

“Just a moment Mr. Adams.” The visitor spoke again. “This is a professional visit. I’m in the same business as you.”

“Oh, and what business is that?” Donald arched an eyebrow. He turned away from the security buzzer and faced the Visitor again. He knew the faces of his competitors, and this was definitely not one of them.

“The body business.” The Visitor twitched the corners of his mouth upwards, in an imitation of a smile. Donald became uneasy. Had this man just said ‘body business’?

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. What do you mean by ‘body business’? Are you an assassin? Are you here to kill me?” Donald’s voice wavered a little. His face didn’t show much fear, but his eyes did dart towards the security buzzer, as if trying to push the button through sheer force of sight. He started to slowly back away, trying very hard now to avoid being within striking distance. What was going on here? Hit men didn’t usually waste time talking to their victims, and they sure as Hell don’t offer business cards.

The Visitor’s face kept its slight smile. “Don’t worry. Tempting as it is... I’m not going to kill you. There are some important matters we need to discuss. I know about you Donald. I know about the genetic treatments you have received in your own lab. And I am aware of the government regulations prohibiting such human experimentation at this level of development.” The face from whence these words came did not show any of the smugness black-mailers usually exhibit. It was frozen in place, suiting the cold hard facts he uttered.

Donald slightly tensed as comprehension came to him. He returned to his chair behind his desk and wordlessly gestured for the visitor to occupy one of the two seats facing him. So blackmail was going to be the name of the game...

The two men sat facing each other.

Behind Donald, a wall of glass looked out upon a bustling cityscape, full of the signs of life. A nice view was just one of the perks that came with being in the shoes of a man like Donald.

Behind the guest there were the office doors, still closed, and a simple black analogue clock mounted on the wall above them. This allowed Donald to watch the time without making an obvious effort to look at a wristwatch or desk clock. Even during private discussions with VIP’s, he was able to constantly monitor the day’s progress without showing disrespect.

To the right of Donald and his visitor, a large aquarium took up an entire wall. Inside, among all the radiant coral and sparkling sand, there swam a beast of all scales and fins and teeth and even tentacles. A creature that Mother Nature had not given birth to. It had been spawned in one of the labs owned by Donald. The

visitor merely glanced at the sea creature with the bored indifference of one who has seen much in his time.

This irritated Donald. That creature was actually one of his favorite accomplishments; it was a triumph of genetic manipulation, shaped by the rules of Donald, not Darwin. He had wanted a beast that some might vaguely recognize from a mostly forgotten nightmare; a representation of subconscious fears. It was generally a success too. Many people were quite intimidated by the creature in the tank, generally trying keep one eye on it at all times, in case it somehow escaped and panicked flight would be necessary. The distracting presence of his 'pet' allowed Donald to maintain a keen edge in any negotiations that took place in his office.

Then again, the creature was really a superfluous ornament. Donald could be considered awe inspiring by himself. He was the man behind the success of ElyTech, a multi-billion dollar enterprise that created cures for various cancers and other terminal diseases. Utilizing the latest technology and the intelligence of some of the finest minds the world had to offer, his company was well on its way of achieving its goal of genetic perfection. Actually, his company had already attained this goal. It just wasn't marketable yet... or federally approved for that matter. But laws couldn't stand in the way of the ambition of some.

Seeing a great opportunity, Donald Nathan Adams, president of ElyTech, had voluntarily undergone the process of genetic manipulation that would make him a low level god. He was now immortal (provided no one put a bullet in his head or ran over him with a car or something along those lines). Without severe trauma, he could and would live on indefinitely. His body was now immune to disease, and could easily cope with the stresses that accompany aging. But this is all confidential information, and strangers were definitely not supposed to know.

Donald contemplated the man across from him. Access to this type of information would give him the ability to cause some big problems... Great! Now what? The last thing he needed were federal investigators snooping around. It could really put a delay in his plans. Donald briefly entertained the idea of having his guest fed to his aquatic pet, but there was no telling if this guy had any accomplices. He decided to proceed very carefully and try to negotiate instead. Turning the Visitor into chum would be plan B. "Ok, I'm not going to confirm or deny anything. Tell me what you want, and I'll see what I can do."

At this the visitor actually took on an earnest look. "I was hoping you would say that. Here is my proposition: I want you to destroy your data. I want you to reverse the process you performed on yourself. And I want this little secret buried and forgotten." The visitor leaned forward, and locked his eyes with Donald's. His gaze was intense, and his eyes showed all the warmth of Pluto now.

Donald didn't flinch from his visitor's stare; instead he tried to match it... and failed miserably. But he thought he knew what was going on now, and even considered laughing in this man's face. "Oh great, let me guess. You're some kind of religious zealot. Have you come in here to condemn me? Or is my redemption still at hand? I have to admit, I was actually a little impressed at how you just marched on in here. That showed guts. But I know your type. You're a coward, afraid of the possibilities that lie in tomorrow." Donald became agitated as he went on, carried forward by the fervor of his words, and falling into the rhythm of his rhetoric. "I have found a way to end death, to eliminate many types of pain and

suffering. And you, you just come on in here and tell me to nullify all of my hard work? Because you say so? Because my research is throwing you into religious upheaval?" Donald laughed, an angry, mean, humorless laugh. "Give me a break."

The Visitor was clearly unimpressed with Donald's words, maintaining a passive expression during his speech. When Donald did finish speaking, the Visitor got up from his chair and started to pace in front of the aquarium. The creature inside watched him closely, hunger shining in its eyes. But the Visitor obviously didn't care about his marine audience. Nor did he appear to pay any heed to Donald's words, most likely being too caught up in his own righteous ignorance. He spoke as he walked back and forth.

"What would you know about religion? The only power you consider at all is your own. Let me make this clear to your clouded mind. Immortality is not meant for mankind. " The Visitor's eyes began to shine dully, but his expression remained unchanging. "The cycles of life and death can not be disrupted. Some type of balance must be maintained. And you..." The visitor stopped and turned his eyes on Donald. "You are casually disrupting that balance with all the foolishness and impetuosity of a child" The eyes shined more brightly.

Donald was slightly freaked out and quite offended by this type of talk. This guy was the one who seemed unbalanced. And who was he to call Donald a child? He decided to put an end to this conversation, and took on his most authoritative tone. "I've had enough of you and your babbling. You come into *my* office, make these ridiculous demands, and then insult *me*? Who do you think you are?"

At this the Visitor came towards Donald, eyes blazing; the light within those orbs surpassing the brightness of sunlight reflected off polar ice. They were now both behind Donald's desk. As already mentioned, Donald's reflexes were a little slow, and all he managed to do in his terrified surprise was sink further back into his chair. The Visitor stood before him, and his voice thundered: "Don't worry about who *I* am. You will know me soon enough." The Visitor radiated coldness as he towered over Donald. No, actually, he seemed to suck all heat from the room. A vacuum. "All you need to know is the folly of what you have done. The proper order of things must and will be maintained. I command you: fix what you have done."

Donald, voice quivering, felt compelled to be appeasing. He may have been immortal, but he was far from stupid. With this mad man standing above him, he was reduced to a quaking mass, willing to say whatever it took to save himself. "Alright sir. Whatever you say. I screwed up. I'll place the necessary calls right away."

"No, no, Mr. Adams. I need more than your desperate assurances. Make an oath to me. Promise it." He didn't seem to notice how freezing it seemed to be getting inside the office.

"Alright. I swear it. I'll take care of it. Just... Don't hurt me."

The Visitor grinned, a look of joy on his face; well, at least joyful in comparison to his previous face. His icy expression had temporarily melted. "Good. Very good Mr. Adams. You possess incredible wisdom. Too much for your own good I should add. I have faith that you will do what must be done. It is now time for my departure. I will see you soon... provided you keep your word." The Visitor picked up Donald's limp hand from the chair's armrest and shook it. The

Visitor's hand was cool and dry; Donald's was warm and sweaty. Then the Visitor relinquished his grip and turned towards the aquarium; he pressed his fingers lightly to the tank, perhaps as some type of farewell to the dangerous denizen within. He contemplated the aquatic beast for a moment more, and then casually, as if this whole meeting was a light hearted affair, the Visitor strolled out the same way he came in, leaving Donald alone in the office.

Donald gasped for air, and marveled at what had just happened. He had just been face to face with an incredible mad man. The type of guy that would flay you alive just for pleasure and then wear your skin if it fit properly. He chuckled, as a wave of relief slapped some sense into him. But he was still alive, undoubtedly due to his quick wits and reflexes. Not that he could push his luck and rely too heavily on himself; he would have to call security and make sure nothing like that *ever* happened again. Once he went public with his discovery, even more whackos would start crawling out of the woodwork.

Still slightly shaking, he decided to clear his mind by finishing up any remaining work. It would be best to just put this little encounter behind him. But operations would have to be speeded up in case, regardless of his claims, his visitor was indeed a black-mailer. Once Donald's process of genetic enhancement was marketable, nothing could be done to stop him. He reached for his phone and started placing some calls. There would be other workers staying late tonight; ElyTech would soon be going into the immortality business, after all.

He quickly became so consumed in his work that he failed to notice his marine pet floating lifelessly in its aquarium until much later that night.

Cuss Words, Always Four Letters (excerpt)

by Jarod Holtz

The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence under no circumstances can it be neglected.

Sun Tzu

This is it. Jim watches the ties. One by one they shuffle into the elevator, taking impish glances at the other ties clustered in the box, before slowly shuffling in a half circle, so no one else can look at their own tie, as they stare patiently at the steel doors, waiting for them to close. The sound of rubber rubbing against rubber, followed by the gentle tapping of metal as the outer shells of the door kiss, monogyny-lessly, bring the stupid silence that always seals the boring ride to wherever. The damn silence ensues even if two, three, four of the ties sat on the same rack together for their entire life, once the morning box has been packed it's quit time until everyone is picked out, dust blown off, and prepared for the day's use.

Jim had failed to change this scene for many moons. Each new moon he told himself this would be the month that he would break the silence, shatter it, *own it* each time he took the elevator up into the bowels of their building. The other ties would look at his tie, and make a tighter shuffled semi circle before staring at the head or door in front of them, whichever it happened to be. They would know that he had drawn the line, separated from them and their kind, only to pull away from the pack all together. There would be, could be, *no challengers*. It was simply the way it must be. There was no telling Him, Jim from all the other ties in their box, when he glanced up out of the rounds (ovals don't have corners) of his eyes, to the mirror above them. But your tie or haircut or suit or cufflinks or shoes socks shirt watch briefcase ring facial hair don't need to stick out for you to stick out. The others would just sense his presence among them, like the reveal of a pack of dogs sniffing blood, they would smell him, but he would be the shark. He Jim of the jung—elevator! There could be no turning back, no return to the mindless silence that stifled his creativity, everyone he knew, met, or ever saw would know now that they were dealing with, speaking to, hearing him, Jim, the one who turned everything upside down, inside out, leftside right, throughside to the blueside! He was *ingenious*,

or at least he was different. BING!

who is the maniac, and why everywhere at the same time by baraka (yeah i'm wondering that too)

a fag named Ginsberg, Allen wrote {I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by/madness, starving hysterical naked,/ dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn/ looking for an angry fix,/...who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes/ hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy/ among the scholars of war/...who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burn-/ing their money in wastebaskets and listening/ to the Terror through the wall, }

Yeah this thing is complex,

i don't understand the difference between this and a driveby though, which never get any coverage—both just kids killing for respect, for what they want, what we want

the shit only runs down the leg when its suburban kids die ing, money kids die ing, kids di eing

it could be my neighborhood next

how do we convince ourselves we can take a gun out of a young man's hands and say ==> Don't Kill

then a few years later when he is in the olive drab, giving his service for the cuntry's good, we hand him a bigger gun and say, go east my son, Go Kill ==>

if we as a nation go to war when our wishes are not respected, when our nation is not respected, when we are threatened mentally or

physically_____how can we then say guns aren't the
answer_____respect comes in many forms...

.....ME. ME. ME. MEMEMEMEME....me mayme, i
don't understand it, maybe it is just me,

we don't ever tell the truth,

the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me god, ((7((with both fat,
pootang poking, trigger pulling, dog tattooed, mirror clutching, benjamin
stained withOut sweat, hands on the good book))7))

no one Wants to tell the truth so we all just give "my gravest condolences"
and go on our merry-go-round ways without ever, in forever, never
neverland, addressing the whole issue

Existence without children?! As if_____ this were even a possibility. An
yet staring at her navel, filled with endless colors of sweater fluff, with
names like deep ocean, festive read, conifer green, baby butt peach.....Jan
realized it had never been connected by that oh so fertile connective tissue
that from the beginning to forever always maintains that diamond bond
between mother and child. If Men wouldashouldacoulda understand this
driving need that she craved perhaps one of them, just one of those many
she had fucked might have provided her with the shovel, soil, water, mulch
and seed she needed to grow her little plant. They wouldn't have all been
good fathers, some yeah, others a definite nea -but none of that mattered
because they had all been beautiful, gorgeous men that stood tall and
proud, shooting up like barrel cacti in the deserts of her youth. As long as
her baby was beautiful, like herself and whatever father it had, everything
else would be just fancy! & dancy, like the clubs downtown. Smarts? If
she was brilliant, than all she had to do was teach her child everything she
knew, internal genetics don't count for shit. John Stuart Mill had been
brought up in this position (without the looks and charm her baby would
have of course), and he turned out to be,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,well smart at least,
that's for hell, fire, and damnation sure. His father had pushed him, taught
him everything he knew so that when it was his turn in line to check into
life, he would be ready to swipe the barcode over the laser reader. it would
all ring up so well, like a little triumphant song, each day bringing a new
note, singing directly to the world of what he could do for mother nature,

mother earth. If J.S.M was able to do it, there was no doubt she could only do a better, cleaner, more complete job. Like the butchers in the meat factories, she would slice and dice until everything was right. She was going to change the world, like all those annoying pre-lawyer, humanitarian, fuck-it to the conservatives, the u.s. has blown shit up too sorts in her political science classless, but she was going to do it by doing it. by making children. (fun) by raising children (hard) by seeing them blossom into those leaders of tomorrow who will themselves make a difference (heroic), this was her selflessness working towards the greater good of all society. a sacrifice of the womb, like al sagrado corazon de maria! Te suplico me ilumines y me des fuerza proteccion y paz. Me acojo a tu voluntad y confio en tu sabiduria. Me entrego a tu misericordia, Oh Sagrado Corazon de Maria, Madre de Dios, Tu que conoces mi necesidad, ayudame. Sagrado Corazon de Maria en la delzura de tu amor confio. AMEN. enlightenment, strength, support peace...abandon myself to your mercy, for you know my need and will help i trust in your love,

its all there,

the working of a miracle.

7 sins that should make you dead 7

wealth w/out work

pleasure w/out conscience

science w/out humanity

knowledge w/out character

politics w/out principle

commerce w/out morality

worship w/out sacrifice

the bald one\white robe\assassinated

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Sun Tzu

Get That Look

by Billy Brooks

It's fabulous being a woman
Repeat after us: you look fabulous!
Ready to change your look?

We have answers to your
most pressing private questions
Why don't you...
Sexify your look: beauty moves so hot
you'll melt his ice-cream cone
How to reel in bunches of boys

See how you compare

Tips, tips, tips
Tush-tightening tricks
Tiny changes
Cellulite-afflicted areas
Transdermal fat emulsifier
Penetrating gel emulsifies
fat on contact
Should I get a tummy tuck
at the same time as my C-section?

It's all about you
Looking great is just the beginning
When you lose weight, you're a new person!
I looked terrible, but I was like,
I'm
thin
and that's all that matters
People noticed
Girls are more likely to develop depression than boys
Survival of the sexiest

It's what inside that matters
Nothing screams "me" like...
Finding your inner supermodel
The stretch mark solution!
You'll multiply your
oh-wow factor by 10
Vanish unsightly spider veins—
Guaranteed!
Get your best body ever
Make him crazy for you

I like to change my
clothes and make-up all the time,
but I always remain
the same person inside

The things we do for love:
the push-up bra
Your problem: breast enhancement
Bust boosting gel
Get me a gallon!
\$3 per application
Breast enlargement: \$2999 both breasts
This was really me and people
(men) were actually looking
(it's amazing what larger breasts can do)
Guys don't respond well to subtleties

That extra "feminine charm"
The implant in a bottle
After watching my friend *explode*
out of her old bras
Become born again,
Become a new person

Having a great time with my
newfound confidence
Everyone around you starts
treating you like the someone
special you always knew you were
Especially my husband

59% of men cheat: does yours?
Need a little beauty expresso?

When breasts are seen
as defining who a woman is
Sore nipples
Money back guarantee (less s & h)
Just in case you decide
you prefer your smaller breasts
Not available in Iowa

No more beauty blind spots

If Marilyn Monroe were alive today,
she'd be all over this look

In Sanity We Believe

by Jennifer Salamat

When broken children cry hungry on empty streets
And fat cats are measured in gold,

We plead in sanity

Because their hands are small and nimble
While ours are stuffed with money to hold.

When women's screams echo past time, color, sphere
And power smiles without throwing bills,

We plead in sanity

Because her screams are empty and meaningless
And we know she was only looking for cheap thrills.

When men's tongues are caught between a rock and a country
And we try to mold it to form,

We plead in sanity

Because he is weaker and more obvious
And we care not who he is but where he was born.

When the masses are blind, deaf, dumb

And indulged in glam, glitz, hype

Crammed through the eye, nose, ear

And yet can discern the colors of the rainbow—

Where the black tint ends and the white tint appears—

Then it's just another day in the life...

Just another day in the life

So give us our exploited, our victimized, our silenced

And tell me this is not mucked up, sucked up—fucked up

Because in sanity we believe.

Untitled

by Joje Reyes

I don't deserve you
You're too good for me
I am the stars that disgrace the night sky you are
I do you no justification

Your sky should be filled with fiery stars that

Glimmer

And

Dance

And

Compliment

Your radiant background

Yours truly the stars that darken you
The stars that worry you
The stars that degrade you
The stars that take up useless space

Where

Light

Instead of

Darkness

Should occupy your lonely environment

Please forget
Please let the sun set without remorse
Please let it be
Please let things return to the days when

Sorrow

Was a way of life and not a temporary fixation when

You weren't around to hold my trembling hand

My trembling trail of star dust

My trembling

Flickering

Light

Fading...