

Style is not worth thinking about while making art. If you have it, you'll be the last to know. All you truly have are your preferences.

– Del Antonio

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# Editor's Note

Temper is an annual magazine exhibiting the artistic and literary work of the students at UC San Diego. Writer Edwin Schlossberg said, "The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think." We hope, on a similar vein, that this annual magazine serves as a meaningful arena to better contextualize the diverse emotional, cultural, and visual spaces within which we traverse as people. We offer thanks to the many writers and artists who submitted their work to this year's journal.

We would like to dedicate this issue of Temper in memory of Natalya Cherepakhin.

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

Please note: The views expressed in this publication are solely those of Temper and our members. While Temper is a registered student organization at the University of California, San Diego, the University neither supports nor endorses this publication or its contents. Additionally, the views expressed in this publication do not represent those of the University of California, the Regents, their officers, or their employees. The members of Temper bear full legal responsibility for any and all consequences arising from its publication.

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### **recant**

<http://www.neovoid.org/recant/index.html>

<http://www.mp3.com/recant>

**your home store** by Susan Liem

<http://artslab.ucsd.edu/~sliem>

**sixteen pieces** by Lan Miao

<http://www.i6pieces.tripod.com>

# ON LIGHT

(translated from the italian)

by Heather Gordon

1

we cut a hole in the pumpkin,  
to let a little light out

2

i don't know about the moon,  
but today was a full sun.

3

the bulb died in the bathroom, so  
we put a lamp on the radiator.

# The Two Shirts

by Brian Hurley

Well, I heard this story from a friend who was living in San Francisco at the time when all of this happened. Everybody in his office had heard it, in some form or another. Apparently the husband in the story was one of the executive partners at the office, and word got around. Anyway, the story goes like this:

A woman woke up one morning and found herself alone. Her husband had not come home during the night. This didn't bother her too much, since he was an attorney or an accountant or something, and she figured he must have fallen asleep at the office. The woman rolled out of bed and got ready for work.

She was reaching for a blouse on a hanger when she bumped a stack of folded t-shirts, and they all fell to the floor, coming unfolded. As she bent down to pick them up, she noticed that two of the shirts were exactly alike. They were both dark gray, with the words Cape Cod across the chest, and a small hole in the seam of the right armpit.

The woman couldn't believe what she was seeing. She held the shirts up next to each other. There should only be one, she thought. It was her favorite t-shirt from college. She had bought it in Massachusetts, on an Easter vacation with her future husband. It had a rip in the armpit. It also had a tiny stain of blood near the bottom, from a time when she had worn the shirt to a concert and a fanatic had bumped into her. Only one shirt like this existed in the whole world. She checked—both shirts had the bloodstain. She laid them side by side on the bed. This is physically impossible, she thought.

She sat down. Later she went to the kitchen, poured herself a glass of orange juice, and sat down again. Then she finished getting ready and went off to work.

Instead of riding the bus as usual, she caught a taxi. She figured she wouldn't have to pay the fare anyway. Why should she? There were two identical t-shirts sitting on her bed at home. None of the old rules applied. But when she hopped out of the taxi without paying, the cabbie chased after her. He caught up to her and said, We'd all love to live in a world without consequences. Why should you be the only one who gets to do it?

The woman liked that so much, she paid him double. She even thought about getting back in the taxi and telling him to keep on driving. But she didn't want to give him the wrong idea.

Now she was standing on the sidewalk, looking up at her office building, a huge waterfall of red brick and squarish windows. What am I doing here? she thought. What good is a day at the office when my favorite t-shirt is replicating itself in the closet? She had to find out if anything else was going on.

Up the street was an Italian sandwich shop and café. The woman went inside to sort out her thoughts. She bought a cup of hot chocolate and sat close to the window, where she could watch everyone passing by. If a bus with five

wheels came along, or a building began to split its seams, or a streetlight erupted in blue flame, she didn't want to miss it. It might be a clue.

She waited. But nothing looked out of the ordinary. So the woman began to make a list of all the possibilities on a paper napkin: If there was only one t-shirt on her bed when she got home, she would have to consider the whole thing a fluke, and never mention it again. Mistakes are made all the time. Maybe the two shirts dilemma would fix itself by this evening.

On the other hand, if this was only the beginning, and the Cape Cod t-shirt kept reappearing in her closet, more and more of them all the time, then she would take it to a group of scientists at a university or a museum, and sell it for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Or, she could keep it for herself and use the extra shirts for good, possibly shipping them off to third world countries, where they could be used for clothing, shelter, and in the construction of sails and rope and curtains. She would become a secret benefactress to the huddled masses.

By now the woman had begun writing on a fourth napkin, and her hot chocolate was almost finished. One thing that she never considered was the likelihood that she had gone crazy. Nobody thinks seriously about that. However, there was a third possibility. She tipped back the cup and finished her hot chocolate. If the two shirts were still on the bed when she got back, then she would have something to think about. That was the thought that made her swallow hard. If there were indeed two shirts... then who knows? If there were two Cape Cod shirts on the bed, then maybe her bathroom door would open inwards, instead of outwards. And if her bathroom door opened inwards, then maybe her alarm clock would count the minutes to seventy-five instead of sixty. And if her alarm clock counted to seventy-five, then maybe the orange juice would be colored blue. And if the orange juice were blue... then who knows? These are the things she was pondering as her co-workers filed into the café at lunchtime. She saw them join the line, and place their orders for a sandwich or a coffee and biscotti. The woman sized them up for the first time, checking for anything dubious. One of the co-workers leaned over and said, You're not getting away with this.

The woman shoved the napkins into her pocket and left. Remembering the cabbie's words, she humbled herself and took the bus home. When she got there, she rushed into the bedroom to check on the shirts. Then she called her husband at the office.

—Hello, he said.

She had intended to ask if anything had gone horribly, suspiciously wrong with his day, whether he could corroborate her evidence, whether everyone's world were spiraling into the absurd, or just hers. But she found herself asking something else.

—Are you alright? You didn't come home last night.

—Yeah, fine. Got a lot of work right now. You know.

—Mm hm. Do you remember my Cape Cod shirt? The one we bought on vacation a long time ago?

—Uh huh.



—Have you ever seen another shirt like that?

—No. Why? To tell the truth, that's a pretty godawful shirt. Doesn't it have a hole under one of the arms?

—Yes, but there's only one of them, right?

—Only one of them. That's for sure. Most miserable t-shirt I've ever seen. Why? Are you getting rid of it?

—I don't know.

—Look. I've got an awful lot of work to do over here. You shouldn't count on me coming home for a while.

The woman had been cradling the phone in the crook of her neck, and holding a t-shirt in each of her hands. Both shirts had been lying on the bed when she got home, rips and bloodstains and all.

—Okay. Me too.

So the woman moved to Alaska. At least, that's how I heard it. She didn't take many things from the house, and she was gone before her husband got home. Nobody really knows what happened until fifteen years later, when she showed up at the house again. She looked surprised to find her husband sitting in the living room.

It seems one of the shirts had begun to fade. Nothing drastic, just a bit of color draining out of the fabric as it got older. The bloodstain had spread, and grown fainter, and the rip in the armpit had widened. This shirt had also been stretched out at the neck. But the other one, its twin, hadn't changed at all. If you saw the two of them together, you wouldn't be able to deny it. Only one of them had aged.

The woman said hello when she walked in. She set a suitcase on the coffee table.

—I came to ask if anything else had changed. For instance, does the bathroom door open inwards now?

—You never let me say goodbye, he said.

—Do the clocks still count to sixty?

—What was I supposed to do?

—Answer me! Have there been any new shirts in the closet?

—No, he said. Nothing like that has happened since you left.

The woman sighed. From her suitcase she withdrew the Cape Cod t-shirts. She let the fainter one fall to the floor, and then she took off what she was wearing and put on the other t-shirt. After that, she went back to Alaska. The first thing she did when she got there was get rid of all her other shirts, because she would never need them again.

# Friday Nights

by Andy Lee

Street corners bombarded my posh folk  
Stuck in a position, alone in your bedroom  
Twenty dollars for a night outside your window  
Seventeen more than you can afford  
Fixed only dreaming of having the money to follow  
You, alone, hung in  
Your own hands.

Self disgust defied  
By sweaty palms  
Leading to your simple gratification  
Relieved sighs echo off barren walls  
Quivering trembles trickle down vertebrae  
You, alone, hung in  
Your own hands.

Ask for something  
More than self adulation,  
Fornication,  
Love bound by lust  
For none other than yourself  
You, alone, hung in  
Your own hands.

Responses left at your disposal  
Struggling to become more than a  
Self serving vagabond  
Huddled in a corner  
In tears and in shambles  
You, alone, hung in  
Your own hands.

# one of those (dreaded) personal statements

by karima mosi

when i take myself seriously, i'm an emaciated lioness  
tolerating a painful, grumbling stomach rather than succumb to the  
gory truth of my existence.  
i stuff two fingers down my throat  
put flowers in my hair  
wear a convincing smile of gritted teeth.

otherwise, i'm a naked baby swimming or a Labrador puppy with oversized  
paws stumbling up stairs.  
confident in my clumsiness  
basking in my inadequacy

perfect imperfection

like Cameron Diaz in *Something About Mary* or a cross-eyed Vivica  
Fox  
most beautiful when my external beauty is complicated by coagulated  
cum in my hair or mango fibers hanging from in between  
my teeth.

when i take myself seriously, my body takes control of me.  
my heart is a wildfire.  
my throat burns sour.  
my fingers get all jittery.

my unstable confidence crumbles.

i'm paralyzed  
like a feral cat startled by a drooling predator,  
like Nicole Kidman in *The Others*,  
clutching her rosary as the safety of  
her house,  
her children,  
her faith  
dissolves into a dense fog...

otherwise, i'm a monologuing performer who  
in mid-sentence liberates herself from all her scripts to float aimlessly  
in silence...  
rocking to the mellow rhythm of a solitary heart  
unconcerned about, yet never completely forgetting  
the astonished gaze of my forsaken audience.  
aimlessly in silence...  
rocking to the mellow rhythm of a solitary heart  
unconcerned about, yet never completely forgetting  
the astonished gaze of my forsaken audience.

# Reality Fiction

by Eric Dean

"I'm pregnant."

Joe ran to the toilet. Vomited.

"I'm going to have to call you back," he said, pressing the off button before she could respond. He vomited again. The rim of the toilet felt cold against his hands.

When he was relatively certain that he was through, he stood up. Two things then dawned on him. The first being that in the last two months or so he had been with more than one woman who was not his wife and second, that he had failed to get a name from his illegitimate caller.

Joe kneeled back down, placed his hands where they had just been, and vomited for the third time. He cursed into the bowl.

The phone rang. Joe frantically grabbed at it, pressed the on button.

"Hello?" he said, his eyes closed tight.

"Hello. Who is this?" The voice was male. Joe opened his eyes.

"This is Joe. Who is this?"

"This is Frankie of the Three Frankies. We met at a certain event a few days ago. I understand if you don't remember."

"Excuse me? I don't know any Frankies, sorry."

"That's okay. I understand, like I said. Listen, I don't have much time, you know how it can be. But I'm calling to tell you that very soon Mr. Genivicci will be sending a representative to cut your throat."

"What?" Joe asked. But the man had hung up.

Joe was positive he didn't know any Frankies. Let alone a Mr. Genivicci.

"Jenna!" he called up the stairs.

"What Joe!?"

"Do we know any Frankies?"

"No!"

Joe walked up the stairs, both hands on the rail. He knocked on his bedroom door, pushing it open at the same time. His wife was in bed, her back to the door, and him.

"Honey? Something wrong?" he asked.

"What do you think?"

"I think that you've been acting very strange lately. That you've been quite standoffish with me, and only me, and that your tone alone indicates that I've done something to hurt you, and you know, that's the last thing I want to do to you. To my little Bumpy Kins."

By now, he had eased onto the bed and placed his face close to his wife's turned shoulder. He spoke into her ear.

"If you could tell me," he said, "what it is I've done, I might be able to explain whatever it is, and then we wouldn't have to be a monologue couple."

His wife rolled over more, pressing her face into the pillow. The position didn't look comfortable; Joe got the message. He left. Went

downstairs. Into the kitchen.

His two children sat at the kitchen table, eating breakfast—toast, cereal, orange juice. Grover, the family pet, an English sheepdog, lay under the table at their feet, waiting for crumbs, panting happily. Joe stumbled to the kitchen sink, turned the water on. He splashed his face. The cold water did little to help him.

“Something wrong, Joe?” his eighteen year old daughter asked.

“Something wrong, Joe?” echoed his ten year old son.

Joe looked at his son, “You. Stop repeating everything everyone says, you may end up saying things you’ll regret. And you,” to his daughter, “what’s with this ‘Joe’ stuff? What happened to ‘Dad’?”

“Oh come off it,” his daughter moaned. “I refuse to live in the past. ‘Dad’ is such an ancient conventionalist construct indicating mastery between parent and child. Though I see that I should pay homage to the two responsible for my pointless existence, I don’t think I should be forced to act as your humble servant on a daily basis. That humility originates with the vernacular. Besides, you don’t call me by my name. I’m sorry, Joe. This is the way it’s gotta be.”

She walked past him, out of the kitchen, his son, on roller skates, wheeling behind her. “Sorry, Joe,” his son said. “This is the way it’s gotta be.”

Joe dug his face into his fingers. He heard his children’s pounding steps on the staircase. He imagined the marks from the skates imbedded into the carpet.

“Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr!” the sound came from the floor.

Joe spread his fingers apart, stared through the net they created. “Grover?”

The fur on Grover’s back whipped around like string tied to a fan. His teeth were bared.

“Grover. Hi. What’s wrong, buddy?”

Grover let out a vicious bark, jumped at Joe. Joe leapt backward. Instinctively he propped himself up on the counter, bringing his knees to his chest, his legs as far from Grover as possible. The dog glared up at him.

His wife walked in. “Joe—what the Hell are you doing?” She patted the dog, who now looked as he had before, tongue out, torso heaving, tail wagging. “My little Grovesy-wovesy. Yes you are! A good one! Yes you are!” Her eyes and face narrowed as she looked from Grover to Joe. “You want to explain to me, Joe Christopher Patene, why our daughter is in her room crying, and why you allow our son to skate around the house like this is some kind of circus tent?! He could seriously hurt himself. And then...” She began to sob. Quietly. Her breaths came short and quick. She yelled through her tears, “What the Hell’s going on with you? Goddamit.”

Joe inched his way down from the counter, to console his wife, but he was wary of Grover. The dog didn’t make a sound. Slowly and deliberately, Joe thought, Grover pulled his lips back from his teeth.

Joe decided to stay on the counter, and pulled his foot back up.

“So?” Tears fell from his wife’s cheeks. Joe couldn’t think of anything

to say. After several seconds she left, sighing on the way out. "Come on, Grover!" she called over her shoulder. Steps on the staircase. Grover, growling, eyes always focused on Joe, backed his way out of the kitchen. Joe could hear him panting up the stairs.

The doorbell rang.

Joe considered staying balled on the counter as he was, in a fetal position. But logic and reason overcame any real gut feeling, and soon he was opening the door to a red-faced Mr. Potts.

"Mr. Potts. Hi. Something the matter?"

"Yes something is the matter! You stole my newspaper!"

"I didn't Mr. Potts. I haven't even had a chance to go outside this morning."

"Shut up! I'm going to go back across the street. I'm going to go inside my house. I'm going to sit down for some hot cocoa. And I'm going to give you ten minutes. If my paper is not back on my driveway as it was earlier this morning, I will come back here and I swear to God Almighty, I will punch you."

"Please, Mr. Potts, just calm down. Why would I steal your paper? There are other houses closer than yours. Why, Mr. Potts, would I go out of my way to take yours?"

"You're a thief, that's why!"

Mr. Potts huffed away.

"That doesn't make any sense," Joe yelled to him.

Mr. Potts flashed him the finger from the street. Joe slammed the door. When he turned around his daughter handed him the phone. He hadn't even heard it ring. "Some woman," she said. "Try not to take too long. I'm expecting an important call."

Joe walked quickly to the bathroom, locked the door, and sat down on the seat.

"Hello?"

"I tell you I'm pregnant and you hang up on me!?"

"Uh."

"How could you, Joe? Do you think I wanted this to happen? Do you? Who answered the phone?"

"My daughter."

"Your daughter! You never told me you had fucking kids! You got a wife, too?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Goddamn."

Joe put his head between his knees.

"So," the woman continued, "what are you going to do about this?"

"I'll pay for the abortion," he said. "Who is this?"

Silence.

"Hello? Hello?"

Joe cursed as he hung up. He got up from the toilet, threw open the door. His son was skating by. The sound of door and skull colliding reminded

Joe of a sack of concrete tossed onto the dull, cold metal of a wheelbarrow.

Joe bent down, cradled his son's swelling head in his hands. "Are you okay?"

"Are ay oo yay okay ay?" his son grunted back.

"Stop it. I'm serious. Are you all right?"

"Ine fay."

"Stop the pig latin, too."

"I'm ay ot nay eaking spay in ay ig pay atin lay. I'm ay alking tay ormal nay. This is pig latin."

Joe looked at his son for any signs of mischief. He saw none.

"Fuck."

"Uck fay," his son echoed.

Joe's daughter stood in front of them, holding the phone out to Joe. "What's with him?" she asked, nodding at his son.

"Nothing," Joe said.

"Othing nay," said his son.

Joe, but, I'm still expecting a very important call."

She handed him the phone and started to leave.

Joe covered up the speaking end, whispered to his daughter, "Wait."

"What?"

"Man or woman?"

"Man."

She left. He went back into the bathroom, figuring he'd deal with his son later.

"Hello?" he said into the phone.

"Yeah. How ya fuckin' dooin'? This is Frankie—"

going to cut my throat—"

"Don't you fuckin' interrupt me again. I hate your guts Joe Patene. I ain't never seen your face and I ain't never plan to. I sure as shit ain't never talked to you neither. I recommend you keep your pie hole closed. You probably talked to one of the other, more amiable Frankies. I gotta say, that when Mr. Genovici is through wit you, you're gonna pray, that your throat, is all he cuts. Good day."

"Shit," Joe muttered into the dial tone. He pressed 'off'. Hard.

"It shay," his son said through the door.

The phone rang again.

"Hello?"

Joe. "Hello. I'd like to speak to Karen." It was a man. Sounded as old as

"Your name Frankie?"

"No."

"May I ask who's calling?"

"Yes you may. I'm Karen's date tonight. Chuck."

“Karen’s date? I don’t think so, pal. Go bark up a different tree.” Joe hung up on him with an emphatic thumb. Something about his voice though, something about it gave Joe a queasy feeling.

“Karen!” he called up the stairs.

Karen stood on the staircase. “Yes? What is it?”

“Your ‘date’ just called—”

“Oh! Good, I’ll take it in my room,” she began to bounce up the steps.

“Karen. He’s not on the phone anymore. Come down here.”

Karen came down the steps, stood in front of Joe. “What is it? Is he going to call back? What did you tell him?”

“I hung up on him. I told him not to bother with you.”

Karen’s face grew tight with anger. “Why would you do a thing like that?”

“I want to talk with you about dating, and boys. Let’s go to the—”

The doorbell rang.

“Hold on. I’ll meet you in the living room.”

Joe went to the door. Opened it. Mr. Potts’s fist came in. Cracked into his nose.

“There’s one of those for every day you steal my paper, Patene! Thief!” He spat as he walked away.

Joe lay on the ground, holding his nose, gushing thick red blood. It felt cold to him.

The last thing he heard before blacking out was a tiny whisper in his ear, “eef thay.”

\*\*\*\*\*

When he came to he was sitting on his couch in the living room, alone. His wife came in, silently, and handed him the phone. She left without a word. Joe held the phone in his right hand and stared at it for a long time. Finally, he pressed it to his ear, and spoke.

“Hello?”

“Hello.” It was a man’s voice.

“You must be the third Frankie,” Joe said. “I have to tell you something. You send whoever the fuck you want to my doorstep and I will cut their throat! Do you understand me? I hope you do because I’m sick and tired of these silly games and I’m sick and tired of you and your stupid ass! That goes for all the Frankies!”

There was silence on the other end.

“Hello?” Joe asked.

“Hello. Joe Patene?” The voice was suddenly very familiar.

Joe closed his eyes and tried to imagine himself as a different person. Anyone. “Mr. Hughes, I’m terribly sorry sir, I thought you were someone else.”

His boss sighed, the exhalation of air on the other end secured, Joe thought, any chance of a promotion. “You invited me over to your home recently for dinner. I wanted to know what kind of food we would be having.



I don't mean to sound rude, but, I'm allergic to most seafood."

"Okay," Joe mumbled. "I'll tell my wife."

"Excellent."

Joe said goodbye and pressed the off button.

"Jenna! Jenna!" he called. His nose felt unattached. He wondered how long he had been out for.

She came into the living room and looked at him, her hand on her hip, her weight shifted to one side.

"That was Mr. Hughes. What are we going to make for him tomorrow?"

"I'm going to be cooking halibut, shrimp, and scallops."

"He says he's allergic to seafood."

"You complete bastard, Joe! You complete bastard!"

"What?"

"Get your head out of your ass. Please! And what happened to Kevin? He's been speaking in pig latin all day. Talk to him, okay? Do something that indicates you're worth anything. Please!"

She stormed off. He heard her shoes stomping on the staircase.

The doorbell rang. Joe got up. Slowly he trudged to the door. Opened it.

"I knew that was you. Son of a bitch!" said the man on the doorstep.

Joe recognized the man immediately. Understood why he had felt as he had. He tried to slam the door on him, but the man wedged his leg in the door, pushed it open with his shoulder, slugged Joe once in the belly. He grabbed Joe by the collar and threw him into the bathroom, pulling a gun that had been concealed in his pants and cocked the hammer, placing the barrel against Joe's temple. It felt cold.

"Pansy Patene, it has been a long long time."

"Chuck," Joe managed to eke out.

Chuck laughed. "You pussy. God. I knew it was you! I can't believe it, though. Your daughter, man, she is some piece of work. A fox."

Joe was folded against the wall of the bathtub, in the corner. Chuck sat on the toilet seat, holding the gun casually.

"I brought this over to let you know that I'm going to be taking your daughter out whether you want me to or not. Regardless of any kind of restrictions you put on her. What do you think, Patene?"

"I think you're the same bull-headed bully you were in high school."

Chuck laughed again. "I think you're right, Patene. You do what works, right?"

Chuck stood up, put the gun back inside his pants, walked out of the bathroom and screamed, "Karen!"

He looked back at Joe, winked at him. "I'll treat her right, don't worry."

From the floor of the bathroom, through the little window of visibility created by the open door, Joe saw Karen—in her backless shirt—give Chuck

a kiss on the cheek. He saw Chuck's hand creeping down her back as they left together, the front door banging behind them.

Joe refused to move from his spot beside the toilet. His wife came in. "I can't believe," she said, "that you would permit her to date someone nearly as old as you are. I don't understand you, Joe. I just don't get it. I don't want to see you or hear from you for awhile. I don't want to be near you. Okay? Here." She handed him the phone. "Some guy named Frankie." She said as she left him there.

Joe took the phone and made a small, pathetic sound.

"Joe Patene, you dirty son of a hump. After we get you I'm going to cut off your ass and glue it to your face."

Joe continued to listen, even though the Frankie had already hung up. He listened to the silence. Then pressed off when he heard the dial tone.

He got up and went upstairs to his son's room. His son lay blank-faced and motionless on his bed. Joe sat at the foot.

"How are you, Kevin?"

"Okay ay."

"I'm sorry about your head, son. I think this pig latin thing will go away soon."

"I ay ope hay o say."

"I've been getting some phone calls, son. From all kinds of people. Horrible horrible phone calls. Your sister thinks she knows it all. Your mother, she's mad at me. You know why Mom's mad at me?"

Kevin nodded.

"Why?"

"Anniversary ay."

"That makes sense. I forgot. It's tomorrow, when Mr. Hughes comes over, isn't it?"

"Es yay."

Joe's nose began to run with blood. A drop fell and landed on the folded newspaper at his feet. He picked up the paper, and walked downstairs, toward the door.

Grover was there, growling.

Joe walked toward the dog.

Grover backed up, moved aside, barked twice as Joe opened the door and walked across his lawn.

He walked across the street, toward Mr. Potts's house, but on the way was hit by a Volkswagen Beetle. He was killed.

by Neha Singh

My dearest,

I'm dying to interrogate you about every detail of your date, what did it taste like - the fear, adrenalin, did you lose yourself in another world ... and this silent love - quite what form did it take, did you get to touch, kiss ... and darling, tell me, what else has been weighing, teasing, seducing your mind. dying to flood you with 'mundane' questions about your life ...

and me ... after months of half wishing I was a few years older, or maybe with less baggage - oh dearest you, how can I spin the story of me, to mitigate the risk of it invading the space of yours I have been quietly trying to preserve. and darling, quite what spin would I give it. I'm stuck in a crappy paradox. our silence renders me ever so illiterate on your 'capricious' moods. and yet you've been starring in something else recently too - my lucid dreams - they arouse an illusory affinity, a mutual affection that might just horrify you.

what words of mine could elucidate the allure of beginnings without ends, of chaos without order, of being without doing, of imagination without rationality, of lightness without dark - temptations ignited after an outing with some friends. only hours later I stumbled into the internal bashing, complete desperation on the streets of this damn country.

A bit consumed by thoughts of you, the image of me swishing out with you standing. Both of us terrifyingly numb. Flashing to images of me nestled in your arms, you being the perfect pillow. Am running out of strength to continue this flashback, in fear of having to rush to the nearest airport and knock on your door tomorrow morning with a bag of your favorite muffins and unpredictable emotions.

I'm struggling with the irony of silence. hope I've censored the desperation, turmoil, pain at me fearing the end of 'us'. yet intruding on that silence I hear, so often, words you've spoken once before, that I so long to hear again ...

Am scared by this spot I find myself in...would be easier to write everything off as a fatal, breathtaking illusion. But I fear you intoxicate my mind, more consuming than this continent....my love, my dream- at some level, letting go is inconceivable.

Always,  
me

# Our Story

(Translated from German)

by Anne Seifert

Can you believe that I am finally going to tell our story? I can't. And I don't really know where to begin either. I should probably start with the beginning. But I don't want to start with things that would soon get boring because they are so ordinary. And our story can not be called ordinary.

But it started quite ordinary... that's what makes it so special.

Three... that number is repeating itself. It seems to appear frequently no matter how coincidental things happened. This number again and again.

Saturday. My favorite day of the week. A day on which you can do whatever you want, because there is nothing before it and nothing after. The week ends on Friday and the weekend is over on Sunday.

Nothing ends on Saturday. Saturday is when everything begins...

The 15th of December is already pretty close to Christmas. At any rate it is high time to think about Christmas presents if that hasn't happened until then. That's what the two of us thought, too. And of course, we were two of those who hadn't thought about it yet. How were we supposed to, with what we had to do for university?

We meant to go for an hour.

An hour, with which we would try to get away from studying and enjoy ourselves. As much as one can enjoy buying Christmas presents.

But we got swept away, had so much fun, couldn't stop looking around....

We made one bargain after the other. Couldn't resist.

"Look, how do you like this?" "Whhhaat???" "Come over here, I found something fun!" "No, look at this. This is good." "Wait a sec...!" "Come on...look!"

"Are you serious?" We were standing in the middle of the strangest things laughing like crazy. Each of us was holding a bunch of useless but interestingly shaped stuff. We had no idea how we would get all that home on our bikes. But it would work out somehow...

After we had decided which of the crazy items we actually wanted to buy, we balanced our treasures home.

Secretly we sneaked into the apartment, so no-one would see what we had bought before they were supposed to.

All of that had taken more time than we had thought, so we were pretty surprised, when we finally saw what time it was.

"Whhaat.... it's so late already? Let's quickly sort our stuff apart, before we need to get ready for the party. I need to go home real quick to get changed and get my sleepover things so I won't have to go home through the cold and the dark later on!" It was the 15th of December in Germany after all and accordingly frosty.

It got pretty late that night. I had planned not to drink, because I didn't feel like it. It was going to be a private party, so it could be great even without alcohol.

Well, that resolution lasted until I got back to the apartment, where all of you were drinking, because you got bored waiting for me. "Just a little bit!"

"No, I don't want anything tonight.... but well, a little bit can't be too bad!" That

killed me... don't think that I drink on a regular basis. I don't. Sometimes it just tastes so good. That night it didn't taste very good though, but it felt good.

Can you remember the two guys sitting in front of the computer? There were two guys sitting in a dark room, right next door to the noisy party and were reading political internet sites. It was a little scary, but I guess they just didn't like to party.

How we got into that room? I don't remember. Oh yes, we wanted to get rid of our coats there... no, we didn't bring them 'cause you lived right across from that house... Well, anyway, we didn't stay in there much longer, because they couldn't convince us not even with a lot of talking, of the importance of those sites.

There were a lot of Greens at the party itself. I felt totally conservative although I wouldn't usually consider myself as conservative. At any rate, we danced like crazy... I did at least... and we had a lot of fun. Was it important what anyone was thinking about us? I didn't care! Maybe I should have?

Our friends went home one after the other and said that they needed to go to bed. When we didn't know anyone anymore, I could finally be convinced to go, too.

We tottered home across the street. Puhh... we were thirsty. Dancing all night drinking only alcohol can't be healthy, can it? So we sat in the kitchen and drank some water. I should be more correct: I wasn't able to sit, because I got sick whenever I stopped moving. So I walked along the black and white tiles. Always along the lines... around the corner, and back. Saturday night music from the radio was playing softly, interrupted by the news every now and then.

All of a sudden, you were standing leaning against the stove, which was on my way. And since the music was still playing, we started dancing. One step forwards and a half back... Your hair smelled so good. Your back was so warm, your eyes shining.... your lips so soft...

The 3. advent.

Christmas that year was pretty strange... and we were pretty confused. Pretended that nothing had happened. Didn't talk to anyone about it. Guess, we didn't even think about it ourselves. Maybe we should have....

Our friendship suffered very much during the following three months. 3.

Good that we could always blame our studying as a reason not to be able to see other. We couldn't avoid each other in university anyway. But after a while our friends started wondering what had happened.

After a long time of silence between us, we finally started talking again. We talked and talked and eventually stopped talking... that was the third of march. 3.

Five months... can you imagine, that we haven't seen each other for so long? And it is actually longer than that, because that is only the time that I am here already. We hadn't seen each other several weeks before. And now it's only three more months until we see each other again. 3.

I have a lot of dreams. Dreams about you. Day and night. I am dreaming so realistically that it hurts to wake up and realize that you are not there. You are so close to me in these dreams. I hear you talk, I see you before me and I can

feel you. You touch me and look at me. With your eyes that I can drown in. Your eyes that look at me so warm and smiling. There is a warmth inside of me that expands, kind of like sunlight flooding me. You give me the feeling of being important like nothing else on this earth. Of being unique. But the dreams get less frequent. Is that good?

The longer I am here and the longer I think about it, the more I get the feeling that our story isn't real.

The distance is strong, it lets a lot of things look more pale. Can a year or a half make everything be forgotten? Should it?

A lot of new impressions form my current picture. I wonder how many new impressions it would take for me not to be able to recognize and see our picture anymore. I think there are not enough pictures.

But I could turn around, try not to look and concentrate on different pictures. But other pictures don't seem to be really interesting right now. I am honestly trying. But the colors aren't as bright as yours... ours. The contrasts aren't as clear and the images aren't as honest. How could they, if I keep comparing?

Our last night at home was probably the highlight of everything.

We were supposed to be at that invitation at eight. We should have met there. But for reasons that neither of us can recall now, we decided to meet at my place first and then go there together. We told everyone else, that we wanted to have a little time on our own before, because we would not see each other for a year either, after all. That was the truth, but another one, than everybody thought.

We didn't talk much. It was a little strange at first. All of a sudden we were on our own again. In the presence of the others we always pretended that nothing had happened. To switch instantly wasn't always easy. The first approach was hesitant. A tender stroke along your arm. A look into your eyes and was lost. I let myself go and let you catch me, I stopped thinking. I got swept away by you and feelings took over...

We lost total track of time...

It was much too late for us to find a reasonable excuse. On our way to the party we thought about what we could tell the others, but everything sounded so made up. In the end we decided not to say anything. Just in case anyone would ask us, we would tell them that we talked and lost track of time... at least half of it was true.

It was a little strange when we first got there, but after a short while no one even remembered that we had come late. I felt really comfortable. The atmosphere was relaxed.

During the course of the night I was getting more and more afraid, that we wouldn't be careful enough anymore. We drank delicious cocktails and had had good red wine before. The later it got and the less inhibited the alcohol made us become, the more often I found my hand on your back, your hand on my stomach... it felt so good. A little forbidden but then again it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

Why?

Why you? Why me? Why us?

And always this number 3...

# A Rosary drowning in the Rosewater

by Nick Van Borst

shoulders shake while lips struggle  
to give words to the terror you feel:  
your darting eyes telegraph daggers at me:  
how could I, who listened with open, oily eyes  
to memories from childhood,  
pictures of sunbeam passion  
or disregarded daydreams reclaimed  
from cavities of fourth-grade,  
the lone kiss on the playground, the unwritten memoirs  
of Saturday-night oblivions –  
how could I,  
I, who had so considerably last Tuesday,  
picked the stolen car keys up from the station,  
who remembered to bring the last cartoon butterfly in from the rain,  
and who had meticulously combed your hair at the crying window  
while avalanches piled in knots and bundles,  
how could I, I?, I!

like a delicate art I absorb the sounds let slip  
by the tenuous thread that ties  
feeling to life,  
until – finally – drained – you  
plunge like a wave into my arms

our mouths will meet patiently,  
disregarding the haste with which we strip off our clothes  
and a haze will wash over us  
as faces melt into  
the sinuous darkness of closing eyes

we will take hours to work it out –  
and, in the meantime, let slip  
the hidden feelings and guilty raptures  
so long unexpressed;  
the intricate meanings and solitudes congealed beneath  
the torrential, meandering, incommunicable chaos  
of our minds

tomorrow these truths will vanish like footprints swallowed by wet sand

your arms gesticulate wildly as with carefully worded sentences  
wrenched painfully through the gates of heaven,  
you ponder the utter impossibility, the contemptible and irrefutable fact  
that the one you once loved with such grandiose and immoderate totality:

– who gave voice to the tiny sonnets of uncertainty lying in paths untrod,  
lent eyes to peer, ears to listen, tongues to caress –  
could sit before you know and scald with these bitter, childish word

and how could you have felt ecstasy, here, where  
now are only  
loneliness and pain?

we will spend hours to work it out, and in the meantime  
thoughts trace widening circles around the twisting moments,  
fix into patterns and rhythms the tenebrous connections  
formed by those sordid materials which flit so easily  
from realities and dream;  
while, between every syllable, a yawning chasms looms  
rushing to engulf you

how could, you wonder, those feelings you painstakingly swindled  
from the deepest recesses  
now sound  
meaningless and hollow,  
like puddles  
drying in the sun?  
how can the one who touched your heart in its most secret moment  
whither like a dying flower,  
leaving only a stain of memory in its place?

once again we will work it through,  
and find love in each other's eyes  
once again we will dance that dance, give word  
to vain passions and fleeting memories that burn away time  
once more we will be  
a fountain, drowning the world in the depth of our tears  
and find that solitude where all is heat and beauty,  
happiness melds with pain, and insanity becomes  
a profound, unspeakable reason

the tears roll back in your eyes, our lips  
brush, my hand brushes through your hair, hot breath awhisper:

everything is alright.  
                                this happens for a reason.  
  I understand.

a beautiful, beautiful lie;               but a lie all the same



# In a World Full of Nothing

by Erika Baino

In a world full of nothing  
a scream is heard

but silenced

by the deceit of the american voice  
they wash their hANDS  
and turn their backs  
on the suffering

the weak

the children

they turn out our pockets  
and steal our pride  
so  
raise your arms

cry for peace  
take it back

make it yours

if only we could fill this world of nothing  
hide the clock  
remember the compassion of past  
we know now the turncoaT POlitics  
we must believe in ourselves  
the wall is crumbling

a light shown through

only to reveal the truth that blinded our faith  
if only we could fill this world of nothing  
maybe we can  
the children are our future  
they must be seen and heard  
so  
raise your arms

cry for peace

take it back

make it yours

# The Ghosts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue

by Marcus Kouma

*Approximately 7:00 a.m., Now*

The door swung open on its hinges as it had countless times over the last 74 years; the hinges had been replaced several times in those last 74 years, yet these ones, too, were beginning to squeak ever so slightly. The stair just beyond the threshold creaked when forced to bear weight, as it had for the last 40 or so years; no one had ever gotten around to replacing it, though at least half-a-dozen had vowed to do so. The freshly (relatively at least) installed brickwork at the base of the stairs was just now beginning to show the first signs of age. The grass on both sides of the walkway was lush and green with just a light frosting of fall leaves. The path that younger dwellers of the house often followed continued out to the sidewalk and down 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to the school; it was the same path that had been walked countless times since 1964, when Benjamin Franklin Elementary opened.

Turning around at the edge of the brickwork would bring one to see the front of 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The white paint, freshly sprayed only 5 years ago, shined nicely in the morning sun. The barn-red paint on the eaves and the trimming on the stoop gave the house a quaint, farmhouse sort of feel. The red and yellow rose bushes adorning the space on both sides of the stoop added a nice, earthy touch of green to the front of the house. At just this time, only an hour or so after dawn, a photographer, or a shrewd member of the city council, would surely have thought the house would make a beautiful post card: "Greetings from Ridge Creek, where our home is your home," it would say. The houses to the right and the left, 1106 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 1098 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue respectively, had the same farmhouse feel, but neither exuded the same level of small-town, American nostalgia as did 1102.

The sun crested over the hills at the edge of the township that faced the rear of the house. Robins chirped in the tall oak standing just behind the house and hummingbirds sucked nectar from a feeder hanging from the porch. All in all, the morning around 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, which faced the local park where teenaged lovebirds would meet up to hold hands and snuggle on one of the benches by the duck pond, began just as it had for the last several billion years, regardless of what happened at 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, or the ground beneath it.

For the last 74 years, the house had stood, and for the last 74 years, the house had witnessed the lives of half-a-dozen families. Inside its walls, countless hundreds of days passed by. People spent their lives within those walls; memories were formed, love made, arguments fought, meals eaten, and parties thrown. People lived beneath the roof, and people died there as well. Many times were happy ones and just as many were sad, angry, or stressful. But mostly, life happened there: nothing special about that, just life. From the extraordinary to the mundane, it happens everyday. Just life, that's all. Happens everyday.

*Approximately 5:00 a.m., 1945*

“Japan surrenders! The war is over!” Newspapers all over the nation, indeed the world, carried headlines proclaiming this good news to all who would listen. For the last 7 years the world had been at war, but now the good guys had triumphed and the good people of the world could return to their lives without the threat of fascism looming over them. Paperboys would stand on street corners shouting, “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” Boys on bikes would ride through the crisp morning air, bringing the good news to front porches and mailboxes throughout the 48 states. Fathers would rise for work to find the news and breakfast tables all over the nation would be ablaze with orange juice and talk. And, later that night, celebrations would take place in office buildings and homes everywhere.

*Two and a half hours later*

At 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue there was no talk of celebration, however. The good news had arrived at 5:00; the bad had come two hours later.

“Allen, honey, wake up,” the woman said. Her hair was honey-blond and reached just past her shoulders. She gently shook her son, trying to wake him, trying as hard as she could to hold the tears back. “Wake up, honey, I need to talk to you. A man was just here with important news.” She was on the verge now, trying to steady her voice as much as possible, but teetering just on the edge of hysteria. Allen, a boy of about 4 rolled away from his mother and tucked the blanket up under his chin. Now she could smell smoke drifting heavily into the room. Breakfast. That did it; the tears came freely and easily now. The (literally) fried bacon was only the straw that broke the camel’s back; so much more had brought this on. Allen sat up at the sound of his mother’s tears.

“Mommy, what’s wrong?”

*Ten minutes earlier*

The bacon popped and sizzled in its own grease while the eggs fried away merrily on the griddle next to them. Sharie, with one eye turned on the frying foods at all time, got out the juicer from above the counter and began to squeeze fresh orange juice to serve with breakfast. One, two, three, no, four good size oranges were enough to fill two glasses with juice and still have enough left for a refill or two. Returning to the stove, Sharie flipped the eggs and broke one of the yokes, she laughed to herself. The war was over; Aaron would be home in less than two weeks. Nothing could happen that could put a damper on her spirits now. Just as she was turning to put the fresh-squeezed juice in the Frigidaire, the doorbell rang.

“Coming, just a moment,” Sharie called out. She put the juice in the fridge and headed for the front door. She opened the door to see a man dressed in the neatly pressed dress uniform of a military courier. She could see his car parked on the street, at the edge of the hedge-lined walkway that would one day be replaced with a handsome brickwork path; sadly though, the hedges would be gone. “Hello,” Sharie greeted him cordially enough, though she couldn’t help but wonder what this was about.

“Mrs. McLaughlin?”

“Yes, what can I do for you,” Sharie asked the impeccably groomed

man, feeling vaguely sorry for him that he should be out driving around so early when the war had just ended. She imagined that he should have been back home with his family, celebrating and holding his children, if he had any.

"I have a letter for you, that's all, ma'am," as he said this, he offered Sharie a (*pitying?*) smile. Now she was beginning to think that something was wrong. Perhaps Aaron wouldn't be home as soon as she had thought; his ship might need repairs, or perhaps he had been asked to remain behind for a while and help with some kind of military "clean-up" operation.

"Well, thank you, sir. Have a good morning." She smiled at him as he turned and headed back toward his car.

Sharie closed the door and leaned her back against it as she opened the letter:

Dear Mrs. McLaughlin,

The Secretary of the Army regrets to inform you that your husband, Aaron McLaughlin, has been listed as Killed in Action. He fought courageously in his last battle in the skies over . . .

The letter went on, but for Sharie McLaughlin, in the kitchen of 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, the world slammed to a halt. As it did this, the first trails of smoke began to rise off of the bacon, frying unattended on the stove.

*Approximately 10:00 a.m., Now*

Sunlight shined through the open drapes on the window that faced the hills at the eastern edge of Ridge Creek. The light shone painfully into the half-closed lids of Gregory "But You Can Call Me Greg" Chester. Greg pulled the blanket up over his eyes to shield them from the painful light. *God, he thought, why's the sun have to come up so early? It shouldn't be so rude.* Of course, Greg was just a kid, he didn't know that the sun always came up; he didn't know that the house and the world and the sun had no concept of people or time or politeness. At the ripe young age of 9, Greg had just finished his first week of fourth grade at Benjamin Franklin; he couldn't be expected to know things about the greater meaning of life, or the irresistible and relentless forces of the universe.

Slowly, almost comically, Greg slid out of bed and thumped to the floor. He got up and moved over to the desk beneath the window. Greg had just gotten a new computer game as a birthday present, the accompanying party to be held that very afternoon. His only plan for this sun-filled September Saturday, other than attending his party, was to play until his fingers bled and his eyes dried up. As his computer booted up, he listened to the sounds of his parents' preparing an early lunch for him in the kitchen.

*One hour later, 1984*

Eric Johnson tipped the bottle back; he felt the warm rush of the whisky running into his mouth. He swallowed and fire erupted in his stomach

and crawled its way up to his chest. He tipped the bottle back two more times, enjoying the way that the liquor warmed him from inside, and slammed it down, empty, on the table. Eric's wife was out to work and Eric was home for lunch. He worked as a custodian down at Benjamin Franklin Elementary, just up the street from his house on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Normally, he took his lunch at the school, but today he had a plan, a special Eric Present. The doorbell rang. "Come in," he called. It was Christmas time for Eric.

A blond girl, about 17 or 18 stepped in through the door. She was dressed in a black vinyl miniskirt and a denim jacket over a black spandex shirt. The height of fashion for 1984, though she looked woefully out of place in the small rural town where her parents had moved, dragging her along. She crossed the room and moved into the kitchen where Eric sat at the table, the empty bottle of whisky now full with sunlight, which bounced around inside of it. "Hey," was all she said to him.

Eric gave her a rather lascivious look and rose to go toward her. He put one arm around her and the other on her left breast. He brought his whisky breath to her face and kissed her sloppily, a drunk's attempt at passion. The girl didn't protest, she kissed back and pushed her body against his. Eric liked this, it was the best lunch he'd had in quite a while. He pushed against her and walked back toward the couch. She stumbled, caught herself, and walked backwards to the couch. He released her and she removed her jacket.

She sat down on the couch and Eric pushed her on to her back. She went back easily enough, with no hint of trepidation. Eric started to climb on top of her when she finally stopped him. "You got the money? I want to see it before this goes any further." Eric pointed, a twenty-dollar bill sat on the table among a smattering of cigarette ashes and papers. With this sign of reassurance, the girl reached down and pulled her shirt off.

### *Twenty minutes later*

The girl got up and got ready to leave, never noticing Eric picking up the twenty and pocketing it. She put her jacket on and turned toward the table to look for the money. It wasn't there, obviously. "Hey, where's my money," she said, a little perturbed that this jerk was trying to rip her off.

"You weren't good enough to get my money," a lie, she had been great, the best Eric had had in years. But he had decided that this 17-year-old kid wasn't going to have much to say if he decided to keep his money. Now thoroughly trashed, Eric's booze-clouded mind told him that he could easily handle anything that this little tramp could dish out.

"Listen, asshole, give me my damn money," the girl, that's all she really was, was more than a little perturbed now. "If you think you're gonna get away with trying to cheat me, you're gonna be in serious trouble."

Shocked by her audacity, Eric planted the back of his hand against her face. She stumbled back and fell to the floor, a bright red mark already welling up on her cheek. Her hand fell to the pocket of her coat, where she kept the pocketknife that she carried for protection. *If this prick tries that again, he's gonna be suffering*, she thought to herself. She stood up, hand still in her pocket. "Give me my damn money, you prick! And don't you try that shit again." This time Eric brought his fists to bear, one on her stomach and the

other, a moment later, to the other side of her face. As she fell to the ground, she discreetly drew the knife from her pocket. She had something of her own to bring to bear on this asshole.

She got back to her feet; she was going to plant this knife in him and run like hell, forget the money. She quietly opened the stainless steel blade of the knife and stepped toward him. "Hey, bitch, just get the hell out of here. I don't owe you shit," Eric told her. That did it; it was the final straw. She lowered her head and lunged at him, bringing the knife up and aiming for his torso. She hit him and he toppled back on the couch. She had felt the knife slide effortlessly into Eric's flesh, but with her head lowered she never saw the look of shock as the glimmering steel blade pierced Eric Johnson's heart. According to plan, the girl jumped to her feet and fled out the door; she didn't even look back.

As Eric's life flowed out of his body, staining the couch red with blood, his wife Sylvia was clocking out for lunch and wondering what she would be making them for dinner that night.

### *Approximately 2:30 p.m., Now*

As the clock chimed two o'clock, the party was just getting started, by now it was in full swing. All of Greg's friends were in attendance and the picnic table where his family held the annual start- and end-of-summer barbecues was piled high with presents. A piñata hung from a branch of the old oak tree, swinging gently in the breeze. For now, the action was along the back fence, where a rousing game of Pin the Tail on the Donkey was underway.

After the game ended and Steve from up the street had been declared the winner, the children began clamoring for the piñata. Obliging, Greg's father fetched the bat and blindfold and took his place at the end of the rope that would raise and lower the swinging candy store. Kid after kid was spun around and sent to unleash his fury on the piñata; finally Steve, the Pin the Tail on the Donkey Champion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, dealt a fatal blow to the side of the airplane shaped party favor and sent a torrent of candy raining down on the earth below.

It wasn't the first birthday party held at the house, and it wouldn't be the last. It was only one of dozens, not special for any particular reason. No one got hurt, no one died, and no one got in a fight. A little piece of Greg's life came and went, and he shared it with his friends. There was nothing special about that, a little bit of "Move along people, nothing to see here." Of course, to Greg, it was special; it was important.

### *Three hours later*

The party was long over and Greg had since retired to his room to commence saving the virtual world and eliminating baddies in the name of good. Sitting at his computer, Greg never once thought of the things that had happened in his house. He never once considered the lives that had been shaped and affected by it, not because he didn't care, but because he didn't know. Just as they didn't know of his peanut butter and jelly lunch, or his birthday party, he never knew of them. Greg never saw the bloodstained ground beneath the

carpeting that he also didn't know had been replaced in 1984. He had never heard of Sharie McLaughlin or her son Allen. But he did see the paint and patchwork on the wall in his room; he like to imagine it was an old bullet hole from a gangster shootout that took place over some money laundering or moonshine scandal during the prohibition.

*Approximately 5:45 p.m., Early November 1929*

Mark Westerfield, a successful stockbroker living at 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Ridge Creek walked into his study at the rear of the house, a room that would later be the bedroom of Allen McLaughlin, among others. Mark turned, shut the door, and locked it. He slumped into the leather recliner at the back of the room. Over his head, through the window behind him, was a picturesque view of the hills at the edge of town; it seemed a lot about Ridge Creek was picturesque, except Mark's life at this particular point in time. Mark had been a successful man; he drove a brand new 1930 Mercedes, was married to a wonderful woman, Marianne, and was expecting his first child in March. Everything in his life had been going according to plan; he was content with his life as it was. But then the Market had crashed. Thousands of dollars in investments had puffed out of existence.

If the talk was true (he believed it was), and the situation was as bad as they made it out to be there was no hope for the foreseeable future; this could very well be the end of America. Mark couldn't face the thought that his child would grow up in poverty. He couldn't face the thought that he wouldn't be able to provide as he always had. He couldn't face those thoughts and a dozen others. His sleep had been troubled lately.

Marianne was there for him, but he had begun to shut her out. She told him it would be okay; she told him they would make do. And when she did this, he felt better. But then, he would resent her; he would resent his obligations to her, and when night came he would suffer. He would lie awake for hours struggling with the prospect of not having a future. He could hear his father, a rich lawyer when Mark had been younger, telling him that he needed to provide for his family, and if he couldn't, he could hardly be called a man. He didn't deserve to live.

Mark had come to agree with him. Now he opened the small oak box he held in his lap. An oilcloth was wrapped around a bulky object at the bottom of the shallow box. *I wonder if they'll bury me in pine or oak, like this box*, Mark thought. Now he drew the object out and unwrapped it. The oilcloth fell away to reveal a polished, blued Colt revolver. He spun the chamber and snapped it out. He drew a breath and reached into his shirt pocket. He pulled out six bullets and loaded them into the gun, one by one. One by one. He snapped the chamber into place and spun it one more time. *Thank God Marianne is out with her friends this afternoon.*

He set the gun on the arm of the chair and stood. Like a man walking the last mile to the electric chair, Mark approached the door and undid the lock. He drew in a breath and looked around at his life. He turned inside himself and remembered fishing trips with his dad, eating his mom's rhubarb pie. He saw himself playing in the creek just on the edge of town. Splashing in the water with his friends, playing Cowboys and Indians. He slowly let the

breath out as he lifted Marianne's veil and, at the priest's cue, kissed his new bride. For Mark, this was the worst of all because it had been the best. Marianne was his life; he would give his all for her. Now, in light of current events, he began to believe that he had failed. He would never be able to give her what she deserved. Every moment with her had been a blessing, a gift from God, but now they would suffer in poverty and squalor. They would lose the house, the car, everything. Mark could not believe it; he couldn't come to grips with it. His life could not be like that. For Mark Westerfield, though he was only 33 years old, life was over; there was no future, no more memories to be made. It would take a miracle to make Mark see that life was still worth living; nothing short of that could make him hold out for hope.

He walked back to the chair and, drawing in another breath, sat down. He reached for the gun, feeling the power it held and the sense of finality it brought. *I'm sorry God; forgive me for what I am about to do. Watch over Marianne and my child. Let them have a good life.* Mark brought the gun up to his temple and took another breath. He looked across at the black and white photograph of Marianne and him on their honeymoon. He drew the hammer back and exhaled deeply. *In the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, he thought, Amen.* With no sense of bitterness or regret, Mark Westerfield pulled the trigger. The hammer swung down from its cocked position.

The walls of 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue watched all this happen as they had watched Mark and Marianne since the day they moved in, the beginning of the story. The first residents of 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Just over a year ago, the story had begun. The sun had risen over the back yard of the story a few hundred times and westered over the pond across the street just as many. So, the house watched, an inanimate object recording the histories in its walls. It held its secrets close, revealing them to no one, a silent recorder.

The hammer met forcefully with the rear of the bullet. A sharp click echoed through the room and was quickly overtaken by silence. Utter silence. Four more clicks in rapid succession, each accompanied by the rotating of the gun's chamber. Silence again rushed in to fill this void. Mark Westerfield's sobs, sobs accompanied by freely flowing tears, pushed the silence out. The gun fell from his hand to the floor, triggering the firing mechanism and emptying what would have been the killing round into the wall. All the while Mark sobbed. It was a miracle. Suddenly, possibly, life had meaning again. Surely there was a reason that the gun had spared him. Five bullets don't misfire like that; the chances against it are astronomical. Simply stated: it was a miracle.

He took the old revolver, more properly called a cannon, outside and threw it in the trash. And while Mark did all this, the house watched, silently, indifferently, recording the happenings on the plot of land known in Ridge Creek as 1102 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

### *Later that evening*

Marianne returned home from her day out with her friends to find Mark asleep in bed. He slept on his side, his face smooth and free of worry. He made no sound and moved not a bit; as if in answer to this sight, the baby inside her kicked softly. Marianne had not seen Mark sleep so peacefully in



days, over a week in fact.

She undressed and got into her nightgown. Smiling, she climbed into bed with her husband and pulled herself close to him, to his warmth. He stirred at her touch and rolled over to face her. "I trust you, darling," he said, "It *is* going to be alright. I love you." He wonder if he could ever bring himself to tell her what had happened that afternoon..

*Sometime after sunset, Anytime*

The path from the car led from the sidewalk and up to a set of wooden stairs (the top one creaked ever so lightly), at the top of the stairs, past the well-manicured lawn with its rose bushes and neat stonework path (not brick, not yet, or maybe not anymore), was a door that squeaked on its hinges, but just a little. It was through this door that the stories began.

The car door opened and a man, though barely a man at 23, stepped out. He walked around to the passenger side and opened the door. A young lady, svelte and stunning at 21, stepped up onto the curb, holding the man's hand for support. She stepped to him and kissed him lightly. He embraced her gently and they turned to face the house.

The paint, a light blue color, was peeling slightly, and the white trim was suffering the same problem. The "2" on the address had fallen off, so it read "110." The couple looked at each other and smiled contentedly. The man took the girl's hand and led her up the path, up the stairs (*creak*), and to the door. Reaching into his pocket, he fished around and drew out a key. Smiling he slid the key into the lock and turned it. The tumblers fell cleanly into place and he pushed the door open (*squeak*).

The girl took her first step toward the door and the man grabbed her about the waist, lifting her up and into his arms. He craned his neck and kissed her lips softly as he stepped across the threshold; he carried her to the master bedroom and laid her gently down on the bed that the movers had set up earlier that day. She smiled up at him, her face glowing with peace and content.

*Later*

The bed was made and they were both tucked snugly under the covers. They lie in the spoon position, his arms around her. They lie there, peacefully sleeping while the house watched over them. Quietly recording the beginning of another story. It looked to be a happy story; the house would have liked it if houses were gifted with such capacities. Instead, it saw life, just life, passing by. It was beginning of a new story, yes, but not necessarily special. The house had seen so much; it was just life. It happens everyday.

So the couple slept on, oblivious to the things that had happened in the house, the people that had built their lives and their memories there. And while they slept, they dreamed of one another. They dreamed of their life together, and they were thankful for that life.

## 15 cents

by Valerie F Pell

The coffee was bitter and boring as an old shoeshine rag. A greasy film spread itself across the surface of the steaming brown murk. "I can't believe they sell this shit for a dollar," the gruff workman grumbled to himself in his foggy morning mind. He took another sip and it bit the back of his throat like relentless red ant. "I knew I should have bought it from the machine instead of the caf." His shoulders tensed with their familiar disappointment as his lips drew into one elongated slit.

The machine made ten times better coffee than the minimum wage workers of the dingy, heavy aired cafeteria. But the workman returned every day to this wreaking, wretched hole for his morning potion. Why? Fifteen cents. The machines sold an eight-ounce cup of gourmet, imported from Central America, coffee with real cream lightener and perfectly dissolvable granulated sugar for eighty-five cents. The sludge the minis served up at the caf was a dollar for sixteen ounces. There was no real cream, just oily synthetic powder that lightened and saccharinized the thick, greasy, globular liquid. The workman would suffer through anything for an extra jolt of caffeine.

He hated the minis — dull, conformist, low-life bastards. But he hated the machines more—self-service pieces of shit metal that kept you standing out in the morning smog air while they did their peculiar magic inside their secret closed box.

Everything was self-service these days. The grocery check outs, no more pretty, voluptuous ladies named Barbara smiling at you as she wrung up your foot powder or ball cream. The gas station, no more smelly Arab attendants eyeing you sideways as you put a ten on the counter and asked for gas on eight. K-mart, no more fat-ass black bitches with long fake squiggle colored nails and fake diamond nose rings and fake track hair glaring at you with disgust for buying work boots and cheap blue-jeans. All these pathetic people had been replaced by recycled plastic, stainless steel, and the power of electricity. Step up to the consul, scan your own jock shorts, and be on your way back into the traffic of the loonies on the subway. Do it yourself. Everything by yourself. You don't need assistance, not even to tender your own change.

Yup, he went to the caf, put up with the pork-faced mutant minis for fifteen lousy cents.

The workman gulped another lump of his coffee and felt the synthetic creamer scratch his bite like a friend with sharp nails. He didn't flinch, only swallowed, exhaled, and threw the half full cup into the wreaking garbage. "Shit," he sighed. As he started walking to the shop, he rhythmically opened and closed his calloused hands.

by Neil Patel

Once was a sad man  
he went to go deliver the mail  
and mailed his mail without stamps.  
They were once read by Santa.  
Santa came down the day before X-mas and brought him a gift:  
his letters with stamps on them.

A boy with a name on his shirt goes to the park.  
At the park he climbs the jungle gym,  
at the zenith he is the self proclaimed "king of the world."  
Off in the distance and echo he hears,  
He looks over his shoulder to glance another boy has gotten higher than  
he on  
the twirly slide.  
the end.

David was 10, david's dream became true at 12. david's brute  
arms and tight waist helped david fulfill his wishes. Her dreams, her  
passion, her desire. David is a ballerina.

twinkling in the air, twinkling in stare. twinkle in his eyes,  
twinkle in the sluggish skies. twinkle in the stars, how i wonder where the  
twinkles really are?

Looking outside, on a bright autumn day, inside a rainy class of  
gloom. I decided to stroll outside and see what was new. In a tree awaits  
for me the joys of innocence, alas another ring and its yearn for dissidence.

an old man sits on a pidgeon feeding nest forgetting he hasnt any  
pidgeons to feed, he awaits and ponders without even a bother until the  
season of winter has passed.

the original king of the world story:  
neil says: its complex.  
neil says: a boy with a name on his shirt goes to the park  
neil says: at the park he climbs the jungle gym, at the zenith claims he is  
the king of the world.  
neil says: he hears the echo i'm the king of the world off in the distance  
neil says: he looks over to glance another boy has gotten higher than he on  
the twirly slide.

**um, you can title it**  
**“so this other time we went running...”**  
**by ousheng dai**

approaching street, black gold  
o: you know what black gold is? it's this horse. it ran the  
kentucky derby,  
but it broke its leg, like, three-fourth of the way through.  
the jockey was  
trying to stop him and hold him back, but he wanted to run.  
and he wanted to  
win so badly that he ran the rest of the race with his leg  
broken and he  
won. <pause> and then he died after the race.

approaching sign, 2 hour parking  
l: you know what two hour parking is? it's this horse. he  
could only park  
for two hours. then one day he really wanted to park for  
three, so he parked  
for three hours and, at the end, he died.

# Saturday Morning

by Akaash Gupta

Every morning he would dread waking up. He wanted to stay locked in the world within his warm blanket and protective dreams. To him, awaking was the re-entry of the monotonous lethargy that was his every day life. Every morning after his alarm clock would ring at eight O'clock, he would lie in bed and scrutinize the details of his insignificant life. He would think about the day ahead of him and how it was no different than the day behind him or the next day. He would think about another day at the thrift store, another day of old fabric and register tape. He would think of the customers who bought the old videotapes, books, and Members Only Jackets, and remember each one, what they bought, and what conversation, if any, took place between them. Then he would think about their departure out of the store and out of his life. He would especially remember the couples who came in, and would muse over the natures of their relationships. He longed for that type of interpersonal connection only achieved between two people who were truly comfortable with each other. But he was comfortable with no one. All these thoughts filled him with a degree of sadness and stayed with him throughout the course of the day.

But this morning was different. This morning he woke up with a smile. It was a Saturday morning and thus no alarm clock was needed. The chilling feeling of loneliness was now replaced by a warm feeling of contentment. For the first time in quite some time, Jack took notice of the rays of incandescent sunlight that slipped through the bottom of his blinds. He rolled onto his side and smiled as he watched the light paint the lower portion of his wall from its superb radiant palette. This morning, there was no massive sigh of annoyance at reality but instead a breath of fulfillment. He lay atop his soft mattress, wrapped in his warm black blanket, just letting his first feelings of pure happiness soak into his once empty soul. Jack wanted to capture and keep forever the emotions he was feeling at that moment, the initial moments of waking after that spectacular previous night.

He began to reminisce about the Friday evening he spent with the woman of his dreams. It was so simple, like an act of fate. They walked through the streets of Downtown. She looked stunning. Her eyes were luminescent candles that lit up the entire block. Her smile seemed to be in perfect rhythm with all of nature's beauty while her long hair flowed like a pristine river. The white scarf she wore perfectly complemented her exquisite black turtle neck sweater. She walked with elegance and spoke with eloquence. They discussed all matters of importance as well as matters of inconsequence. They stopped at a quaint café and made comments on a newspaper left at their table by a past customer. There were brief moments of silence between the two, but they were moments of peace for the two of them as they sat with their hands interlocked in a cozy booth in the corner of the café. After they finished their café mochas with whipped cream, they exited the coffee house and continued to wander the downtown streets. He showed her his thrift store. They stood outside

and glorious profession. After the moment at the thrift store, Jack walked her home. The journey back home was almost spiritual. It was as though every motion and every gesture either of them made was in sync with the other. Their minds were at harmony. Together they transcended everything that was restricted by conventional truth. They rose above reality and into their own consciousness where truth was what they wanted it to be.

Jack lay in bed thinking about her. That night made everything seem beautiful. The dry-wall of the ceiling looked heavenly. The sounds of cars passing by outside suddenly seemed melodic, almost musical. His carpet looked to him as if it were made of sparkling gems. Everything was perfect to him. He thought of the end of the evening and how it was the most fitting end to an amazing night. They stood at her doorstep and he was captivated with every nuance of her. It was the first truly genuine experience he had ever had for he knew that her feelings, her words, and her smile, were genuine. He remembered their embrace to complete the night but then suddenly the memory faded into a memory of a bag of tortilla chips. He had no idea why suddenly a memory of tortilla chips slipped into his mind. Then he remembered a television set constantly changing channels, never stopping at a channel for more than a matter of seconds. The memory of changing the channels of his living room television while eating chips now started to become more vivid. But he could not grasp the context of his memory and why it would suddenly manifest itself in his recounting of the previous night. Abruptly, the blaring sound of his alarm clock rang out. He turned over and looked at the alarm clock and read the digital display, "8:33." He realized that the alarm clock had been ringing for over half an hour but he was too enamored over the memory of the previous evening to notice. But he always turned his alarm clock off on Friday so it would not ring on Saturday morning. Confused, he looked around the room understand what was happening. In a matter of seconds, he realized that it was not Saturday, it was Wednesday. The memories of his sweetheart from the last night began to fade away and became replaced by his TV memory. He jumped out of his bed and scrambled around the room looking for any evidence of her existence, a receipt from the coffee house, her phone number, anything. He turned over every piece of furniture, in a frantic search for proof. He then attempted to recap on how his evening with her ended but he realized that he could not even remember how it began. He had no memory of meeting her; he had no memory of even her name. The feeling of warmth that he had when he woke was now gone and he was left cold and alone again. Everything he saw suddenly became overwhelmingly hideous. He picked up a lamp and threw it against a wall in a frustrated fury, sending broken glass scattered throughout the room. Tears flooded his face as he fell to his knees from the philosophical anguish. It was as though reality was playing a cruel joke on him. He looked around the disheveled room in silence for several minutes until ultimately, with a clenched fist and a groan of bitter acceptance he started to get ready for another day at the thrift store.

# For Jay

by Stephen Klass

For those whose earth cracked hands  
bleed to  
feed the plow-sown mother roots  
the vegetables  
the cantaloupe  
but not the fruits  
they would not eat  
if could not cook first

For those whose backs break  
under the sun staked  
pierced earth  
to rake its riches  
wake with eyebrow stitches  
rough hoods cut to score  
the power threads  
sore after-taxi backs bore

For those whose sweat  
stains jails  
soaked wet  
of newland justice  
Pratt clacked  
guilty pregnant mother  
sought to smother  
evidence your brown  
eyes see as evident  
burden brought  
nurse mothers bear 'n it  
whose Americ-injustice  
breeds sky-flight fists

we breathe  
justice not here  
just us  
For them we breathe

weren't for their love  
wouldn't conceive  
of fists fight  
for flight  
Ameri-cannot stifle the

history rifled into  
backstreet graveyards  
land of the free  
stripped naked  
switch-beaten by nature  
left to die  
lie in ditches  
revives in the teachin's  
of the youth  
who reject your  
melting-pot plot  
for truth

you can take your allegiance pledge  
and polish the wooden coffins  
of Filipino Veterans  
who died  
non-US citizens

as you watch the  
eight rays of revolution  
fade your fifty stars into day



## 2 POEMS ABOUT THIS WAR

by Heather Gordon

11 SEPT 2001

we have watched the towers of our illusion crumble  
at the birth pains of our pregnant earth, but still  
we don't see—  
that these lungs could breathe life, while instead  
we choke on the ashes of our Ambition. and these  
hands, stained with the blood of one another, could  
be our salvation when woven through with work and  
lifted prayer. and as long as these eyes are our  
own, we won't see. until we have shed the tears of  
one another, how thick is our blindness.

—

14 FEB 2003

Between the black print and the bath mat,  
the front page and the footpath,  
newspapers and the thumbs that tread their  
tracks across its pages—  
the air that we are breathing—  
it is charged. ominous. toxic.

Are we still writing stories?

This war extends its felt tip  
to grind a raucous fuck into the groin of our machine.  
It's oiled, but we're still numb.  
Our crevices are cold, our faces blank,  
but it'll still come.

And so.  
We wait.

The clock in this corridor creaks and works  
while we stand crooked in duct-taped doorways shut,  
breathing stale air because it's still air and it's  
still there.

How much will the human spirit have and to hold?

A thick sun slips globular, yolk-like, in  
Regardless.

# POST-MODERN CRITIQUE POEM

by allen lau

and the battle rages on as folk clashes  
atop turf of tarpaulins as the earth is not  
watered and night crawlers greet death, sapless,  
mother earth needs to breath air and music, though  
we suffocate her pores with chokes of grids and grids  
and grids by brick by brick by layer by layer  
we are separated from our earth  
concrete roads paved way for our souls of asphalt  
and we scream as though we are dead  
already, but silence does not echo, does not sing notes  
to a grave of hearts and palms  
and we are not heard

and we do not see, because there is a foreign box  
in the bull's eye of my home pulsating corporate lies,  
greeting me to cadences of forced smiles and  
currency tongue prostrating before dollar signs,  
eye'd rather watch static than watch these waves  
echoing down like a fading comet from a phony heaven,  
our media does not reflect reality as  
it shapes reality and molds reality to whatever it pleases,  
shape shifters of dreams and truths, and  
ideas cloaked in suits and makeup

where are the brown and chink children  
that made my sneakers and yours, where are  
the chinks that toil in labyrinths  
of sewing machines and machine belts and toxicant adhesives,  
they do not exist in this world that we have spawned from a voodoo brew  
bleached white from our collective conscience to  
die along deserted coastlines as beached orphans, shores of margins  
on margins on margins, though they do exist there  
over there amongst the dust and dirt  
and skeletons you sweep under your oriental rugs

we have stained their land with sprays  
and sprays of blood seeped from  
their people's already moldered spirits,  
spirits choked of its blood for our consumption  
as processed juice, fat free, while we  
alchemists chase a black gold on high horses  
and the battle rages on as folk clashes, tears from

crying war drums drown the voices of the earth,  
their hands bear witness as they are outreached  
for pennies, the copper dances to their eyes like diamonds in ours  
and our flag stands tall as a sentry pillar  
mist the rubble of calamity, staining the yellow sun, casting  
the red, white, and blue! (ha! we fooled you!)

this if a post modern critique  
and this is your eight to five existence,  
eye see no resistance from your silken hands, or your intellect,  
eye see no stones thrown, no bleeding hearts, just  
roads in grids and grids,  
concrete roads paved way for our souls of asphalt  
holding onto their sacred lands  
with the handshake of infidels  
as the beating pulse in your thumb ticks  
to the end of time,  
this is the triumph of mediocrity,  
this is our kill,

we will get you too some day

# Tequila Marathon

by Tracy Rosecrans

Nervous anticipation sparks in the early morning air. Murmurs of voices blend together, forming an ebullient ripple of sound hushed only by the low, triumphant start of our national anthem. The musty smell of fog reminds me of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland. In front of me, a woman with short, silver hair is wearing a sign that says “Come run with me! It’s my 68<sup>th</sup> marathon on my 68<sup>th</sup> birthday!” Close to her was a man with curly hair to his shoulders sporting a shirt that says [runningbarefoot.com](http://runningbarefoot.com)—my eyes look down at his large, calloused feet. Concentrating on the silence, I whisper two words:

I can.

His face. Shadows in the room made his eyes appear more sunken, like dark, gaping holes. His lips curl and he makes a quiet, high pitched whistle that reminds me of the time we cornered a jack-rabbit and it thought it was going to die. Like the rabbit, I lay still, unmoving. Sufficiently sure I was asleep, he repositions himself behind me—

Bang! A gun sounds—setting my body in motion, and my mind shifts focus to the solid cement welcoming my Hurricane running shoes.

My nervous energy soon melts with the morning mist as soft rays of light gently kiss the clear blue sky. A sea of heads dot the canvas in front of me. Looking down, I like to imagine my thighs are the wheels of a black, coal powered locomotive. The rhythmic, soft fall of my running shoes send my mind into a relaxed meditation.

“You need to focus on a goal Cristina. Don’t let him win,” my therapist, Jay, says. Through eyelashes webbed with tears, I can see her honest gaze fall on me as if she is looking at an injured puppy. My eyes shift down to the worn white tissue, mangled by my fingertips.

“Let’s think of a goal, something to give you direction, and to help you focus on something other than the rape.”

I shuddered at the word r\_\_\_: the worst four-letter word that ever violated my eardrum. When she said it, I could feel it linger in the air like the stench of garbage after the trash has already been taken out.

“It doesn’t have to be huge. It’s better usually to start small. Like: I’m going to get out of bed in time tomorrow and read a book. Or—”

“I want to run a marathon” I interrupted.

“That’s a very...big goal—good, but big. Perhaps you should start with something smaller like I’ll spend more time with my mom.”

“No. This is something I always said I would do—even before I was... before this happened.”

Mile 15. I pull two Motrin tablets from the inside of my sports bra. The orange coating had disintegrated from the cups of water I had dumped over my head. I place the tablets on my tongue, and the bitter aftertaste coats the back of my throat. The pain killers leave an orange residue on my hand that I wipe across my wet shorts. I turned my head to look towards the vast ocean on my left, and wait for the aspirin to hide the throb in my right knee.

“Do you have a goal time?”

“No. I just want to finish. Even if I crawl across the finish line. Oh, and I don’t want to walk under any circumstances.”

Mile 18. Sticky energy goo sits in my mouth like a wad of silly putty. After squishing the goo with my tongue, saliva helps the sweetness dribble down my throat. A woman with a white visor hands me a glass of water—“You’ve come a long way—good job.” Through the glasses that reflect my sweaty, beaten image, I can see a genuine kindness reflect in her elderly eyes.

“You’re doing what?” my mom asked.

“A marathon”

“Why?” everyone questioned.

“Because.”

“You’re crazy.” my friend told me.

“I know.”

Mile 20. A woman with latex gloves and a can of Vaseline asks me if I want any of the semi-white, sticky gel. I rub a dab between my thighs where the skin touches. The thick viscosity adds cushion between my legs.

Mile 22. Throbbing, pulsating, eclectic pain. Red, white, and blue balloons. Bob Dillon’s voice through speakers. Born in the USA. A cup of water. Spills out the corners of my mouth. A person shakes my hand. Blisters. Sweat. People walking. My legs still performing the motion of a jog: he can’t win.

Playing dead like a dog. I pretend to be asleep. His breath, thick with tequila on the back of my neck. He unzips my sleeping bag. Without asking permission. A click of a belt buckle. Tequila. He’s taking his boots off. Hot tequila breath. Hands on the elastic band of my pajama pants. A snake tattoo. A shaved head. Tequila. Without asking permission.

Mile 23. Keep your shoulders back. Deep breaths. I don’t know if I can finis...

He never asked if it was ok. He just took my body. A hole. That’s all I was. I laid there like a dead body. My neck soaked with his steaming tequila breath. There were people in the other room. Why didn’t I yell? If I had just screamed. I didn’t even say no. Why the fuck didn’t I scream? Why the FUCK didn’t I SCREAM?

Mile 24. “Honey, you got yourself two miles left. Two miles. Two miles for the rest of yo’ life.” A middle aged woman with a soft southern accent says to me.

“It’s not your fault. You realize that don’t you? You did nothing wrong. Look at me Cristina,” Jay said with steady sternness. My eyes, wet with shame, met hers. “It’s not your fault,” she says, taking my tense fist into her soft, cool hand. A convulsive sob wracks my body.

Mile. 25. Red lights. Loud sirens. Paramedics. A woman dies in the last mile of the race. They’re not taking me. I am going to live. I am going to live.

25.2. I own my body. I own my swollen knee and my numb legs.

25.3. I own my aching shoulder and the dry granules of salt embedded amongst the tiny hairs.

25.4. My damp tender breasts and my tender big toe with cracked maroon nail polish are mine.

25.5. The birthmark next to my naval and the excruciating cramp in the small of my back are mine. Mine.

25.7 It isn’t my fault.

25.8. It’s not my fault.

25.9. Sweet tribulation

Mile 26.2 I can. I won.

## Anonymous

> there is nothing so liberating as being so far away  
> why are some things in life so certain that you know  
> them already? Matthew, travel, music > things to  
love:> Indian meals > walking in heels on cobblestones  
> a cathedral peeking up over a meadow > London Soho  
(lights, food, small streets) > warm double beds with  
two comforters, an electric > blanket, a stereo, and a  
nice boy inside, especially > when its storming and  
trees are being blown down > outside > train journeys  
with ridiculously picturesque steeples > edge of cliff  
northern Britain towns zooming by and a > newspaper in  
front of you > Ulysses > a pile of 50 free sampler cds  
obtained from some > basement where the radio station  
is (for reviewing > purposes)> the Margiotta deli  
across the street (what bread and > cakes in the  
morning!) > the fruit markets down the road > nice  
coffee shops for studying > lads playing football in  
the meadows > when you haven't lost your umbrella or  
mittens and its > not having enough time to go on all  
the trips you can > go on (loved for the fact that  
these places are > actually accessible) Northern  
Scotland, Glasgow, > Manchester, Bristol, Cardiff,  
Ireland, Europe.. > Tindersticks > Beth Gibbons > big  
cherry wood wardrobes> piles of vegetables and fruit >  
silvery sparkly mermaid Halloween costume > Samhain -  
Festival to welcome in the winter, or Celtic > New  
Year, complete with massive crowds down the royal >  
mile, big green paper mache spring man, mad forest >  
parade people on stilts..> lovely vintage shops > the  
breathtaking view of central Edinburgh > the London  
underground > new silver sandals to keep my feet clean  
when walking > in the kitchen with lovely silver  
swirly things that I > bought under the pretence of  
being for my mermaid > costume > living with someone  
from Hong Kong who gives me free > Chinese dishes >  
free camera equipment, the wonders of the darkroom >  
California works better as a myth than as an actual >  
place... its beautiful to drive its highways, but its  
> probably not too good to stop too long in most >  
places..

# Sunset and the Café

by Jeff Alexandre

Stopped, ready to turn right onto Sunset.  
The car has three Blueroses, with Puente  
next to César in this Monte Carlo.  
César is driving and checks the black gun  
underseat. A car drives by through the light—  
all Evergreens. Shrieking past painted walls,

César follows. In the back, Tweet reads walls,  
reads the twilight graffitti on Sunset,  
leans forward to tell César that *the light  
won't be red*. But it is; so screams Puente  
at César, putting shot in his shotgun,  
cruise through, they don't see us. I'll get Carlo.

The noise of the bangers' Monte Carlo  
music makes strings of styled code on store walls  
shake in (orange red black) delight and gun  
glinting in a car sprinting down Sunset.  
When they close on the Evergreens, Puente  
levels and readies himself, but firelight

from a gun in the other car makes light  
shine through a hole in Tweet's neck. *Damn, Carlo  
saw us coming, he's too quick*, thinks Puente.  
He fires at Carlo, hitting thin walls  
instead, sending shot into a sunset  
painting in a child's bedroom. His gun

still hot, Puente grabs César's own greased gun.  
At the next intersection, white sunlight  
shines off cars—on a green—crossing Sunset.  
Tweet holds a bandana to what Carlo  
made of his thick neck. César brakes, the walls  
slow down as the crossing nears and Puente

pulls. The shot hits César's head bare—Puente  
puts his hands to his face as he drops the gun,  
his mind a stoned rose enclosed by written walls,  
unseeing as they run into a light  
pole, César's head now on the blue walls of the Monte Carlo.  
This ends in front of the Tropical Café on Sunset.

Between peach walls, café customers arrested before guava pastries stream  
into the light and see—a Monte Carlo without life. Some start forward  
as Puente  
and Tweet, leaving their guns, stumble and flee the sunset.



# Through the Phantom Tollbooth

by Cathlin Goulding

"Where is Tock?" asked Dolly on the last Sunday in January.

"Tock is outside talking to the birds as he always does," replied James O'Toole.

Dolly pressed her nose against the screen door. "No, Dad, the birds are alone today."

Her father was crouched underneath the bathroom sink, unscrewing the pipes. "Well, Dolly, perhaps he is hiding from the birds today."

"No, old pie, I don't think so." Her brow knitted as she counted the number of crows sitting atop the brick wall.

"Why don't you ask Titus?" Titus was the largest crow that perched on the backyard wall.

"I hear Titus talking with the others and he says that Tock is missing," she said worriedly.

Dolly's father removed the bottom section of the sink pipe. He peered into the U-shaped pipe and shook it. "Ah-ha! I hear it in here Dolly!" A marble rolled out onto the floor. James O'Toole caught it before it rolled out onto the carpet.

"Dolly!" he repeated, holding up the green marble. "Here it is—you haven't lost your marble in the sewage system after all!"

That morning, Dolly had accidentally dropped her green marble into the sink drain. She had convinced him to take apart the pipes to rescue it. She had described the loneliness and danger the marble would experience floating through the Los Angeles drainage system ("He'll suffocate down there!" she exclaimed). They were not able to use the sink all morning for fear that it would be carried away by a flash flood of tap water. He had forgotten and started to brush his teeth. Dolly, always on guard, charged him before he could twist the water knob.

"No Dad! No water this morning, remember, it's down there!" She had placed her hand upon his, cautioning him against the use of the sink. "Did you spit down there?"

He had nodded. "Now it's going to be yuck down there," she admonished.

"It's already yuck down there, Dolly. Think of how much stuff goes down that sink."

"Yes, our hair goes down there," agreed Dolly.

But now Dolly did not seem interested in the green marble that had been of such concern that morning. She remained fixated on the back wall, upon the five crows that muttered to each other and shifted places. "Dolly? Don't you want to see the stuff at the bottom of our pipe?"

She did not answer. James O'Toole approached the screen door, wiping his hands. "Is Tock out there?" He scanned the backyard for Tock, the seven-year-old Terrier. They had adopted him from the Norwalk Animal Shelter only three months ago. Dolly had named him after the dog Tock in her favorite book. She explained that this Tock also had a clock in his side, but that it just had not come to the surface of his fur. It is slowly growing out of him, Dolly said; she could hear it ticking inside his

stomach.

“Perhaps the birds are crotchety today Dolly. He is hiding from them.”

He opened the screen and they both went into the backyard. The grass was brown and dying—James O’Toole decided he could no longer pay the high water bills and he let the grass die. Mrs. Cohen, the next-door neighbor, often peered over the fence and then complained to the homeowner’s association about the state of their backyard. He had noticed that she sometimes took a step stool and leaned over the fence to spray her hose onto their grass (“Thanks!” he had yelled out to her one day and Mrs. Cohen, surprised at being discovered, turned the hose upon herself). Dolly looked around the small backyard. She picked up a purple rubber submarine that belonged to Tock. She waved it in the air.

“Tock! Tock come!”

But they both knew that Tock was nowhere to be found.

James O’Toole went around to the side of the house. He moved Dolly’s old and yellowing plastic rocking horse. He saw the back gate swinging open. He closed it and Dolly turned the corner. He turned and looked at her, helpless.

“Old pie, I asked Titus and he said that Tock ran out of the gate. He said Tock was running real quick and didn’t have time to talk.” Suddenly Dolly sat upon the dead grass. She whacked the purple submarine upon the ground.

James O’Toole came and put his hand on Dolly’s head. “Did Titus know where Tock was going?”

“To find the Phantom Tollbooth,” she replied.

He sighed heavily and looked up at the sky. “Come on Dolly-in-the-sky. The phantom tollbooth can’t be too far from here.”

James O’Toole buttoned up Dolly’s red coat. He tied the first knot in her yellow shoes and Dolly finished, double knotting her laces.

“Wait! I’ve got to get my things.”

“No Dolly—you can’t bring all your things, we have a lot of walking to do.”

Of late, they frequently had fierce arguments before leaving the house. Dolly had gotten in the habit of lugging along all of her worldly possessions each time they went to the grocery store, the post office, and even to school in the morning. She placed all of her plastic horses, paperback books, and marbles in paper Vons grocery bags (“You are turning into a bag lady,” he protested). On the way to school in the morning he would ask her many times why she insisted on bringing all of her things, to which she replied that she was afraid of losing them.

“Just a little stuff.” She came out of her room carrying a kaleidoscope, a rabbit’s foot, two packages of string cheese, a plastic bag of milk bones, and a picture Dolly had drawn of Tock (complete with his emerging clock).

They began on Airline Drive; Dolly waved to Mrs. Cohen as she peered through the slats of her Venetian blinds.

“Hi Mrs. Cohen!” She yelled. Mrs. Cohen retreated back quickly into the recesses of her living room. Dolly and her father looked at each other.

“Old bag,” both Dolly and her father whispered under their breaths.

“Mrs. Cohen doesn’t like our grass or Tock,” mused Dolly. “Maybe she told Tock where to find the Tollbooth.”

"I don't think Mrs. Cohen wants Tock to run away, Dolly. Even if she does hate our dead grass."

Dolly looked through her kaleidoscope through Mrs. Cohen's front window. She turned the knob and watched Mrs. Cohen's Venetian blinds collapse into shards of blue and gold. "I can see her."

James O'Toole looked towards the house. "But she's not in the window anymore Dolly."

"My telescope is magic, you old pie. She is sweeping her kitchen and crying."

He looked down at Dolly. "Come on now, let's go and look for Tock." He hummed a few bars from the old Louis Armstrong song "Hello Dolly!" Dolly, hearing this, jumped from each cement square to the next, and intermittently, clapped her hands underneath each leg.

"Look old pie! I'm dancing like the monkeys in the Jungle Book." Dolly had always wanted to learn to jump rope with her arms like the orangutan in the movie (No, he cautioned her, this would be too painful).

"Well, hello Dolly. You're lookin' swell Dolly. I can tell, Dolly. You're still glowin' you're still crowin', still goin' strong," he sang.

They came to the park on the corner of Airplane and Walker. They used to walk Tock there each evening after dinner. Dolly ran ahead calling to Tock. She came to the swing set and swung headfirst into the swing. Letting her head and hair drag through the sand, she hummed "Hello Dolly!" loudly.

"Dolly, get your hair out of the sand now," said her father.

A woman approached them, holding a young girl by the hand. "Hello there!"

"Hello!" replied Dolly for her father.

"You're Dolly O'Toole, aren't you? This is my daughter Kim; you're in Mrs. Tanner's class together, aren't you now?" The woman smiled broadly at both of them. The girls looked at each other, saying nothing. "And you must be Dolly's father?"

James O'Toole shifted his feet. Dolly kicked his loafer. "Yes of course. It is nice to meet you."

"Well, I haven't even properly introduced myself yet—I'm Joanne Mitchell. I saw you at Open House a few weeks back."

"I was late—I try to go after work. It is—it is nice to see the good work Mrs. Tanner does with the children."

"Why yes! She is a such a wonderful teacher, isn't she now Kim?" Kim squinted up at her mother. "I hardly ever see *any* Dads at these Open Houses. It's good you're giving your wife a break!"

Dolly took up her kaleidoscope and peered at her father. "I don't have a wife. She has been dead four years now."

A brief look of horror and embarrassment passed over Joanne Mitchell's face. "Oh, well I am so sorry Mr. O'Toole. I—"

"It is nothing," he said.

"We are looking for my dog Tock." Dolly pulled out her drawing. "You might have seen him. He is growing a clock."

"Oh well," said Joanne Mitchell, again recovering. "I can't say that I've seen"

"It went that way," said Kim pointing towards the Vons shopping Center. Dolly looked through her kaleidoscope at her classmate.

"Come on you old pie, we're on a mission." Dolly grabbed her father's hand.

"It was nice meeting you Mrs. Mitchell," said James O'Toole.

"Until the next open house?" said Joanne Mitchell.

Dolly and her father walked past the 99 Cent Store. They stopped while she counted the rows of Cheer laundry detergent.

"There are four rows here, and seven rows high over there," she reported.

They continued to walk down the sidewalk and passed a boy sitting on the ground in front of the window display of leftover Christmas wreaths and electric icicles. He licked a cone of strawberry ice cream. Next to him was a cardboard box of kittens, crawling and fumbling over each other. Dolly opened a package of string cheese and fed a piece to one of the kittens crawling out of the box.

"Hello Sea Biscuit," she said, as the white-socked cat took the piece of cheese in its mouth.

"Want to buy one?" asked the boy.

"We've already got a dog," said Dolly, scratching Sea Biscuit between the eyes.

"These are cats; cats are different."

"Well we've got a dog and he wouldn't like a cat around."

"But I've gotta get rid of these. My mom said." The boy let the strawberry ice cream melt for a while. Dolly took her father's hand and stroked Sea Biscuit's paws with his fingers.

"See how soft his paws are Dad?"

James O'Toole smiled sideways at her and said calmly, "Yes, he is a soft cat."

"Why don't you put them in the mailbox and let the mailman deliver them?" asked Dolly to the boy.

The boy scoffed. "You can't put cats in the mailbox, jeeze. They'd *die* down there, they'd suffocate."

"Like my green marble in the sewage system."

"Huh?" The boy scratched his yellow head.

James O'Toole de-clawed Sea Biscuit from his sweater and put him back into the cardboard box with his brothers and sisters. "Well Dolly-in-the-sky, we're still on that mission, aren't we?"

"Yeah, we've got to go now boy. I hope you sell your cats." The boy nodded and continued to eat his ice cream. Dolly and her father passed the 99 Cent Store.

"When people are dead, where do they go?" She jumped over the cracks in the cement.

"They must go far away from here. . .farther than Sea Biscuit or boxes of Cheer."

"Like through the phantom tollbooth?"

"Yes, Dolly, like through the phantom tollbooth."

"What places did she go to?"

James O'Toole looked at Dolly and said slowly. "She crossed the phantom tollbooth and then Tock found her there and—"

"Tock took her to the Island of Conclusions in the little car."

“Yes—and they got off the Island by shouting nonsense. And then they drove up a huge mountain and went to a land where all they did was eat letters that tasted like tangerines and watermelon.”

“And drank cherry soda and never brushed their teeth,” Dolly added. “Did she ever get lost there?”

“Yes, many times. But she found her place—by the pea-green sea with Tock, who told her the time even though they no longer needed to know it.”

“You spin a good yarn Dad.”

“Thank you.”

“What’s the difference between dead and lost?” Dolly jumped down off the sidewalk into the street. James O’Toole quickly grabbed her.

“There was a car Dolly! You have to be careful.” He shook her lightly by the shoulders.

“But what’s the difference, Dad? What’s the difference!”

“Lost means you never have peace. That is the difference.”

Dolly looked backwards back towards the boy eating ice cream and the kittens in their box. James O’Toole watched the cars passing by.

The beach was windy the last Sunday in January. James O’Toole steadied Dolly as they walked upon the sand. Dolly took off her yellow shoes and ran barefoot in the cold sand. People milled around the beach, feeding bread to the thousands of birds taking rest on the shore.

James O’Toole sighed many times before he said, “Dolly—I don’t think we’ll be able to find Tock today. We’ll call the pound when we get—”

Dolly was not listening to him but walked towards the ocean. The leagues of white birds parted as she walked through them in her red coat. She was pointing towards the ocean. He followed her and looked to where her index finger directed. Nearer to the shore, ran a little black Terrier barking and snapping at a large white gander.

“He must be tired of talking to our crows,” she said.

James O’Toole laughed suddenly. “My god! It can’t be.”

Dolly took her kaleidoscope from her coat pocket and watched Tock through its lens.

“Look in here Dad. It’s so much prettier.” He knelt down and took the kaleidoscope from her hands. He peered through the opening and watched hundreds of Tocks running and leaping among the white birds. Turning the knob, the angles and colors altered—slivers of brilliant triangles collapsing and re-forming.

Dolly’s father touched his throat. “Love is so short,” he said. “And forgetting is so much longer.”

Dolly pointed towards Tock, who was chasing a seagull with black spots. “Look at Tock,” she said solemnly. “He’s grown his clock.”

“So he has.”

Dolly and her father took a seat upon the short and continued to watch Tock with his clock converse with the white birds.

# Long Time No See.

by Yosun Chang

Of what right have you to declare,  
“My... You have not changed at all!”  
Of what reason have u to proclaim,  
“Love... I still have that for you.”  
Of what meaning have you to exclaim,  
“You... The object of which I have bade Jove to set the stars amiss for.  
The being with whom I am passionately enamored with,  
Whose existence I ponder, wonder, fret upon,  
Every single instance of my waking torture.”  
Why do you think such?  
“Because I know not otherwise.”

## in visibility

by Billy Brooks

old metal plating factory is finally shutting down the shut down will cost thousands of dollars the neighborhood where the factory sits the people there they're happy relieved the structure where things came to become shiny with chrome glimmering liquid silver sheathing on car bumpers on intake manifolds on tire rims on exhaust pipes on naked woman mud-flaps on yacht compasses on sink faucets on ovens on toasters on microwaves on window frames on compact disc players on

everyone loves shiny and silver gleaming sunlight beams chrome plating covers plain metal makes it better semiprecious items enter the concrete and wooden factory treasures emerge fumes emerge tainted pipes coughing transparent clouds of carcinogens big words wan compassion emerges (the reporter and the viewer) the old are stricken and soon the young will follow tiny steel saws down the wind-pipe but before it was believed that the dying had weak flesh inside and were not poisoned by breathing the air outside

but before this story was not news wan sympathy emerges close-up on the residents (a grandpa then a toddler) blinking tearing bloodshot eyes slight throat convulsions luckily now gesturing optimism now the chances for developing lung heart brain cancer could be dramatically less for the future generations of this neighborhood filled with sandpaper shingled houses and apartments with thin plaster walls and a couple shiny toaster ovens through his silver cellular phone the white city official told the white factory owner to send someone into the neighborhood to shut that place down for good so no need to worry the representative and the news reporter imply with smiles although relocation will be costly

on top of a street-lamp a tall stick-legged stork stands motionless up there it looks like a weathervane blown away from its home and landed on the tall street light oddly stoic legs straight stiff little poles connecting the head of the lamp to the slim bird's body wings tightly tucked at the sides beak firmly facing forward the cars below rumble by in the sunset shiny reflections without noticing the stork watching them pass under its silent gaze

unmarked door slides open carrying a crumpled white plastic bag deflated a lady emerges from behind the blank pink door moving quietly towards another pink door marked by a white stick figure covered by a white triangle on a dark blue plaque only her empty bag crackles softly as she goes inside the female bathroom swap-meet sneakers don't even squeak on the smooth salmon floor and they don't kick the shiny silver kick-guard attached to the bottom of the marked bathroom door

bag is full when she comes back out bulging slightly with crumpled gum wrappers used tissue paper paper towels toilet paper napkins plastic wrappers drink containers toilet paper rolls and she makes her way through the pink hallway the space is like an empty womb or stomach or intestine it has a deceivingly fleshy feeling the soft fluorescent lighting makes it seem almost fuzzy glutted with pink gleams of light around the edges the lady holds back a hacking cough with a shudder

full plastic bag and lady reach the unmarked door she opens it and slides inside with the bag one toilet paper roll spine rolls out of the bag as the door closes and scuttles onto the glossy pink floor its rattling is not absorbed by the seemingly fleshy walls a teenager tired of shopping (she's resting on the only chair in the hallway plush and pink waiting for her boyfriend who's in the other marked door down the way she's holding his shopping bags by her feet) only this echoing scuttling catches her attention she sees something reach out into this stomach this womb a broom emerges and scoots the cardboard spine back into the unmarked door

granite apples emerged in the firefighter's biceps as she reached back to adjust the straps her bra was red crimson it was almost shiny secretly a few days ago she had had an abortion so she could keep her job so her boyfriend wouldn't leave she knew it wasn't murder but it didn't feel like choice either she hadn't eaten much since then but now she was feeling a little hungry

whispering up bits of food and trash carrying stacks of trays dripping with soy sauce salsa sweet and sour sauce catsup and so on they move silently around the food court with tired flat sometimes smiling faces with heads usually slightly angled downward most are engaged in mutual aversion along with the hungry patrons the barrier is not only linguistic passing by as cleansing shadows under the gaze of long sleeve button up shirts and ties dress pants with chrome faced cell phones clipped at the side or pressed to the ear without a noise without a complaint without

outside is where the family works with a rattling shiny plastic rake and a straw bristled broom the woman gathers into piles what the man pushes into bunches with a power blower sometimes his cough can be heard over the wheezing blower not from dust the child sometimes she helps her mother brush and bag sometimes she dances around sometimes she plays in the piles of corn chip leaves potato chip leaves pretzel sticks trash dust and dirt she is probably six or seven it is late autumn monday around eleven most residents of the apartment complex have already gone to work or school the others are probably still sound asleep even while the power blower buzzes in the seeming distance outside their locked windows and doors

there were no spaces in front so the college student had to park down the street across from the elementary school walking down toward the row of rusted warehouse buildings with steel gates in the driveways and metal bars covering the few windows he wondered if anyone wondered what he was doing in this neighborhood glimmering shards sprinkled on the gravel street ground under his sneakers

on the front wall there was a mural of children's smiling faces painted in loud colors there were a few lines of grey spray paint interrupting one kid's smile but it still seemed to blend slightly into the fading but booming paint

as he walked in through the large glass aquarium doors in-set from the building's warehouse face hearing coughs and words he understood mixed with those he couldn't



two languages he spoke one well his pale peach cheeks bloomed a bit and although he could feel heat surround his head he wasn't aware of his rosy complexion a single white (now pink) pebble in a fish bowl filled with brown pebbles of varying hues cinnamon to mahogany the bowl seemed to shift and all the pebbles chestnut to chocolate turned their attention toward this new flushing pale pebble

at night the teenage boys felt mischievous invincible and invisible once everyone in the house was asleep they quietly snuck downstairs and went outside as pale shadows the only light shined down from the high streetlights the three of them were armed with pellet guns reckless but silent as they crept one behind the other they surrounded their prey hunting as they thought men were known to do the boys raised their guns aiming in a high triangle towards the night sky in unison they fired like a balloon popping then a crash like a window smashing and glass from the street-lamp poured down from the suddenly darker sky by the time the flailing stork thudded against the glassy suburban street the pallid boys were halfway home having killed their streetlight a pellet through the bird's thin neck brought it down coughing blood on white feathers shiny black eyes slowly dying

whole community was alive and rumbling today it was moving day they all had to pack up their belongings and get in line to wait for their tickets out on the street this bright beaming morning seven o'clock the street was brimming with people from the community there were no cars on the street the neighborhood was going to be revitalized renovated redeveloped refurbished remodeled it was going to be great

there was going to be a new school built on top of the old crumbling one where children still went to learn there was going to be a brand new library with stacks of fresh books and rows of computers there was going to be a new park with shiny metal slides in the place of the old gravel field surrounded by jagged metal fencing there was going to be many new houses and nice apartments for people to live in and of course there would be many rows of shiny new stores to line the streets it would be great

the community buzzed with anticipation a few coughs rang out as they stood outside that fine summer day morning sunlight danced off the shiny metal shopping carts they had their things and were waiting they stood in line to get their tickets they would have cost fifty dollars but the people from the city were paying for them they were one-way for anywhere inside the state and outside the city it was going to be great

# **My Midnight Jog with the Armenian**

by Soosk Esia

I tried to run from myself that night,  
but she wouldn't let me.

I took out to the night and greeted  
the inhospitable asphalt with its cold, lunar glare.

Yet all I heard in return was the sound of her flip flops  
awakening the lifeless black carpet beneath us.

I tried to keep my control but her necklace just killed me—  
the way it haphazardly swung back and forth across her porcelain neck.

Why wouldn't she allow me to suffocate myself  
in my own stinging, self-imposed solitude?

# **Turbid Watersnap**

by Sean Sandage Fullmer

They said that we were the late and  
the great but what if

we arrived

long before they opened the doors

and what if

our cologne didn't really impress  
with feelings charismatic  
or of sincerity?

# Free World

by Kristen Driskell

count the dead  
people lying in ruts and ditches  
streets torn to pieces

children screaming for murder

adults pulling their hands  
away from the bloody swords  
nestled deep in their chests

while the children scream for murder

mobs smashing caverns  
in the heads of their mothers  
rivers of blood tear away the buildings  
crashing on the fumes from decaying bodies

of children screaming for murder

seeing blood mixing and swirling  
between the limp and deteriorated hands  
glass shards falling from the sky  
attached to broken people  
limbs and backs bent in half

for children screaming for murder

amidst the chaos  
a movie camera  
capturing every gruesome act  
one brave man with his heroine  
"I will not let this be the way!"

cut!  
that's a wrap.

packaged off  
in theatres everywhere  
rated R under-17...  
but they will see

and the children scream for murder

# FALLING AND FALLING SOME MORE

by Bailey Kennedy

I. Blinded and letting myself be  
yours and emblazoned in  
a mosaic of otherworldly thoughts and  
heart twisting  
emotion.

Catching me off guard and  
breaking bits of me off to  
taunt the heavens.

II. Miles of wasteland but  
your face tugs at my  
existence and above everything  
I'm yours for the  
taking and supplied you with  
my essences and shared the  
stars.

III. Falling  
apart and crashing the moon down  
with me. Tearing the shreds of  
life we spent and  
smothering the glittering sparks that  
barely breathed  
as it was, anymore.

IV. Lost and buried in  
valleys of myself,  
emaciating with remembrance and  
wide eyed haunted by your words and  
impact on every enduring  
breath of mine.

V. Sell me no more  
blindness and force less of your  
bitter words down my  
accepting and open  
being.  
Give me release or at least  
the comfort of  
basking in the shards of our  
past  
without the steady encumbrance of  
your inflicted destruction on  
anything worldly we ever  
made shine.

# Toulouse, Summer 2002

by Kate Cook

“Malek.”

“Where are you?”

“Portugal.”

“What’s wrong?” The response was air forced from the lungs. “Ok, calm down. Tell me what happened.”

“It’s Sarah. She— I— Malek I’m sorry, I hung up and then I called you right away. I didn’t know what to do.”

Malek could hear that his friend was in a phone booth. Sound bounced off glass and there was claustrophobia in Jack’s voice. “You talked to Sarah. What did she say?”

“Not like this, not this way.”

“Talk to me, Jack. What did she say?”

“She... it’s just, she’s so young, so little. She’s so far away. I didn’t know, this whole time. Sarah just told me she’s pregnant.” The words got fatter and heavier as they came.

“Jack. Where is she?”

“She’s home now. She’s back in Toulouse.”

“How long ago did she get here?” But Jack caved in. Malek heard the air forcing violently in and out of his friend’s lungs. He saw the cold light in the phone booth and imagined Portugal. He had never even been to Spain. This was the farthest south he’d been.

Sarah’s room came to him. He saw her tiny feet, bare, thumping around on the floor. He saw Sarah heavy, full-bellied, and then he saw her old.

“Jack, how long ago did she get here?”

“Just two days ago. Didn’t she call you? I guess not. She didn’t know how to find me. I told her I wouldn’t be checking my email. I didn’t have a phone. We said goodbye before I left. For good goodbye. She didn’t think she’d ever hear from me again.”

“No.”

“She didn’t think she’d ever...”

“But she did.”

“I called her. It was supposed to be a surprise. I’ve been thinking about her, you know? So much. Now, I feel like I’ve ruined her.” His voice was porous, all air and whisper. He seemed to fade away.

Malek plucked Sarah out of her room, and held her up as a mobile in his head, letting the air spin her. She turned and fluttered and her belly grew. She was small, but strong for her size. She was determined, and bright. Very few could claim to know her. Malek knew he was not one. He wondered if Jack was.

“She wouldn’t ruin. Don’t think you ruined her. Don’t even think she is ruin-able.”

“I love her.” Air pushed the words out slowly, with great force. Jack

had never confided in Malek this way before. They were friends through the Americans, they had spent hours together talking, with Sarah, with the others, rolling hash spliffs, drinking wine. In Malek's head Sarah coughed and passed the joint, smiling, big glassy eyes. "Will you go see her? Please? Don't tell her I told you, just will you stop by and sit with her a while and..."

"Yes, yes I will."

"...and see if she's ok? And maybe she'll tell you but there's no one there anymore. There's no one there with her, they've all gone away, and she sounded so alone on the phone. I am coming home but I can't get there soon enough. And will you make her feel ok?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Thank you. Oh God, I better go. Thank you. I'll see you in a few days. Please don't hate me, don't let her hate me."

"She won't hate you. I won't hate you. See you soon."

\*

Malek slipped the Koran into his backpack that afternoon. It was a slim, delicate book, bound in white leather. A gift from his mother. Last time he read it was nearly a year ago, in September. He knew Sarah loved that book. She had trouble with the French but she loved the beautiful metaphors. She loved the white cover and the gold tipped pages and the red satin ribbon to mark the pages. Maybe, he thought, it would calm her.

On the bus he opened it and read about the story of Jesus. It was a fairly silly story, he thought. He liked the characters ok. He thought Jesus must have been a very wise man. Mary he couldn't figure out. But then again, the bus was a distracting place to read.

He got off on the corner. The air had tinges of afternoon, and things moved slowly. He walked two blocks along a wide avenue to number 22 and rang Sarah's bell.

"*Oui*," she said through the intercom, her voice heavy, sinking to the bottom of the stairs.

"It's Malek, *Bonjour ma belle*." He let too much jolly trickle into his voice, was sure he sounded phony. The door buzzed open and echoed in the stairwell as he pushed in.

It was Sarah he'd met first, Jack second. These were people to talk with for hours. They had loved Malek first of all, and then began to really love each other. The new union brought him great joy.

Malek was a man poorly suited to romantic love. He knew he wasn't shaped to fit the shape of another. Once he'd read an African myth about heaven being so close to earth that the people kept bumping their heads against God. Heaven moved higher, but still found itself in the way. So heaven moved higher, and higher, until it was out of the way of everyone. Malek climbed the stairs to Sarah's door, turning the myth in his head, and thought he understood how heaven felt.

Sarah opened the door in her robe. It was gray and made of fleece, with red coffee cups for pockets. She looked fine, smiling up at her friend, her hair messy.

“Still in your robe, I see.” Sarah appreciated it very much when Malek spoke with her in English. Her French was less refined, and he wanted to please her today.

“Tea?” She turned and padded into her bedroom barefoot, Malek behind her. On a wicker table was a half-full glass teapot, sitting amber and fat on a tea warmer over a candle. The window was open and thick summer air blew in. Sarah hopped on the bed, curled in a pale wool blanket, and propped herself up with pillows in a half-moon shape around her cup of tea. Malek sat next to her and poured himself a cup.

They didn’t need to talk much. Sarah knew right away that he knew and she didn’t care.

Sounds of the city rose up into the window. The big empty room sort-of shone with light and reflection, and the candle glowing under the pot. “You look good. You got color,” said Malek. He felt so close to his friend. He felt older and he wanted to put a hand on her head but didn’t dare.

“Greece. It was so beautiful.” Sarah smelled like breakfast. Bread and butter, milk and tea. Sweet, warm things. She was next to him, and she was two. They were three.

“I brought you a gift.” Malek unzipped his bag and the throaty noise resounded in the room. Sarah peered over her cup and saw the white bound book peek up from the edge of the bed and dance back and forth for her. Malek said, “Dum de dum dum dum.”

Her hand shot out and she smiled. “Yay,” she said.

“You can keep it. I don’t really read it, and when I do, it means things have gone wrong.”

“I’m not going to keep it.” Her words spilled over the book in her palm and pooled at Malek’s knee.

He looked at her. She mirrored his gaze and she didn’t look unhappy so he knew it was ok. Sarah had slipped out of her half-moon shape, so she set down the tea and shaped her moon again, around the book. She opened to a page near the back and began to read. The room was quiet and Malek drank his tea. He thought that maybe he had never felt so happy.



by Jessa Lingel

And I laugh when I hear people ask me how I have dealt with cancer. They mean my dad. I mean something else. I simultaneously crave explaining the reality to them while greedily clinging to this prideful image of myself. If only they could possibly fathom how ridiculous that statement sounded, someone playing an off note in a Bach invention that fucks up the entire piece. But I know. I know that it is me that is dying, wasting away in a pool of cancerous muck, sinking into a pit of slimy shame. Because this disease of infinitely reproducing abnormalities is neither noble nor one to be quietly borne – it is dark and deep and full of a screaming terror that with every passing moment is consuming more and more of my flesh.

Doctors give me reasons for how these segments turned and twisted into malformed versions of myself, but I already know, and it is none of those tightly wrapped medical responses, taped up and ribboned in delicately professional and subsequently indifferent wrapping paper that is covered with a million different synonyms for dying. I have long felt this haunting mass, this lurking lump of my misdoings, this gathering of all my faults and flaws, and it was only a matter of time before they realized their power and revolted and stormed the battered fortress that is my tiny body. “You have cancer.”

Declarative sentence, present tense, passive verb, second person singular. The words bounce off the walls of my skull, crashing like china. They speak of it like it’s a possession – like it’s tangible, something you can hold. If only you could. (Would it be sticky, like overcooked pasta? Mushy like disintegrating tomatoes? Slimy like rotten onions?) Then you could rip it out, tearing one bit of sinewy self away, like tearing off pieces of peeling wallpaper that is yellow and brown from the smoke of cigarettes.

In a ridiculous inversion of humor, the lonely adjective for your version of this disease is “cervical.” This is what will separate you from your father, you from your sisters, you from every time you thought that you had cheated fate out of punishment for your crimes. These are tumorous backyard mushrooms that can be unnoticed one morning only to be found exponentially multiplied and glaringly obvious the next. Something that hides inside, shows itself whole, and laughs when you try to figure out what it is, let alone how it came to be there. You do not even question whether or not it could be destroyed.

In order to stave off the fear of endless multiplication, in order to hide from the terror of an infinitely reproducing tumor, in order to distract yourself from the possibility of the unthinkable, you convert to a passionate worship of numbers, not distinguishing the numbers that matter – the survival rate of this treatment, the sequence of that procedure, the number of patients that your oncologist sees – and the numbers that don’t: the number of words you can find in ‘cancer’ (over 12: can, care, race, ace,

are, acne, arc, ear, near, an, a, ran, car, cane) the number of letters in 'malignant melanoma' (17), the number of stop signs in between your house and the hospital (42) and you find some sort of hidden meaning in all of it because four plus two is six, and if you flip the one and the seven in seventeen and subtract, it's still six, which is the number of letters in cancer, which is a word that you will do anything to somehow contain, even if it's only in your head, even if it's only in being able to limit it to a measly half dozen characters, because the most terrifying thing in the world, the thing that made you start counting and computing in the first place, is the gripping fear of the endless.

It's funny to see people not knowing that I carry this inside me, an unborn child of furious wrath, eating me alive, devouring the womb itself and working its way outward. This sickness will not end, not as long as I can feed it with my very muscles and marrow. My privacy is the quilt of patchwork pride that keeps me safe. You will worship me for my strength. You will praise me for my martyrdom. And all without knowing it. My anger is my medicine, and I have earned it. I cannot explain it better than this. Maybe when there has been more distance, more time. Until then, do not ask me how I feel about cancer. Do not ask about my father and do not ask about me. The answer may very well cost me my life.

# **To Pieces**

**by Rachel C. Wood**

She dances around in her snow globe fantasy  
Wide-eyed and glitter-blind...

Hollowness so eloquently hidden

Confidence exuded, strength concluded, truth secluded.

Just watch her unravel.

She wishes and hopes and dreams and screams and falls and watches the  
walls crumble and fumbles in her search for sanity while vanity prevails and  
rejection impales her weakening heart now falling apart she starts to get up  
but the weight won't let up she's fed up and fucked up can't suck it up can't  
drop the crutch or take the punch she's faked enough she's ....  
done.

Turn around babydoll. Run.

# Silence

by Corrine Fitzpatrick

The insults that were hurled at Bobby Smith daily fell like giant rocks of words at his feet. But not before making contact with his ears, his shoulders, elbows, hips, thighs – any part of his physical periphery that served as his shield, his metal armor. That is to say, these blasphemies and slanders made impact; small pox marks and craters of hate dotted this young man's silhouette, creating a mountain range of bruised but resilient flesh that after all these years was beginning to sag under the weight of cruel words. When he walked down the hall, he might as well have been sliding, eroding into the ocean.

His mother was not sure when it was that his posture began to decline. She did not realize that protecting one's heart and soft belly from words involved a routine and now permanent hunching of one's shoulders. She had stopped pulling his shoulders back and together at least three years ago. It was around the same time that he stopped saying I love you before going off to bed.

To the kids at Daniel Boone High School, Bobby Smith was a fixture. They did not question, try, nor care to get to know him. They did not wonder, want, or attempt to see him as a person. Rather, they lined up daily to fling their offenses, continuing on with their other standard habits of slapping high fives, banging on lockers, and spitting gum on the marbled cement beside any number of empty trash cans. Bobby never replied, and so they never expected he cared.

But Bobby did care. Since White Plains Primary he had cared. At Los Indios Intermediate he had cared. And now in his twelfth year of stoic solitude the steam was rising against the lid of his temperament and the whistle was about to shout.

Only Bobby had never spoken a word at school. Not once in twelve years of public education had his low and steady baritone been heard in the halls of the Arroyo de los Victorios Unified School District. He had always been a quiet child, shy and innocuous and extremely, alarmingly intelligent. Not knowing what to make of his controlled brilliance, his mother and teachers had spent the better part of his K through 12 years shuffling him from special education to specialist, from child psychologist to classes for the Gifted and Talented. Time and time again, he would silence the professionals, the analysts, the curious with his drawings, his completion of mathematical proofs, his commandment of IQs, SATs, GREs, etc. Throughout all the commotion Bobby Smith stayed silent, never wanting to say the words that he knew and understood so well.

While his silence mystified the adults in his life, it infuriated his peers. Bobby Smith represented everything they hated. He was different, he was genius, he was not a part of their traditions of eat and drink and dance and group and play. For twelve years his classmates grew up beside him, but while they grew in measured stops and starts, he deferred to the left like a weed, like a piece of stray hair out of one's ear, like a freak of nature. Bobby Smith stood for

everything they feared to admit of themselves; he was their proof that if one doesn't follow the crowd, one will be trampled by it. He, in his quiet lope down noisy corridors, was their daily reaffirmation, their measuring stick for how normal they were and how very wrong he was. The less he seemed to notice, the more they would attack. His silence became a direct offensive to their teen-age defense of the way things should go and the way one should be. Every day for twelve years they would fire their rounds of insecurities into his one-man camp, and never once would they stop to see what was left when the smoke had cleared; no one had ever thought to ask him how he felt.

It was on a Tuesday in April that Bobby Smith wanted to shout. On this particular day the words had stung like shotgun shells, and with the sharp pain his silence had been pierced. It was around noon that a girl, a stranger, had bumped shoulders with him in the hall and looked up at his face that was down and said you fucking nobody. Her words hit him on the mouth and strayed a minute, skipping off his chest, his stomach, his groin, his knee caps before falling on his toes with a heavy, heartless thud. Bobby bent down, almost crumbled, and picked up her words that lay like a heap of stones on the ground before him, thinking all the while of shouting and shotguns and pain. He held the rock of her words in his hands, and before returning it to its rightful owner wrapped it carefully in the only word that came to his mind. Silently, he reached out for the strange girl's shoulder and when she turned around he gave it back to her, only now the rock said sad. She stopped, looked up again at his silent face and accepted the sentence. She listened to the weight of his reply, felt its mass in her hands, and offered him the only word her sympathy and surprise could offer. She smiled, and Bobby Smith knew that he had won.

# **ROME**

by **Alex J. Lee**

Cobble cobble lobble  
Stone creeps heavy as a tomb  
Crying neon luminescence  
Rain spits from dark green moon  
Birds shaken.  
Figure 8 turns in the sky  
Three birds criss-cross together  
One sees the other die  
Random calls the other forward  
Hurts too much to call this time.

**February 6, 2003**

**By Erik Sapin**

Today in politics we learned  
things

Ted Turner retired  
with a guilty conscience  
to protest the war  
to go on vacation with his family  
to the Canaries.

Todays don't mean something  
but anything  
like beady eyes  
like drawls and slurs

like goods  
like poetry

# Independence

by Chris Kargel

While resting,  
through this second story window,  
I can see the clouds  
rolling in a crisp July wind  
as the earth below bakes  
in its Independence Eve sun.  
Tomorrow, it is known, the night will be aflame,  
washed in the bold crimson of honor and valor.  
Those who seek the shelter of sleep  
will be roused by false archaic cannons  
praising their Lords with brazen voices.  
The country, watching, will swell with pride.  
But from the prone position,  
through rust and grated bars,  
tomorrow is a memory,  
abandoned with youth and traded for opportunity.  
The steady paced clouds encompass a heaven  
that once harbored heat and fire, and will again.  
They move slowly, the clouds –  
not through age or caution,  
they simply lack of need for haste –  
hovering in my view for a time,  
collecting their masses and continuing to their destination,  
and leaving me to my own –  
my days and nights of fire  
where the sun will not find reason  
to resist under the cover of clouds  
and I shall find my shade  
in the memory of a future  
beyond the blazing days,  
under the autumnal skies to come.



# If 'The Great American Poem' is the one which best sums up the people of America and their mindset, is this it?

by Matthew Turk

Sk8erGirl4Life> k, this one is called bad boy  
theeminemshow32I> k  
Sk8erGirl4Life> i don't know wut it is about that bad boy  
style, all i know if that it drives me wild. every time i  
see u i can't help but smile, all the cute and thuggish  
things u do make me wanna be with u a while. so u better hurry  
up and take ur pick, cuz u might be  
Sk8erGirl4Life> missing out on one bad lil' chick!  
Sk8erGirl4Life> all done  
theeminemshow32I> cool  
Sk8erGirl4Life> lol, thanx  
theeminemshow32I> u got any more?  
Sk8erGirl4Life> yah, lots  
theeminemshow32I> tell me another one if u want?  
Sk8erGirl4Life> k, hold on  
Sk8erGirl4Life> never say i love u if it isn't really  
there, never talk about feelings if u don't even care. never  
hold my hand if ur gunna break my hear. never say ur going  
to if ur never going to start. never look into my eyes i  
fall u do is lie. never say hello, if  
Sk8erGirl4Life> you really mean goodbye. if u really mean  
forever then please say u'll try... never say  
forever...because forever makes me cry  
Sk8erGirl4Life> all done  
theeminemshow32I> u r a good writer  
Sk8erGirl4Life> thanx

# Redemption

by Chris Vetek

Dedicated to the idea of hope.

In the morning, Syltoplaya would wake and have coffee and meat with rolls and butter. The view on the veranda was always the first thing at which she would look. Glancing out on the Danube River, “The Blue Danube” that swayed through her city, Syltoplaya never forgot to acknowledge the beauty of her city, and the romance of Budapest, Hungary. She remembered the destruction that still showed signs in parts of the city, the signs of bombs falling and visions of children bleeding as mothers carried them to safety.

Politics never made sense. Communists, liberals, and everyone else gave the same lies and distortions. Her friend, Ventrinda, always supported her in the nervous periods when she needed a friend. Everyone was nervous. Yet despite all the worries, God, hope, and blessings never left the grateful minds of people like Syltoplaya and Ventrinda. There was always hope.

*A Duna csak fojlt. Es mint a termekeny, (The Danube flowed. And like a tiny child,*

*masra gondolo anyanak olen plays on his fertile, dreamy mother's knee,*

*a kisgyermek, ugy jatszadoztak szepen so cradled and embraced and gently smiled*

*es nevetgeltek a habok felem. Each playful wave, waving hello to me*

*Az ido arjan ugy remegtek ok They shuddered on the flood of past events*

*mint sirkoves dulongo temetok. Like tombstones, tumbling graveyard monuments)*

from Jozsef Attila, *A Dunanal*, 1936

In 1945, America and the Soviet Union won World War II as freedom and socialist loving nations defeated a fascist tyrannical one. Yet, in Hungary and other east block countries, freedom was an illusion, their lands being situated too close to the Soviet Union. America needed to rebuild Europe and Stalin needed protection for the Soviet Union. He chose to take over Hungary and other states. Most of Europe was rebuilt with American financing. Hungary and its neighbors to the north, south, and east were not financed.

After having coffee and meat with rolls and butter, Syltoplaya would walk down the street to buy bread. Ventrinda Csaba and Syltoplaya Nagy would often eat a meal of bread, wine, fish, and peppers together. Sometimes, on special occasions, they would go down to the Gellert Hotel, and eat on the balcony overlooking Margit Sziget, the bridge, and the beautiful river. The meat tasted so good at the Gellert, the waiters acted so gentlemanly. These special occasions

gave hope to them as well. Hope always stayed with both of them.

Today, Syltoplaya was meeting Milcifer at the book store at Petofi Square. She slammed her house door and briskly walked along the street. Everywhere gray buildings stood half ruined and some soldiers still lined the streets two years after the war's end. Many people shared houses. The worst parts of the city were the slums. Hope did not exist there. People starved and died every day in the urban jungle, like the jungles of Central Africa, or the famine stricken deserts of the Sahara. Milcifer greeted Syltoplaya with a broad smile and open arms, yet the greeting was automatic and brief like a routine of happiness before the wars that stuck with people. His 60-year-old sagging eyes gave away the truth, but only part of the truth. They hugged, and talked, and Syltoplaya loved him as a brother, although he was 20 years her senior.

"Did you hear of the robbery today at the market?" Milcifer asked Syltoplaya.

"No I did not hear. What happened?"

"Two soldiers stormed in at ten to eight this morning and stole much of what little cabbage and fruit that just came in from the countryside yesterday."

"How can they do such an awful thing? Well, I must go and tell Looallen."

Looallen was another good friend of Syltoplaya's. Friendship always gave these women the strength to go out to market, cook, and sleep, inspite of being nervous and having poor health. Syltoplaya and Looallen both gave each other a love and affection that started when they were both teenagers. Ventrinda joined them in laughter once a month for gossip and joking to carry on pre-war traditions of city life. Hope also stayed with Looallen. She had the most faith in God, despite the evils that men put upon themselves. How God could let such things happen, she never wanted to know, because such was the reason for believing in God. Nothing was known and everything was faith with God. The only assurance was the peace that memories, as well as coffee, gave to them.

*Mert benne elsz te minden felrecsuszott (Because you live in all my crooked ties,*

*Nyakkendomben es elvetett szavamban In every careless word, in each mistaken*

*Es minden eltevesztett koszosesben Greeting and in every letter written*

*Es minden összetepett levelemben Then torn into a thousand tiny pieces,*

*Es egész elhibazott eletemben in every deed of my misshapen being*

*Elsz es uralkodol orokkon, Amen. You live, Oh Anna, and reign there for ever.)*

from Juhaz Gyula, *Anna Orok*, 1926

Quasisemi lived alone outside of the fence north of the Buda prison. Always planning to hike to Szentendre, a beautiful town north of Buda, and never

actually doing it, Quasisemi lived with hope in knowing that some dreams were meant to be dreams. He missed his mother and father. Being old and alone, he lived without friends, without food, except scraps, and without warmth, except for a few coats and blankets. The heat vent from the prison also gave out some heat on the cold and snowy winter days and nights. Sometimes, he thought he would freeze to death. But he lived with hope, and faith in God. He knew he was on the wrong side of the coin with God, and he knew he did not deserve his fate if he appealed to reason. Once a skilled artist, he lost the inspiration after his parents died. He still lived with hope, the blind hope of redemption.

Invasions, liberations, robberies, and friendships, such were the memories of Syltoplaya in the fall of 1947. Sighing, she sat with Ventrinda and Looallen on the small balcony at her home. Ventrinda and Looallen always envied the veranda of the house, but never said so and always suppressed such sinful thoughts. Friendships were so much more valuable than petty jealousies.

“Remember the opera that played just before the war?” asked Looallen.

“No I cannot remember,” said Syltoplaya.

“Neither can I,” said Ventrinda.

“Well”, said Looallen, “neither can I.” All three laughed.

“I do remember the name of this man who gave me a beautiful painting long ago. I was walking down the street, the main street of Buda, and a man whistled at me. I turned around. He looked me up and down, like an idol, then laughed quite loudly and gave me a painting. He said ‘A gift from Quasisemi’, and I laughed and bowed,” Syltoplaya said.

Syltoplaya still hung the painting above her bed. In it, two young children, a boy and a girl, held hands and sat on bench near the Danube river, as a dog sat next to them.

“Come ladies, let’s hold hands and pray,” said Ventrinda, in a deep way, with her eyes wide and her head bowed low, staring first at Syltoplaya and then at Looallen.

In another part of the city, with bowed head and wide eyes, Quasisemi looked to the ground and prayed. He gave one last breath and then died peacefully, knowing his redemption would soon come.

Opening their eyes, Syltoplaya, Ventrinda, and Looallen looked to each other, and gave tight squeezes, then ate their humble meal, quietly.

Milcifer arranged the books and sang an old song that his grandfather taught him once. His health was very good, and he loved singing. He missed his childhood, because his grandfather would place him on his lap, and smoke large cigars while telling him fairytales. The aroma would sift into his nose, and he would smell the peppery tobacco, and feel peaceful. Milcifer missed the smell, and missed his grandfather. He never prayed, because he felt that prayer was a

vanity that showed lack of faith. Milcifer was hopeful, and faithful. He wanted to have a good bookstore.

He liked Syltoplaya, she reminded him of his daughter. He hoped one day he would see her again. She lived in America. She wrote often. He liked her letters. America gave her joy, but she often expressed sorrow. She always expressed hope, and that is why Milcifer liked his daughter.

*Amikor meg senkise voltam, (When I was no one yet,*

*fény, tiszta fény, light, clear light,*

*a kigyozo patakokban in the winding brooks*

*gyakran aludtam en. I often slept.*

*Hogy majdnem valaki lettem As I almost became someone,*

*ko, durva ko, a great force rolled me,*

*hegylejton jeg-erezetten stone, rough stone,*

*hompolygetett nagy ero. Ice-veined, down the slope.*

*Es vegul elni derultem And, finally, I have brightened*

*lang, pore lang, to live, flame, naked flame,*

*a szerte hatartalan urben in rounded, boundless space,*

*mutatom valodi hazank. Showing our real country.)*

from Weores Sandor, *Enek a Hatartalanrol*, 1980

# Spanish

by Kirk Eardley

Your tongue bouncing over the word cordillera,  
I consider the possibilities of so pink a thing.

Your fingers shucking back the golden flow of hair,  
I wonder open-mouthed at your flaxen flavor.

Your lips drawing back into matched dimples,  
I shiver envisioning the bottom of such crevices.

My lips licked chapped,  
My hair penciled brown,  
My smile a suture,  
I wish for a beginning,  
Not an ending.

# The Price for Silence

by Soosk Esia

I heard three men break into the house last night.  
I fumbled around in the dark but all I could grasp was confusion and fear.  
A hundred vindictive worms rummaged through my brain—  
But then all my thoughts and feelings  
Were silence when I heard her scream,  
“Why are you doing this to me?”

And they beat her with their sticks like the day they beat her in the fields  
because she wouldn't take off her clothes. Now she lays there, a sac of  
blood and broken bones.

(The guilt just kills me—  
I was just too scared to help her.)

And the blood keeps flowing as I am  
Consciously aware of myself  
at every  
living  
and  
dieing  
moment of my existence.

