

(n o t s o)
warm &
fuzzy
2001 writings

cc&d magazine
scars publications

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fuzzy

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various contributors

cc&d magazine
scars publications
a m e r i c a

what it felt like

i think i have felt it before
i think i remember touching it, and it was
well, it was soft, and *warm, and fuzzy*

that makes it sound like a blanket
but a blanket can only be warm for so long
and it never is long enough to cover you
and the cold air is always getting in
and you can feel the breeze
 from where the blanket fails you

no, what i have felt before,
what i am sure i have touched before
is giving, and soft, and warm
but it doesn't give too much
or it would disappear

it is kind of like cat's fur
have you ever felt cat's fur before?
when you glide you hand along a cat with the fur
it is like silk, it is very,
well, how do you describe it

 don't rub that cat fur the wrong way, though
 because that's when it fights againsty you

it does not hurt you or give way too easily
it satiates you into feeling that life is good again
and when nothing seems to do that for you
sometimes all you've got is love,
i mean, that feeling of warmth and softness

do you know what i am talking abot
i am sure i have felt that feeling before
i must have

2001 written works

Cannibal, 1985

Christopher Brisson

When my father belted me across the face
before flying to a science fiction convention,
I thought it oddly glamorous, perhaps a little
scrap of cinema, the way his diamond ring
caught the top lip and blood spouted freely
from the snag. I'll give him one thing:
I was already fifteen, so it could only seem
a somewhat belated first for that
loose temper, those black beetle brows.

I yelled "Asshole," and the weather was perfect—
late plangent May; left the house in livid flourish,
easy with his departure for five days. I would nurse
my indignation like grist that afternoon, the rent lip,
the spattered t-shirt, wonder whether I'd answer
lightly when questioned at school or marina, "Oh...

it's just my mad father," then gather up the public

shock from my nonchalance like cookie, moist
and delicious, chew it beneath a sky of fat blue
reinforcement. Exultant, rubbing facts like
sooty lucre: scheme, vision, profit: ooh
a swollen lip could well feed some future
fiction, some sincere story, the poignant
memoir. Alas, it's 1997, and you're right

here, exiting one of my briefer poems.

Death is Not the Issue

Christopher Brisson

The bodies do not want to be buried.
Never did. Never in Asia, Iceland, Brisbane, Kenya,
North America, Egypt, Byzantium, the very smallest
of Bahamian islands. No, they prefer open-air
decomposition, even if it means buzzards
excavating the abdomen, eye sockets, maggots
happy at buffet, or a slow, dumb
pruning in the sun.

Death is not the issue, folks—

No, it's all that dirt, shale, sand and gravel
dumped and packed with such presumption—

LISTEN UP: it is an *al fresco* hereafter the deceased desire.

Till then they shall continue to curse and conspire, pay us
back with tsunamis and simooms, frost heaves, hail,
hurricane, flood, mudslide, typhoon. Dolores, thank your
Cousin Horace, cremated in '72,

for destroying your opulent weekend
home in Ojai. We owe him and his cronies sudden
brush-fire, lava, cyclonic mayhem, the spontaneity of

tornadoes. Indeed, California, our most populous
state—or should I say *cemetery*?—shoulders the brunt
of the restitution, though we're talking pandemic here—
Alpine avalanches; Grand Tetons in a crumble of rock-
slide; Senegal enervated by steady drought; surprise
blizzards trapping Vermont; Kobe was no accident.
Didn't you see the upturned graves on CNN?

I implore you: stop the madness: place your dead pet or sibling

in a comfortable lawnchair, give just expired grandparents
a view of the swingset. Oceanloving aunts are best
tied to the masts of cruiseships. And you, flat-roof
homeowners proud in the Midwest—rethink summer
hospitality—host patio parties for the decomposing!
They will so appreciate dusk from your roof-tops
during the long oven of August. No doubt about it,

if we were to support such a movement globally
natural disasters would desist. Everyone could call
their trusty insurance agents, remove the pricey
flood and fire premiums. So go ahead, disinter Nancy
and Gwyneth, Uncle Benito, dead Baby Bishop,
offer them the pleasure of staying within earshot
of soap operas and clothesline talk, their right
to hibachi aroma and the airborne bacteria
gently munching them from scalp
to toe like some final orgasm
exquisite for its length.

Why not plan ahead for your elderly parents?
Intuit their corpsey needs and dispense with
the die-drain-pump-dress-dig-dump-shovel-
cover-over, flowers on Memorial Day hoopla
and surrender your cadavers,
your loves,
to wind, bird, bug and sun,
give them their due, let them become
the sabers and batons, maces,
marimbas and magic wands, proud
racks of bones made available
to an imaginative future:
one's great, great, great
grandchildren waving femurs
in favorite backyard games,
rambunctious after school.

Marry Me, Rhoda

Christopher Brisson

Leave Joe.

Climb out of the television set
and hide behind the imitation oak console.
I'll bring licorice and lasagna in the middle
of the night—latkes if you like—a basin for sponge
baths, clothes my mother will never miss—you need
only wait eight years till I start puberty; then twenty
months or so until my first ejaculation. Soon after
I will be eighteen and we can marry. It's really not
so long a wait, considering how much

I love you. We don't even have to

stay in New York. I'd move back to chilly Minneapolis
and live in the attic, cozy in the turrets. Pink and orange
suit me, we could buy more beads for the archway.
I assume Brenda will be your Maid of Honor (fine with me—
here goes—*I never did care much for Mare*), but
won't you consider Phyllis for bridesmaid alongside
Miss Richards, even though the two of you continue
to have “issues?” (Rho, she's a good friend at heart.)
Of course, I fully support a wife's decision

to work. You should dress boutique windows downtown
as long as you deem fit and tell me what to wear
if my tastes grow too conservative. It's true, I dream of you,
Rhoda, never Jeannie. To me, you are more “That Girl”
than Marlo ever could be. And when on Monday, March 17th,

1989, your mother Ida Morgenstern (née Nancy Walker)
passes on to the great coffee shop in the sky,
I will be there at your side, sitting Shiva, my hands poised
with squares of Bounty (the quicker-picker-upper)
to wipe away your copious tears. I will even skip
my morning Art History lecture in “Rococo to Revolution”
(a key discussion of Greuze and Fragonard),
despite a mid-term two weeks off,
in order to fulfill this husbandly duty.

Oh Rhoda,

Rhoda, Rhoda, Rhoda,
never have I met a girl so beautiful, so
self-critical, so ill-informed about her charms and strengths. Listen
carefully: *you are neither fat, awkward nor unlucky:*
you make me laugh, baby—

hard, in my gut—

You are no mere supporting character
in this boy’s universe. I guarantee you the top
bunk of my heart, would bet a lifetime of collected baseball cards
that decades after you first walk into Mary’s much larger
apartment for pastry, coffee, the spilling of anxiety,
the world will still find you luminous and electric,
high-cheek-boned, funny as all Hell—a smart man’s
definition of worth—
and though I am

but a supplicant in foot-pajamas, please know
from these first-grade bones will grow
the man to love you leagues beyond
the average Joe. Oh yes, CBS
is good to me. Each Saturday night
on an orange shag rug in Massachusetts,
bowl of Lucky Charms in my lap,
parents in armchairs, oblivious
to my one deep, central desire,
only then is when I find
what it is to be religious.

Psalm of an Ugly Girl

Jessica L. Chapman

I never was a perfect girl
Where are the good times?
I'll guess another day...is it
suffice to say that I never had
a date to the prom because
I think that the Good Book is really
a guide to soul death?

I never was a pretty girl
Where are my redeemer's praises?
I'll try again later...is it
suffice to say that sick one's -
they could very well be the
Holy Men shaking your hand
after the Earth shattering sermon
last Sunday?

I'll cry another day...is it
suffice to say that all the girls
are beauties except me?
Will a hundred and twelve Hail Mary's
make me lovely?
make me whole?
she's already left me freezing cold.

somewhere between

Jessica L. Chapman

somewhere between a lifetime of spirals
and I'm tired, so tired
of this wintry grief
it's starting to rain and
it's melting my shoes and
the garden outside my dream
I can't wake up anymore the quiet
rush of silence and the
feathers in my pillow
somewhere between a commitment to
this walkway
and I'm tired of this route
I'm coming undone
with crazy thoughts and
diabolic gestures
and I wish - I wish every fucking day
I wish that I was
somewhere better than here in between
I've spent my whole life
looking in from
the wrong side of the glass

Warm

Jessica L. Chapman

look between the fine line and
I'm inside the moon again
with all their fingers in my panties
I can feel the pressure when
you breathe and my angel
is on the street with
a pocket full of fun
My Holiday's Here
across the sky in a
pornographic photograph
"everybody's girl"
I stay sixteen and dance
for him again
biting my cherry lip
as blood flows freely
down a caked make-up face
look between my legs
and their hands inside my Levi's
with their heaven
stripping me naked and
my voice is screaming
in silent Morse-code
If I bathe will I die
I don't get warm anymore

Gall Point Syringe

Jodie Lyn Fisher

It was the burning, yearning,
fiercely intense passion-
that set my black ink blood boiling.

It was the need, requirement,
A desperate, demanding drive-
that set my fumbling fingers frantically searching.

It was the trembling, shivering, rushing-
to inject medicinal meaning into my blue-lined-white-soul
that surges from my silver metal ball point syringe.

Random Numbers

Mike Hovancek

“I hit a deer on my way into work last week”, Jay was telling one of his customers, “It bashed up my grill and headlights but the really expensive thing was the kink in the hood”.

Jay was a performer. He loved to talk to the procession of customers that paraded through his auto repair shop every day. People expecting the typical unkempt attendant spewing a steady stream of automotive jargon were always surprised by the strange turns their conversations took with this man.

“I was pretty upset”, he continued, “but I figured the deer didn’t make out that well in the deal either”

“I guess you got your first kill of the season”, his customer mused.

“Maybe not. I mean, I didn’t stop to give that animal mouth-to-mouth or anything but I swear it was gone when I drove out that way the next day”

There are people all over the planet who have wealth, power, beauty, fame, and all the other wonderful things that life has to offer. Jay had something that was worth more than all of those things combined: Happiness. Without happiness, everything else is as worthless as yesterday’s lottery numbers.

Jay went through life feeling this extremely valuable emotion while he doled out information about tire, muffler, and brake technologies to his many customers. To hear him talk about Uniroyal Laredo All Weather Tires you would think he was a wine connoisseur, extolling the virtues of a particularly delightful Pinot Noir. He would savor each interaction, feeling its texture and warmth in his mouth before swallowing it whole. Happiness hides in strange places, I guess.

Jay kept his waiting room comfortable as a sort of lure for conversation. That way, his customers could watch the large screen t.v., sip free coffee, and relax on the large, plush couch while they waited for his staff to repair their cars. It was a nicer set up than most of them had in their own homes.

This environment provided Jay with a perpetual audience for his sermons on tires, animal husbandry, religion, politics, hair replacement technology, or anything else that found its way into his head. In addition to his incidental lectures, Jay liked to ask a lot of questions that didn't have answers. He couldn't help it. The thoughts would clutter up his mind, nagging at him like a pack of cranky, restless cub scouts at a life insurance seminar. There was no doubt about it, he needed an outlet for the frantic happiness that cluttered his brain.

This was especially troubling for Jay when he found himself at home late at night with no one to talk to. Without his captive audience, the thoughts would slowly begin to compact themselves in his mind until he became bloated with words. When the pressure got to be too intense, he knew he had to find someone to talk to before his head exploded like a big water balloon.

Sleep wouldn't have him when he got this way. Jay tossed and turned his way through life, waiting for the morning sun and all the customers that accompanied it. He often felt like a child on Christmas morning, up too early to open any presents.

He eventually developed a coping mechanism that helped him to get through these particularly lengthy nights. It all started when he accidentally dialed a wrong number one late evening and found himself in the middle of a puzzling conversation with a complete stranger. It was like barging, uninvited into someone's home. It was reckless, absurd, intriguing... exhilarating.

Soon after, Jay started randomly dialing the telephone and having confusing conversations with whoever happened to answer. It wasn't quite as enjoyable as talking to his customers but, like an alcoholic who finishes off all the half-empty glasses after a party, he found that it held him over until he could get something more substantial in his system. Over the years this evolved into

a nightly habit.

* * *

“Hello?” said the voice that he woke at the other end of the line.

“Hey, what’s up?” Jay asked the complete stranger.

“...Not much...” the confused person replied, sleepily searching his brain in an attempt to figure out who he was talking to.

“Listen”, Jay hungerly continued, “I’ve been thinking about this Jack Kevorkian guy. I mean, the man is famous for killing terminally ill people. Do you think he makes his friends nervous when he visits them in the hospital?”

“Barry?”, the confused person asked, hoping that he had identified his late night caller.

“Yeah, this is Barry”, Jay lied. “You know, they call Kevorkian ‘Dr. Death’ but I heard the AMA took away his medical license. Shouldn’t they call him ‘Mr. Death’ now?”

“This doesn’t sound like Barry...”

“I mean, what if you were in the hospital and Jack Kevorkian came to visit you? Wouldn’t you get a little nervous?”, Jay pressed on.

“Who is this?”, the stranger on the other end of the line demanded to know.

“What difference does it make? Just talk to me for Christ’s sake!”, Jay blurted out at his unwilling audience. His slip was answered by the click of the receiver that severed his dialogue in mid performance.

Strangely enough, this little exchange was exciting for Jay. It wasn’t, however, enough to slake his thirst for human contact. Seeking another hit, he quickly dialed another random number. The phone purred in his hand.

* * *

There are a lot of ways that a guy can kill himself. He can hang himself, blow his brains out, stab himself in a major organ, jump off of a building, ingest any number of poisons, slit his wrists, cut his jugular vein, throw himself in front of a truck, breathe in car exhaust, explode himself into little pieces, drive his car into a tree, lie in the path of an oncoming train... Why, there is a virtual smorgasbord of options available for people who have decided to end their lives.

Choosing a suicide method is a lot like picking out a suit coat. You need

to find something that is appealing, practical, and appropriate for your personality. You need a suicide that says “Here I am, world! Look at me! I’m dead, for Christ’s sake!”.

Leonard had probably considered all of the popular suicide methods at one time or another. For a few weeks he toyed with the idea of buying a gun and blowing his troubled head clean off his shoulders. It seemed to have the kind of fool-proof, no-turning-back kind of quality that appealed to him.

A bullet to the brain wasn’t all champagne and confetti, however. Leonard had a couple of concerns about this method that caused him to hesitate in his decision. For one thing, the Brady law made it impossible for him to buy a hand gun at the moment inspiration struck him. He would have to put in a request for a gun and, then, wait five days while a background check was being completed. This robbed the event of spontaneity. It was like trying to schedule a sneeze and being told that there were some openings in March.

He also imagined that the gun would make a terrible mess. He heard about a woman who blew her brains out while she was sitting under a ceiling fan. When the police arrived, they found blood and skin spiraled around the ceiling like a grisly bull’s eye. Leonard had hoped to find a more considerate way to kill himself. That was just the kind of guy he was.

Finally, he had a dream that convinced him once-and-for-all to seek out a more benevolent form of suicide. In the dream, he carefully positioned a hand gun under his chin and pulled the trigger. The bullet traveled through his chin, through the back of his tongue, through his sinus cavities, and exploded out of his right eye, leaving his brain fully intact. He tried to scream but all he could produce was a horrible, animal-like gurgling sound. He staggered, blindly out the door of his apartment and gurgled for help from his neighbors before passing out in his shabby little lawn cubicle.

It wasn’t the sort of dream that inspires a guy to shoot himself in the head (although it did inspire Leonard to take better care of his lawn). No, there had to be a better way for him to bring about an end to his suffering.

One day, Leonard read about the alarming rise in a new form of suicide. Apparently, people were putting plastic trash bags over their heads and going to sleep. After a few minutes, they would pass out and, eventually, suffocate. It was painless, neat, and fool-proof.

The trash bag suicide method fit Leonard like a perfectly tailored suit. It wasn’t too flashy or technical. It wasn’t high maintenance or self-indulgent. It was effective yet unpretentious...

Once he found his method, Leonard decided that he was ready to give

it a try. This wasn't an upsetting moment for him. It was actually quite a relief to finally reach a decision that would bring about an end to his suffering. It was like coming home after a long, traumatic journey.

Preparing for his suicide, Leonard looked around and decided that it would be a shame to die with his apartment in such disarray. He knew that his passing would be followed by a procession of police, paramedics, and relatives who would be entering the apartment at one time or another in order to conduct whatever business people attend to after a suicide. You simply don't throw a party like that in a home that hasn't been properly cleaned. Even dead, Leonard wanted to be a good host.

He spent a few hours vacuuming, washing dishes, putting dirty laundry in the hamper, taking out the trash... When the apartment finally looked presentable, Leonard put his will on the dresser and went downstairs to get a trash bag from the kitchen. He felt remarkably calm. He reached into the box of trash bags, hoping to extract the tool that would end his suffering forever. The box was empty.

HE HAD USED THE LAST BAG WHEN HE TOOK OUT THE FUCKING TRASH!

"Jesus Christ!", Leonard yelled as he threw the empty box on the floor. Things never seemed to go smoothly for him. He immediately started rummaging through the hall coat closet to see if he had any jackets that were still wrapped in their dry cleaning bags. Although he felt a little silly being found dead with the words "This is not a toy! Keep out of reach of children!" across his face, it was an allowance that he was willing to make. He rummaged around the closet but had no luck.

Eventually, Leonard found some plastic sandwich bags in the kitchen, No, they wouldn't fit over his head but he thought he could hold them over his mouth and nose until he was properly suffocated. He trudged back upstairs, lay down on the bed, and held an entire handful of sandwich bags over his face.

Things weren't going very well. He couldn't seem to get an air-tight seal over his face. The air kept fluttering in and out between the bags. The plastic was getting hot, damp, and itchy against his skin as he struggled to keep his hands in the proper position. This wrestling match went on for several minutes.

In the middle of all the action, the phone rang. Leonard tried to ignore it as he struggled to keep the sandwich bags in place but whoever was calling

was remarkably persistent. The phone rang twenty times before Leonard decided that maybe he should answer it.

* * *

Jay was getting concerned. The phone rang and rang but nobody answered it. Then, just as he was about to replace the handset back in its cradle, the person on the other end picked up the phone, yelled, “YOU HAVE THE WRONG NUMBER!”, and hung up.

This perplexed Jay. How did the person know that he had the wrong number? He hit the redial button on his phone and waited for an answer. This time, the person on the other end picked up after only two rings. Again, he yelled, “YOU HAVE THE WRONG NUMBER!” and hung up. Jay hit redial again and yelled out “HOW DO YOU KNOW I HAVE THE WRONG NUMBER!?” at the very same time that the person on the other end was yelling, “YOU HAVE THE WRONG NUMBER!”.

This time there was a pause. Leonard was trying to decide whether or not to hang up on his persistent caller. The plastic bags felt hot and wet in his hand.

“Why would anyone want to talk to me?”, Leonard asked, the anger rapidly fading out of his voice.

“I was just wondering why dogs turn around in circles before they lie down”, Jay asked, “Can’t they just lie down without turning around first? What do they accomplish by making those stupid circles?”

“You’re not very good at this, are you?”, Leonard asked.

“Good at what?”

“At making prank calls”

“Is that what I was doing?”, Jay asked with a profound, child-like sincerity. Up until that moment it hadn’t occurred to him that his late night phone calls could be considered to be pranks.

“I don’t have time for this shit”, Leonard said with the annoyance leeching back into his voice. He was getting ready to hang up the phone again.

“Why? What are you doing?”

“I’m in the process of killing myself. Would you like to join me?”

“I just wanted to know why dogs turn in circles...”

Leonard was ready to haul his life to the curb like a broken down old couch. It was heavy and ugly. It smelled of mildew. He looked forward to see-

ing it being hauled away by stupid, muscular men with a big truck.

Jay, on the other hand, was so infatuated with life he couldn't talk quickly enough to tell people about it. He woke up each morning, nearly exploding with enthusiasm about the wonderful things the bad mufflers and bald tires would introduce into his life on that day.

Strangely enough, both men lived on the same planet. In fact, both men drove down the same roads, woke up in the same city day after day, followed the same laws of physics... They simply interpreted the world in drastically different ways.

"I don't know why dogs turn in circles! I don't care!", Leonard shouted. The tone of his voice suggested that he was, again, preparing to hang up the phone. He wasn't. His curiosity was getting the better of him. He couldn't keep himself from wondering where this conversation would head next. It was like driving past a horrible car accident and not being able to look away.

"Tonight when I go to bed I'm going to turn in circles before I lie down. Maybe I'll find something appealing about it", Jay added, feeling pleased that the conversation was continuing to unfold.

"You do that", Leonard said.

"Do you want me to call you with the results?", Jay asked.

After a brief pause, Leonard's resistance began to dissolve again, "...Yeah, you may as well call me with the results", he consented, "You know, I haven't gotten a phone call from anyone except salesmen for months. I guess it would be kind of nice to talk to someone who isn't trying to sell me something"

"So I can't interest you in some quality aluminum siding?", Jay asked.

At that, Leonard hung up the phone. He didn't know what to make of this unusual conversation. How was he supposed to feel? Amused? Angry? Scared? He looked at the handful of breath-dampened sandwich bags and tossed them in the trash. He was feeling too silly and awkward to kill himself at that moment. Suicide is supposed to be a solemn event.

* * *

Leonard wasn't always like this. He used to live a reasonably happy life in the suburbs with his wife and two grown sons. He had a decent job at the Ford Motor Company where he assembled track systems into scores of Minivans every day. It was monotonous work but it came with plenty of ben-

efits and a decent union wage. Things went pretty smoothly until his depression hit.

It was a gradual process. What started as a vague grayness in the air slowly took hold like a virus. After a while, the depression attached itself inoperably to Leonard's hip like a vicious siamese twin. It stood next to him on the assembly line each day; it lay down next to him every night; it hogged the covers from him while he tried to sleep... It was like an annoying roommate who blasted the stereo at inopportune times and left dirty underwear on the bathroom floor. The depression followed him everywhere he went, draining the color out of all the things he encountered. Eventually, it became as much a part of his identity as the color of his eyes or the size of his nose.

Without explanation, happiness just packed its bags and left. It sent an occasional post card every now and then but, other than that, it disappeared entirely. There wasn't any clear explanation for it; Everyday things like driving to work, making small talk, or buying groceries just started feeling unbearable. To see the agony that he went through just trying to convince himself to do the laundry you would think he was trying to talk himself into pulling out his own toenails.

As the depression grew roots, Leonard became less and less capable of sleep. This was particularly disturbing because sleep was the only thing in life that appealed to him. He would lie in bed and think the same thoughts over and over again, occasionally looking at the clock to see how long it had been since the last time he looked at the clock. All this time the shallow, useless thoughts would tumble around his head like a late night stomach full of junk food.

Usually around 4 A.M. he would give up on sleep altogether. He knew that if the insomnia kept him up until that point he would be better off surrendering to it. Sleep started to feel like a lover for whom he could no longer get aroused. It was deeply humiliating.

Over time, the various things that Leonard used to view as accomplishments in his life turned into big, merciless anchors. He began to feel trapped in his job, his house, his sons, and his wife. One day when he was sitting at the dinner table he realized that he wouldn't really care if his whole family died in their sleep that night. Watching them chew, open mouthed, with that empty look in their eyes, he found that the only emotion he was capable of feeling toward them was disgust.

This realization came as a bit of a relief to Leonard. He thought he would be more likely to wiggle free from his depression if he didn't have to

worry about his family anymore. He imagined himself writhing like a snake out of his old skin.

A few days later Leonard filed for an early retirement and moved out of his house. His wife begged him not to leave but she had become little more than a blob of protoplasm to him at that point. He didn't feel anything at all for her. He walked out of the house with an armload of belongings, leaving the rest of his life to fend for itself.

* * *

Leonard moved into a low-rent apartment in the lower east side of town. It was a building where hundreds of people sat in hundreds of apartments watching hundreds of televisions every day. Standing in the parking lot he could look up at the windows and see all the blue lights emanating from the television screens like little constellations in the sky. Sleep continued to evade Leonard in his new apartment. Quickly adapting to its new surroundings, it found several effective hiding places in the nooks and crannies of the building. Leonard would lie in bed night after night, listening to the howls of his neighbor's cat. He felt like his soul had gotten loose and found its voice in that tortured little animal.

Situation comedies, soap operas, and tabloid news shows quickly became Leonard's drugs of choice. He would peel himself out of bed each day and turn on the T.V.. It would ignite in a flash of light like a crack pipe in his hands. Slowly, the colors and sounds would form themselves around a talk show or situation comedy. The glowing, buzzing glass eye would fix its gaze on Leonard and he would feel the familiar numbness overtaking his brain. It was almost like being asleep. Almost.

* * *

One day after his first late night call to Leonard, Jay found himself feeling distracted at work. He couldn't escape the queer taste that the conversation left in his mouth. Jay was used to walking away from his calls without any unpleasant side effects but Leonard's hopelessness projected an unexpected shadow across his morning.

Jay tried to talk his way out of his ambiguous feelings. Fortunately, Raif Peterson showed up at the shop that day to take advantage of the free coffee. He proved to be a good testing ground for Jay's new emotions.

Raif used to stop by the shop every month to have his oil changed. He became so enamored with the atmosphere, he continued to be a regular participant in Jay's conversations long after cataracts robbed him of the ability to drive.

Conversations between these two men were always intriguing in their rhythm and texture. Jay spoke with the rapid fire patterns that were necessary to express the thoughts that his brain, itchy with ideas, tended to produce.

Raif, on the other hand, had the kind of voice that made him sound like he was gargling mice. There were little pops and squeaks that bubbled over his grinding bass drone when he talked. His words never escaped unscathed, either. They all bore tooth marks and other little abrasions like a dog's favorite chew toy as they found their way past the thousands of salivary stalagmites and stalactites in Raif's mouth.

"How the hell are you, Jay!", Raif gurgled, waking the mice that resided in his throat.

"Not so bad, I guess"

Raif only seemed to agree with about half of the things Jay said to him. He didn't mind wading through his friend's stream of consciousness, though, as long as he was rewarded with free coffee and ready company.

"What has you wandering around town in this kind of weather, Raif?"

"You saw me downtown?"

"Yeah. I saw you when I drove into work this morning. I was looking at you; you were looking at the Cavalier Hotel; the hotel wasn't looking at much of anything..."

"I was just in the mood for a little walk", Raif said, the words fizzing and frothing out of his mouth.

Raif had spent most of his seventy years in town. He took the business openings and closings as personally as if they were marriages and funerals in his own family. He remembered the day the Cavalier Hotel opened. As a ten year old, he stood with his pockets full of candy, marveling at the awesome power and beauty the building represented. It rose proudly above all the other buildings in town with its fists full of beauty and wealth. He felt like he was looking at a majestic piece of history that would hold up the skyline for as long as there was a skyline to be held. Sixty years later, the hotel stood abandoned,

scheduled for demolition like an inmate on death row. It was hard not to take the news personally.

“This town has expiration dates stamped all over it”, Raif mused.

“I’m not going anywhere”, Jay told him, “How else will an old bastard like you get free coffee around here?”

“I don’t know”

“Hey, let me ask you something”, Jay prodded, “What do you think about suicide?”

“I don’t care for it. Why? Am I getting on your nerves?”

“No. I’m worried about a friend of mine”, Jay admitted. He wanted to talk about his conversation with Leonard but he didn’t want to explain the details behind their meeting. His late night phone calls contained all the guilty pleasures that pornography held for other men. It was just easier not to tell anyone.

“This guy claims that he wants to kill himself”, he continued, “Can you believe that?”

“It happens”, Raif gurgled with the kind of simple wisdom that would sound shallow if it came out of a younger mouth.

“I didn’t really believe him, though”

“People kill themselves all the time”, Raif reminded him, “Maybe you should talk to him about it”

Jay was trying to remember if Leonard’s phone number was still on his redial. As long as he didn’t make any other phone calls, it would still be there.

“I wouldn’t know what to say”

“It doesn’t matter. Just talk to him”

“That’ll kill him for sure”

“Yeah, probably”

* * *

When he heard the phone ring late at night Leonard suspected that he was about to get into another inane conversation with his curious new friend. One day had passed since their first conversation. In that time Leonard still hadn’t decided how he was supposed to feel about it. He had to admit, though,

that he felt a surge of adrenalin when the phone rang him free from the late night talk show that was holding him captive.

After two rings, Leonard picked up the phone and put it to his ear. He didn't say anything at all; he just listened to see what the caller had to say to him.

"You weren't really going to kill yourself, were you?"

"I was going to put a trash bag over my head and suffocate myself", Leonard matter-of-factly answered. It occurred to him that there was something appealing about telling his problems to a perfect stranger.

"You don't want to do that"

"Why not?"

"Because if someone saves you before you actually die you'll end up with brain damage", Jay explained, "Then people will have to wheel you around in a cart like a ceramic doll and feed you with a stick"

Leonard hadn't thought about that. Suddenly his plan didn't look so appetizing. The prospect of surviving a suicide attempt or of committing a sloppy, elongated suicide was much more disturbing than the prospect of actually being dead. He wasn't afraid of death; he was afraid of dying.

"I guess I'm too inept to pull off that kind of suicide", he told Jay.

"I don't know, you sound pretty 'ept' to me. Is 'ept' a word?", Jay wondered aloud, "I mean, how can there be an 'inept' if there is no 'ept'?"

"I'm just tired. I don't want to live any more", Leonard explained, feeling a little comforted to finally set his emotions to words.

"I'm going to use the word 'ept' in my everyday conversations", Jay continued, "Maybe if I use it often enough it'll catch on and everyone will start using it"

As different as Jay and Leonard were, they had one very significant similarity: Both of them had heads that were desperately cluttered with repetitive, useless thoughts. When they held conversations they were like two mail men, swapping all their leftover junk mail at the end of the Christmas season.

"I feel lonely but I can't stand to be around people", Leonard confessed.

"...So you don't consider yourself to be very 'ept' in social situations?", Jay asked, barely able to conceal his excitement at finding a use for his new

word.

“Are you making fun of me?”

“No! I really want to hear what you have to say”, Jay pleaded, afraid that the conversation was about to come to an end, “Why are you so depressed?”

“Honestly?”

Jay fought back the urge to ask why people say “Honestly?” when they are asked a question. He was dying to say “No, lie to me!” but he knew it would be answered with a loud click in his ear piece.

“Yeah, honestly”

“I don’t know. I used to have everything. Then, I decided I didn’t want any of it anymore. Things just quit being pleasurable to me. Did you ever feel that way?”

“Honestly?”, Jay asked, amusing himself with a private little joke.

“Yeah”

“I never felt that way”

“Oh”

An awkward silence began to smother the conversation. Finally, Leonard said, “Look, I have to go”

“Why? What could you possibly have to do? Are you late for a nap or something?”

Jay was right, of course. The only pressing engagement Leonard had was with his television set. He decided that if he was going to stay on the line he should at least try to relate his depression to his anonymous friend.

“I can’t seem to find the will power to go on”, he said.

“You’re not going to end your life with a preposition, are you?!?”, Jay asked, “that would be the worst grammar error of all!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you have lived a relatively death-free existence up until now”, Jay explained, “Why screw it up with reckless grammar?”.

That did it. Leonard finally lost his patience and hung up the phone. As desperate as he was for human contact, he couldn’t sit through a grammar lesson.

Leonard returned to his late night talk show. In the back of his mind he hoped his friend would call back sometime soon. He had to admit that he was intrigued by their exchanges and he liked the freedom of being able to hang up whenever things started to get out of hand.

It didn't matter whether or not he enjoyed these conversations, though. As it turned out, the phone emanated a horrible, horrible silence for the rest of the night. This stillness continued into the next day. Then the next... Then the next... In fact, Leonard and Jay never spoke to each other again.

Jay had intended to call back the next night but he accidentally erased the number off of his redial when he used his phone to order a pizza. With one phone call, Jay's reckless hunger severed the line that held these two desperate insomniacs together. Who knew a pizza could have such a profound effect on people's lives?

* * *

I'm not going to lie to you and tell you that all of Leonard's problems were solved by his conversations with Jay. He may have gone on and killed himself after I finished writing this story for all I know. The calls did, however, distract him long enough to convince him to attempt a new kind of salvation (an unacceptable salvation, perhaps, but a salvation all the same).

Over the next couple of days, Leonard came to realize that the late night phone calls were a sign post in his depression. They reminded him that we was never going to be able to rejoin the living world if he continued to isolate himself. The only thing he had to lose from venturing back out into the world was sixteen hours of television each day.

Leonard had to find a way to reach out to others that wouldn't put him at risk of being rejected or humiliated. After some thought, he picked up the phone and randomly dialed a number into it, the thoughts fidgeting in his head like a pack of cranky, restless cub scouts at a life insurance seminar...



lost

laura johnson

I'm so lost
in a world with
no love,
no sympathy,
no compassion.
There's only hate,
loneliness,
and pain.

THIEF

Michael Keshigian

Two days ago
the sun caught me stealing light
to illuminate a poem,

demanded restitution,
then reported me to Mother Nature
who posted my likeness about the land.

Soon, the ocean, forest, birds, flowers, et. al.
filed suit for substantial abuse
and complacent philandering without permission.

I pleaded guilty;
admitted stealing breath from wind
for deliverance,

marshmallows from the sky to sweeten song,
and rage from the ocean
instilling a sense of urgency.

Convicted and confined to a windowless room
no writing, visitation
or glimpses of stolen sights,

I was sentenced to imagine beauty
without embezzlement
and the wholesale exploitation of words.

TWO-STEP

Michael Keshigian

We watch them gig
in the pit
playing funky jazz licks
in modal timbres
makes me squirm.

I say
let's blow this joint
when this babe be-bops from behind
hands in my hair
says we can really groove.

Flattered
I dance through the night
till light
cuts a ray
through her ceramic face

cracking beauty
into puzzle fragments.
Flaking
she starts to sing
the blues.

praying to idols

Janet Kuypers

every once in a while
i question whether or not there is a god
 but i changed my mind
 i thought i have found him

he had dark hair
 almost black
 just like a god should
and he had these blue eyes
 not just blue
 almost white
 so light
 they look like glass
 and you could almost see right through them

and could i see right through you
if you gave me the chance?

i'd clasp my rosary necklace
and pray to the right gods
 and wouldn't they be you
and i'd let the necklace drape over my shoulders
around my neck
and i'd let the rosary fall between my breasts
and you would forgive me that much more for my sins

how many hail marys
would you want me to say
i'd ask

i cannot believe i have seen you
and i have talked to you
and does everyone get to see their god like this
and does everyone remember

why do you have to be my god
why did i have to see you
and talk to you
and realize how young you are
and realize how inexperienced you are
 i mean, you're supposed to be the god
 you're supposed to be teaching ME

is this what people think
when their gods let them down
 did you let me down
 or did i just never know
 what i was looking for?
is this what people think
when they realize
they are only praying to idols
what then?

the Battle at Hand

Janet Kuypers

I wanted you to know
that I was on a mission when I saw you
and that I was a warrior
and you were just a helpless victim
that couldn't fight my weaponry

that wouldn't fight my weaponry

I would come in to town
and pillage and rape
and rape and pillage
depending on how you put it

and rape is such a hard word, you know,
entirely inappropriate for this
because I made sure that you wanted me
before it was all over
because I have a knack for doing that
 when I fight my battles

this is how I care to think of you.
I was on a conquest
and i came fully equipped with ammunition

I had bayonets
I had a rifle
with rounds of bullets in a chain
thrown over my shoulder
I had a .22 caliber magazine loaded hand-gun

I didn't even need to use the hand-grenade
or the tear gas

even before i started using my tongue as a weapon with a kiss
I used it as a weapon with words
and I knew I had won you won over from the start
you looked at me when I spoke
and I think you might have actually wanted to listen to me

and I would never have to resort to violence
to get what I wanted from you

we seldom had opportunities before
and there wasn't much of an opportunities here
but we made one
and we somehow made it work

I know I wasn't ready for a battle before
but I want you to know
that I came ready to fight
and I didn't care the circumstance
or whether or not we had to be quiet
because we wouldn't want anyone to find out
and no one did

and no, it was not a monumentous moment in my life
it was just a moment
a conquest, a battle,
and in my own mind,
I won the war

you still thought I was beautiful
and that I was horny
did I create a little monster in you?
now I'm going to have to re-arm myself
and use my stockade of defenses to push you away

but that is the cost of winning battles all the time, I guess

you thought I would always want you
and you know, I liked winning the battle,
but I'll have to work again
so that you don't come back to haunt me
because we weren't meant to be anything to each other
and you were just a conquest for me
a battle won

people thought we would never get along.
but I know better
I know there is no such thing as NOT getting along with me
and I know I can make anyone like me
as I did with you

you were easy prey, you know.

Whether or Not It Is From Religion

Janet Kuypers

A.

“Im ambidexterous. The nuns would hit my left hand
when I wrote because I was supposed to use my right hand.
When my right hand got tired when I
wrote a paper at home, I would just switch hands.”

Things are supposed to be a certain way,
aren't they?
There can't be anything different from the norm
you'll have to abide by our rules

“who's rules?” ours.
“I thought I was listening to God's rules.”
We have interpreted God's rules. It is for your own good.
“Doesn't the Bible state that YOUR behavior
and your changing the Bible
is wrong?”

That is when the child was shut up again.
Quickly.

Sometimes rules are needed to be instilled
They didn't care how the rules would be enforced
even though they preferred swiftly
cunningly
and angrily.

B.

“She beat me because I spilled some milk.
She was showing me what Jesus would do.”

It is strange how people choose to instill the word of Christ
It is amazing how people get a “power trip”
by putting a ruler to someone’s hands

when you let someone else tell you that you can’t be married
when you let someone else tell you that you can’t have children
when you let someone else tell you that you can’t have sex
(well, isn’t that why they molest little boys?)
when you let someone else tell you that you can’t drink
when you let someone else tell you that you can’t have any fun
when you let someone else tell you that you can’t have your life
back

wouldn’t you do your damnedest
to take a little bit of life away from everyone else

well, that is probably what they did
they will take every power trip they can get

C.

“But when they go to a private school
they have better manners
than kids who went through a public school.
Kids just need that strict direction in their life.”

I knew a woman who went to a Catholic school
and she wore a ton of make-up
and she smoked and drank

and she screwed anything she could

I knew a woman who went to a public high school
and she was an honor student
and she was in a sport
and she never drank, and she never smoked
and she never did anything wrong
and she never went to church

maybe it is not religion
that keeps them in line
it could be that strictness
coming from anyone, like the parents, religions, or friends

it could be being raised with rules
or morals
or values
or standards

whether or not is from religion
is irrelevant

Chasing

Ben Mitchell

Two boys run down hallway stairs.
The younger one tears his red pants

on the splintered railing.
His brother, older and faster, leaps

into the bedroom,
slams the peeling door

and breathes heavily against it. I can't
remember what I was trying to say,

what drove me
to chase him down those stairs that day.

I needed to tell him something,
struggling by that door,

beneath the stains in that plaster ceiling, the hiss
and clank of the radiator.

Later, I would dream that I remembered it
exactly — I could feel again how important,

how fundamental.
Something to do with why we're here

something about life. Shit,
Adam, if only you'd stopped to listen.

Global Domination

Ben Mitchell

Back in fourth-grade homeroom, Mr. Wyman
in his stiff green pants would prattle on
endlessly the meaningless tid-bits:

the principle products of Botswana,
the proper usage of the floated reflexive itself.
Rows of chairs, in front they knew everything.

I remember a faded brown and yellow globe
pinned in its revolving wooden mounting.
Not the blue plastic one with clear delineation

marking boundaries of the evil empire,
but the old one with traces of long-extinct paradigm,
places like the Belgian Congo and St. Petersburg.

And in that world, I was immortal,
moving free through the great expanse
of brown mountains and orange rivers.

How the boys of Guatepa pounded the trees
with spears they made from the jaws
of Malaysian Gila Monsters.

The crowded squares of Amnesia Fantastica,
where supremacy dressed in flip-flop sandals
and really big hats. We elite few would meet

each afternoon, below the marble archway
to wander back alleys, dividing the fortunes
of our small brown world equally between us.

Pleasing Richard

Ben Mitchell

I went to Wal-Mart
where the plastic's always shiny. Software-
The brightly colored shrink-wrapped box
could compliment his rich gray laptop.
It's the strangest thing —
Wal Mart in the morning —
all the people in their blue smocks,
the rows of red, white and blue
stacked shelves of Chinese plastic.
And they stood in blue smock circles
bowing to the short round man from corporate.
“Sales are up this month and with hard work
we can ensure our raises.”
The yellow faces smiling on the blue smocks
and everyone smiling in unison —
“Hi, Richard.” Richard from corporate is pleased
with their performance.
I went to Wal-Mart
to find a present for my brother.
I felt I should be getting paint and canvas,
brushes with points and fans, something
to encourage him, his strange sense
of light and space.

The Fabric Of A Pillow Pressing Warm Against My Cheek

Ben Mitchell

Dishes cry silently from the counter.
I fade into the warm world where I have my own yard
and July sun trickles
through the full blown leaves of apple trees,
pears and plums. Their rich bark crinkles green
with lichen in the speckled shade — a cat

howls from the kitchen.
She wants to step into the February snow.
A body sinking, independently holding
its restful posture as the mind searches
the house in brilliant daylight,
blending into patterns of wallpaper fruit
the slight curve of feathers
falling slowly though the air — telephone

red flag screaming, alarm bells
and everything inside me should just get on with it.
But something quiet clings to the pillow warmth,
the soft adhesive of my eyelids.
Daylight mist clears to reveal a vast horizon
spreading out at speeds
approaching that of stillness.

The Sting, The Fear, The Faint Mirage

Ben Mitchell

It's always better, safe behind the chain link fence,
hurling insults at the children in the spot-light.

To see a friend step up to the plate and clock
one deep into the stratosphere.

Of course to step up myself, well, that's different.
Even the twelve-and-under fastball stings

like sidewalk pebbles, over the handle bars
of a speed-wobbling bicycle.

With everyone watching and screaming advice,
I try to step up confident and pray

for the failure of some kid, struggling to hurl a sphere
through an imaginary two foot box in space before me

knowing if I stay motionless I may reach base,
but where's the honor in that?

Standing in the sun, I become a battle ground
for three conflicting instincts: the sting

of hardball leather, the fear of being
called a pussy by my friends, and the faint mirage

of immortality, the piercing crack of metal
against hardened layers of wound-up twine.

I watch him kick and hurl on his pile of dirt.
In the movies, time slows down.

It curves in slow so one could read the blue letters
between the red stitches.

But in this world, balls whiz past like terrified squirrels.
I close my eyes and swing with all I have, but

There is no ball, no chain-link fence,
only days that bleed indistinguishably together.

Perfect Justice

Robert Michael O Hearn

Perfect Justice is all the world's rage,
heartfelt desire, verily going blinder,
as if the seeing-eyed dog deceived itself
into smelling a scent leading to some reward.
The fly caught up in the ointment
simply drowns, evening the score.

The Insult

Robert Michael O Hearn

A question intended only to provoke sarcasm
from fruitless lips, inspiring more verbal fire,
shamelessly exacted words from insipid mire.
For no other reason than a fragile ego
do I bother to breathe — thus primary worship! —
where friends and acquaintances become
like fleeting allies on the high seas of life.

Expiation for a life that's a mere token
as if an indeterminate dying nation.
Yet to this nation of penetrable abode
where all flesh too easily betrays
the rich vermilion rivers sustaining it...
I recant to you of a Christmas Eve
where amongst last minute harried shoppers
an indisputable, swaggering drunk
tottered on the edge of the curb.

With clear vision from a Chinese restaurant,
I sat motionless, curious and watching intently
as his backside seemingly supported
the stoplight post turning to green.

Then miraculously, like a general
marching egotistically onto his demise
(here in the city of MacAuthur's memorial)
this drunk rose up ramrod-straight
and with the last measure of dignity,
already worn off his physical appearance,
he posted towards the direction of the memorial
jaywalking across the street.

The Lost Response..

Robert Michael O Hearn

Maybe I don't have anything
worthwhile to convey to the world.
Everyday I wonder what it'd be like
to have thought processes suddenly cease
and why is it that I'm not more fearful.

Some intellectuals continue arguing
on the most frivolous of matters,
or more important ones like areas
of baseball etiquette, transsexual politics
and other generalized areas of human pathos,
which in the micro-sense of the word remains incongruent.

Eventually, even the most passionate harangue
comes to an abrupt halt and if your thoughts become too servile,
then other uninspired issues and non-issues conflagrate
to stir up quite a bonfire on talk radio forums.

Could anything of lasting importance,
other than the present tense, be more centrifugal to the point,
that suckers both past and present carry on a debate without you,
as your opinion becomes like shards of glass
trinkling down upon emptying sidewalks.

The streaking comet you just observed overhead
responds momentarily like a negative afterimage
forever traveling beyond anything worthwhile remembering.

Even the Smallest Stone*

I.B. Rad

I've read
"even the smallest stone
in a riverbed
has the entire history of the universe
inscribed on it"
and, in view of modern cosmology
and the Earth's geology,
it's true,
there's something to it.
So who'd ever dream
I'd leave
a stone unturned?
Yet, curiously,
I seldom stoop
to scoop up rocks
and if I do
all I can ever see
is a missile
to skim over water,
to fling at a pesky dog,
or, at best,
to pose as a paperweight
- such is our basic
metaphysics.

**Written after reading Hikaru Okuizumi's mar -
velously crafted, "The Stones Cry Out."*

The cruellest month

I.B. Rad

A noted poet wrote,
“April is the cruellest month...”
yet clearly he was wrong
for February loiters
an unending snow choked pain,
harking back to a too long winter
stretching forward
to more of the same;
but then, at long last,
March peeps through
reminding us
of what an earlier poet wrote,
“When winter comes
can spring be far behind?”

A FLOWER IN ITS OWN PEARL

Danny Rand

She walks unsteadily
to the bathroom.
The walls whirl about.
She is dizzy, unsure, helpless.
The mornings are the hardest part
of the day
and she wonders
if she will make it through.
Utterly confused, she drinks coffee.
Cup after cup, unable to explain
why she just doesn't get it,
why he isn't here.

NOT MY THING

Danny Rand

We had just finished
snorting evaporated milk.
Joan's energy
began to tail off quickly.
"It was good,
but for a really
short time," she said.
"Yeah, that's
the way it is."
The Pedro knocked
on the window
and climbed through.
And empty box
of evaporated milk
sat between us
on the couch.
"Your guys
are doing
the milk thing
again."
"Yup," Joan piped.
"Builds strong bones,"
I added.
Pedro nodded.
"Hey, I have
nothing against it.
It's just not my thing.

THE MYTH OF COMMERCIALS

Jennifer Rowan

We spent the evening looking at that tube of toothpaste. It sat there on the bathroom counter, mocking us, telling us that we could have beautiful, whiter teeth. Yet we used it just yesterday and when we looked in the mirror, our smile is no brighter than it was before. How could they have lied to us? I wanted to be that handsome model in the commercial. His teeth sparkled and the ladies never declined when he invited them to his pad for breakfast after a night at the clubs. But I'm still that guy, the creepy one, who sits in the corner and studies the dancing, gyrating bodies, wishing that one special girl would finally see his inner beauty and want to sit down next to him.

THAT CASTLE

Paul Thomas

Why does it take guts, to tell the truth?
When lies are but parasites, eating away
Is it because, most are scared of the proof?
Stripping them naked, in disarray.

It's stressaphobia, only a matter of time
Armour plated, ends up rusty
Usually by that time, it's a major crime
And one's commonly using phrases, such as "trust me".

Isn't it stupid, isn't it folly?
Yet isn't it, part and parcel?
Just go out and do it, fuck carrying a broolly
Just go out and build, that castle.

THE COMING OF RAGE

Paul Thomas

That moment many watch, but few only know
That moment when all, is put on line
When the knowledge that losing, has nothing to show
When the taste of winning, is more than sublime.

When reason takes flight, and it's just for the fight
When God only knows, the forces at play
When the season is right, then that soul is a sight
As it recklessly charges, into the fray.

Some call it madness, some call it spirit
Many just sit, in the numbness of awe
Some cry in gladness, some offer tribute
Many deny, the spectacle they saw.

But a warmth that is priceless, defies trophies or praise
When that beast within all, is let out to rage.

LUST LARCENY

Cheryl A. Townsend

All night
we commit
crimes
on each
others flesh
and surrender
to the jurisdiction
of tomorrow

RANDOM

Cheryl A. Townsend

You come in
with no dreams to share
crawling in your depression
It's a heart attack day
and we both know it
I've opened my windows
to let the rain invade
The coffee is hot
 but old
We stare in silence
at words we both know
are futile
Sinus swells
like poetry

DOUBLE SHOTS

Cheryl A. Townsend

You are adrenalin
through my unlit doorway
up my creaking stairs
across my raw wood floor
over my flesh warm bed
beside my reason for poetry

DOWN

Cheryl A. Townsend

TOMATO-RED LIPS
GAVE PURGE To
a promised tease
tight as an O.J. glove
leaving no evidence
splatter-dripped
on leather upholstery
Cruise control dreams
aim white stripes
into impending
darkness and light

FLOUNDER

Cheryl A. Townsend

Sometimes
you sit at a table
You sit with a tablet
and a pen
Both waiting
Both ready
You sit
You look around
You stare at everything
in that room with you
You stare
at that empty tablet
that tells you
you have nothing to say
The palm of your hand
holds your heavy forehead
Keeps it from falling
on the table
on the tablet
out of reach
You close your eyes
and forget

GREY/GRAY

Cheryl A. Townsend

There was a mist
this morning
as I drove into this poem
Drove into a melancholy
just a tad over the
speed limit
I was in no hurry
Just habit
Driving fast
The hurry up & wait
as I still do
Wait
A lot can happen in the fog
Police with radar
Crossing animals
Memories
All are potentially
dangerous
My reflexes are quick
I can avoid
tickets and death
But this humid condition
clouds my vision
Hinders my getting
where I need to go
and I slow slightly
to wipe the dampness
from my cheek

RELATIVITY

Cheryl A. Townsend

It is midnight
or later
outside
but in here
time has
stood still
Sleep
is a dream
I remember
like deja vu
There is
too much coffee
in my cup
and not enough
reasons to be
alone
I never expected
to be believed
as much as
I was
My promises
haunt me
like curses
indeed
like curses

SEPARATE

Cheryl A. Townsend

She told him
Don't mistake
my thighs
for my heart
Getting in
one spot
is not the
same as the
other

TIED AND TORN

Cheryl A. Townsend

You won't let me stop
clenching the posts
My stockings prevent my
releasing I contort in
cramping muscles and
elevate Possessed by
your demon tongue
My legs your altar
of redemption now
raised for a deeper
prayer

UNREQUITED

Cheryl A. Townsend

There is a man
who wants to be forever
Aches to be just now
Pines at being then
Holds memories in one hand
my absence in the other
and reunites us
Eyes closed
to keep the pain
from shattering his dream
as it has
so much of his life
Alone
with a love
impelling
There is a man
I know his name

WHITE LIES STAINED SHEETS

Cheryl A. Townsend

The phone
he called off work from
smells of his morning
aftershave
I savour his remainder
as I dial up my own
reason

WORK IT

Cheryl A. Townsend

His sweaty from the gym
body pressed mine with a
ripped chiseled definition
feeling for ripples beneath a
spandex jog I ask him Do you
want a Gatoraide with this
Because you're gonna be
thirsty

BASICS

Melanie Washington

anyone will tell you life is complicated
there will never be enough time for everything
somethings will have to be sacrificed
what will you sacrifice
can you honestly say it will be worth sacrificing
could you ever know until after you realized your
mistake
would you ever want to know the mistake
would there be a mistake
these may run through your mind
but remember
you will never have enough time
so dont waste it worrying upon things such as this



tried and true

Strange Fruit

B.J. Brown

Oh Lady Day,
Handcuffed heroin hospital,
At forty four,
Mr. Dufty writes,
Goodbye,
On the front page of the post,
She was just singing,
She was only,
Singing,
Tearing hearts out,
After a year of hard time,
Not a dry eye,
Sold out!
Just an another star in the road,
A stepping stone,
Who died in chains,
And I can't help feeling,
This
Uncertain something,
She sang so hard,
Coughing up horrible things,
From deep within,
But something never surfaced,
Something unsung,
I have seen the truth in the photos,
Truth can always be found in the eyes,
And pain can always be found in the voice,
In her heart wrenching voice,
That tares through me,
I know sweet heart
I know.

Kissed in the doorway

B.J. Brown

A handsome man,
With flowers,
In love
Or,
In trouble
It makes little difference.

Mother

B.J. Brown

I wear God,
Around my neck.

play it again

bryan
scott
coward

rock goddess you
are my dancing
dream
my fantasy...

i wait patiently
feeling the rhythm you
play
shoot through me
like a shock to my
core
you spark
my soul
as you swing n' sway
to the beat of
the drum
my heart burns
you own the stage
posses my
dreams...

rock goddess
your album is gold
in China
your essence melts
on the chord
your precious melody
is a sea

swimming madly
i
crave

encore, encore

play it
again...

i
love
you

won't
you
sign
my
underwear.

Tea with an old man

B.J. Brown

How hard it must have been for you,
Such an unhappy man,
But oh so kind,
Scarred by the cruelty of age,
And all the abusers in and out of your life,
How hard it must have been,
Please old man
Tell me more,
You have been so strong,
For oh so long,
And no
You won't depress me,
Don't worry,
Your sadness is surprisingly soothing,
Tell me more old man,
Tell me more,
So sore,
So poor,
Why was your mother gone?
When you had no home,
Where did you go?
I heard through a roomer,
That you were scraper,
So, you weren't always this gentle?
Why did you change?
What made you change?
Was it Her?
Write it all down old man,
Write it all down.

1925

B.J. Brown

There are no heroes,
Not anymore,
Not in baseball,
Not in jazz,
No horns,
Or homeruns,
Fathers or sons,
Peanuts or cracker jacks,
Pin striped suits,
Or porkpie hats,
There's no style,
No Style anymore.

Hermit

B.J. Brown

Is it wrong to be this way?
At this age?
Is it strange
To want to be alone?
Well, I don't know
God knows I don't know,
And I sit in this room,
And it's ok if you forget about me,
In fact I think I might prefer it,
There's no need for me to,
Drag you down too,
I don't think you could bare it,
And my loyal books will replace you all,
Until I decide to show my face again.

bit by bit

bryan scott coward

the water is so good to drink
this weight of the proper combination
is nothing more than i could have possibly imagined
sadly the sun will go down only to bring the happiness
of limited light
as the body rests and the mind dreams.

we dream of compassion, to be shown
to us, to be laid out on the path for us to pick
up, bit by bit, to find our way towards happiness

we belittle that which we do not understand
we betray our father for the sake of desire

count your blessings
count your small toe nails

this is the moment to begin
this is the end of suffering on the road
towards happiness peace love

your own soul.

for in giving
you learn
to give
to

it is in giving that we relive
the need

yourself...

it is in the empty glass of water
the love
the peace and the
compassion to fill
any one
heart...

for in showing compassion
you are cherishing...

i can see it very clear
now. the street does not wind
nor bend
its a steady straight up hill
climb

how can i play the same games
i know the score

fantastic sitting

sitting, the execution of breath
inhale exhale

bryan
scott
coward

it is all very clear, the root
of me
exists below the heart, above
the gut
the dance has just begun
and in the moment
i can feel the dance
inside my soul
and
then...

the words flip
flop

sitting

sitting, it can be seen
very
clear...

fearfull soul...

bryan scott coward

this is a place
to take note
of the sprit
awakening
the weather is
beautiful
in this
brand new time,

i am on the firing line
of life,

jet-set through
the blue
with the
arrival of now
free from
the burden
of the
fearfull soul...

CANCIONES DE LOS VIEJOS

David E. Cowen

I.

Hijo del mundo
why do you salt the earth
with the clouds of your eyes

Por que hijo, por que

El ceilo estan azul y amarillo
with your hair
splashed against the canvass
like spilled paint

your brothers play on the white sand,
apples freshly fallen from a brine tree,
the kiss of the tide
cooling their wrinkling foreheads
as they dig into the heat
shoring up the crumbling sides of their castles
con la leche del mar.

Hijo,
your tears make the soil
grow barren

II.

the cracked earth is a childless woman
crying to the sun
her sunken breasts pink and peeling

when the rains come, mujera,
you will no longer lay fallow;
la promesa de los dios

but the post-deluvian soil
is washed infertile in the dried foam
left from the deluge's crest;
the old woman wimpering
in the broken clay;
mis hijos, mis hijos
she whispers in her lament

III.

we dance,
la bailar de los muertos,
clinging to the ivory of our fingers
like children again,
singing to the old ones, los viejos,
sitting in their thrones of straw and splitting pine,
smiling, smiling
the entire burden of their lives
resolved in a smile

IV.

I saw an eagle devouring a snake;
the rush of his feathers
the only hint of his attack,
lifting the spitting viper with his beak,
tearing its scaled belly
and twisting broken its spine
with talons of iron flesh

the blood of the serpent
dripping in small pools on the hard ground,
springing forth the life of the Virgin's Rose

V.

A child is aware of the triviality of time
waiting for the hair of his loins to grow
it is the old ones who put coins into clicking meters
hoping to delay the chimes of desolation
vanquishing them to the world of faded memory

time moves so slow, hovering,
its dark, round eyes searching the ground
for the squirming earth,
its hooked beak like a guide
setting its steady course downward to its prey

VI.

I walk along the shore,
my white shoes brown
from the mist of tide
I dare not go further
It is enough to wet my feet
and feel the grit between my toes,
the path behind, indented with my prints, vanishing,

absolving me of my birth-sins
and those of my fathers

Vamonos, hijo, vamonos,
the offspring of the foam call to me,
No puede, No puede, I return
pulling away from the tideline.

VII.

Tengo consado,
mas de todo del mundo,
mas de hoy,
mas de manana;
el consado de los ninos de sangre,
el consado de las hermanas del muertes;

sweet child, hold my shaking hand,
which clinks the chipped cups of amber tea
rattling in its saucer,
I am again an infant teething with my rattle
the solace of my sucking on the hard plastic
my only substitute for my mother's lost nipples

VIII.

Pity poor Lazarus,
awakened so rudely;
was he fearful of that sleep
so as to hide from his summoner's tree;
did he weep as the sky darkened
and the crowned bleeder stared at the sky
only to find himself alone
in his pain;
did he go back to his sisters
indulging in their attention and wine,
forsaking the breath of his life.

IX,

In my youth, I saw a two-headed calf.
Anxious over the flyers announcing its arrival
I pulled my mother downtown
and stood in line, with the smell of beer and calf's urine
soaking the ground,
into a tent of sheets where it stood
covered in its own saliva,
tied at the neck with a brown rope,
its multifacial head divided in the center,
its dark eyes blinded by a single white light
anchored on a crossbeam on the structure.
I touched its damp fur and shuddered,
disgusted yet satisfied
that I had seen a marvel of the world.

X.

Canta, hijo, canta;
for the old ones,
waiting their turn at the steppes
to resuckle their mothers' breasts

Canta, hijo, canta,
for the young ones,
who marvel at two-headed calves,
who shudder at the brown spotted skin
of their dying elders,
who dance in their costumes of mockery
against the enforcer of the dust;

Canta otro mas,
a mis padres
who wore down their hands and hearts
on the hard soil,

so that you can sit on the soft chair
eating chocolates and dream of the sea air;

Sing to me child,
soothing the restlessness
of my pocket watch
chiming another hour;
soothing the fever of fear
rising in my forehead,
as the sun,
exhausted from its battle
with the moon,
begins to succumb
to the coolness
of the dusk.

WINTER CROSSING: TOPEKA 1997

David E. Cowen

the horn of the Santa Fe Chief
lingers in the crisp air,
an audio phonic pastel
gently clacking on the long, black rails
on Fourth Street

the snow has graduated from its innocence
into a demon of salted sludge;

shotgun houses, rimmed with iron wrought flowers
circumventing shallow stepped porches
and aluminum armored doors,
line the street on both sides;
outcroppings of old stumps in a cleared field

gray splattered doves
an orchestration of soft sighs
huddle along the base of bared trees
as if sculpted on the exposed roots

two rows of fogged cars
silver trails of melted snow on their windshields
their exhausts choking on the brittle cold
wait as the stripped-armed wooden sentry
adorned with flashing helmet
deliberately exercises the duties of its office
at the intersection

icicles rattle on broken pavement
shaken by the movement of grain cars
clicking in cadence
as they pass the guarded crossing

vapors rise from the nostrils of the cars,
some snorting impatiently

the clatter fades like a dying wind
into a faint whisper
the sentry stiffly salutes
allowing the procession
of glazed, glistening vehicles
to move forward,
they seem to stretch before rising
and entering the asphalt convergence

the coos of the doves
supplants the prattle of the boxcars;
a change of paintings on a wall

a bundled man turns onto the street
walking a red dog on a green leash
both puffing bursts of vapor
their feet disturbing the encrusted walk.

MORNING TAI CHI AT MEMORIAL PARK

David E. Cowen

occidental blossoms on concrete
synchronized to the wind

lotus, tiger, crane

time-lapsed petals
unfold to ancient faces of placidity
fluid in step and gesture

morning joggers
straggle like tired dogs
pause in pant at the oddity of the blooms
and move on, sniffing the wind as they run

Amy the Tabby

Jason Alan Dilts

don't want to move
or frighten her away
stay here for a while, stay here in the wild
she is a kitty, she is a cat
pretty little kitty cat
she is sprawled and she is stretching
sleepy, satisfied expression
kitty kitty kitty cat!
claws in the floor, yawn and reaching
mew and flexing
her elegance is fetching
stunning symmetry - lean and strong
she moves without consequence,
not knowing what she's done

acrobat? she's a catrobat!
cat eyes blinking
smile and winking
the brilliance
of her innocence
sleeping when she wants
sleeping where i lay
she kneads me cause she needs me
graceful, she amazes
so lovely that i ache
and she curls up in a ball
and we curl up in a ball
she's made me a tiger
tired and hungry
longing for her affection
sleeping where it's warm...

Exhibitionist

Eric Dean

watching life
slipping
away
-catch it-
& then
I am (t)here
For all to
see/
naked: dick down
heart dead
razor dull
stream flows
down
the
great
divide.

Wish

Eric Dean

Something more (fucked) than you
Pseudosuicide
Fake not real/not tangible
Can't feel
That is uneffected just fucked
You are
Love its hatred for(to) you
Acid
Corroding
Synapses not crossed
Just there
And fucked
You are
Deceased thinking it's funny
Fucking w/me
&
my head but/no
it's not
you are

Jesters

Jason Alan Dilts

a soul has a voice
a name unspeakable, unreadable
in music and in guilt and in love and in fire
but it's cold here and it's crisp
it bites me and it kills me
where they dance
where they dwell
where I run
stride long on frost, vapor in steam
running to the river, bending to the sea
frothing and cold; frigid and cruel
the dancers from the death of night, the dying side of dreams
the jesters that bleed from their eyes
that foam from their mouths
that slick their twisted lips
stamping the shore, pounding the shore
twisting to the sounds, shaking in the cold
slamming on the shore, trampled on the shore
eyes wide, never see
tremble to the song, writhing in the freeze
white eyes, crimson teeth
all that I've done wrong
in their smiles, their hideous smiles
terrible eyes
horrible cries
freezing in the air, crystals to the sand
echoes in my sleep
echoes in my sleep

nature's cunning

Jason Alan Dilts

leaves to the wind, soft to the earth
turned and waiting, turned and taking
mouth of sleep, gaping empty
return to dreaming, turned from here

they know of life, they think of death
lie awake, they fear the sleep
children shiver, think of God
in the winter, the green has gone

right from wrong, life from death
all in all, just once i've gone
leaves on wind, gather drifting
how cruel the trees: return to green

branches straining, windows tapping
in the night, the children wake
long and gray, arms of willows
in the cold, with dropping snow

love and bread, always wanting
clay to clay, never more
anguish hunting, sleep is stalking
but nature's cunning, return to green

the little things

Jason Alan Dilts

these are the kinds of things
that no one wants to know
those things you can't show anyone?
i got me some of those

you could pull me out and turn me in
and i would never know
i could start it up all over
but i've nowhere left to go

and she could steal the mask away
but there would always be another
i could show her what i meant
but i can never tell her

'cause i could let you in
and you would walk right out
but she would love me harder
and that's the greatest shame of all

i could stand here on my own
but i can't stop falling down

and i could confess it all
but i couldn't bear to hear

i wanna put her on a rocket
a rocket to the stars
cause i can't tell her
and she would not believe
she loves me more than anything
and i am so ashamed

hey i don't write my words,
i fail them
and i can't get it through
hell, i barely even try
i could leave her and forget me
but i'm not man enough to try

The dirtiest left hand

Jason Alan Dilts

So where is your fight, my brother?
quiet as it stills you
you are sleeping in thoughtless places,
in the places they will keep you ,
floating in jars - suspended and silent
ignoring the scarlet trickle of everything you've gained
sorely gained
forgetting that no one will ever hand you
without a smile so stagnant but charismatic,
the other hand behind his back

are you lost in the jumble of their lies?
In the words that were meant
to content and to satisfy
and on one end placid and accomplished
and on the other enraged and poor
and that's just where they like you
to keep you taking
to keep you quiet
speak in scratching symbols
like your leaders, so caught in rabble
to keep you bitter - not empowered
no mind to what has become of you
no cause - you are aimless
can you hear the ghosts
or feel the prickle of the haunting?

have your marches lost effect
while you wash their big left hand
so it's free to dirty itself again
and free to clench and free to point
until you see victory in isolation,
strength in accusation
but you listen to the enemy,-
the scourge that whispers pleasing words
and you take from the hand that passes
that passes
you
on

in this sleep will come the fever
in your wait they keep you waiting
you eat their food to keep you hungry
they feed your fears but they'll "protect" you
and if they lie, then you will hear them
make amends in changing words
retraction, correction, lying ways for lying ends
So my sister just where's your fight
from the passion flame of history?
where is the shock of the ghosts that dangle
where is your righteousness, my brother
get it in your hands
before their hands
move
you
along

The Sea as Green As Loss (autobiographical essay)

Vlad T. Frants

“Regular or decaf?” Julia would ask. She would ask me that same question every day and every day I would smile and reply: “I don’t drink coffee.” Every morning I’d be seated for breakfast even before a hint of golden light penetrated the clouds.

That one summer was full of routine. Every morning I would get up, put on my light blue slippers and run out to the picnic table around the back of our cozy cottage. Julia would bring out the cereal and her thick, buttery French toast. My dad would call me in the house to help him bring out the rest of the food. I would run back another time to bring out the silverware; my hands were too small to carry everything out at once. This was routine.

After breakfast my dad and I would race down to the dock, barely making it across without slipping. My dad would hold my hand and help me into the paddle boat, Thunder we called her. Thunder was an old one with cracked sides, broken floorboards and chipped dark green paint. The boat was of great sentimental value to my father for it had once won my dad first place in a fishing contest. Hence, we kept her. My dad promised me that one day he would teach me how to use a brush and we would paint Thunder together. That someday never came.

My father would smile at me, his brilliant white teeth just gleaming in the early light; his smile bringing out the kindness in him. He would put one hand on my shoulder and help me row with another. This way, I would row the boat out into the center of the lake. Kuneononga Lake, she was called.

Kuneononga Lake was something to marvel at. She was as green as the very trees whose silent presence I felt around me. She was as perfectly still as the very sun in the sky.

It was close to noon and the tide had risen. I had spotted a long, black creature in the water. I remember feeling a sense of trepidation. I remember the tears of fear and then the comforting hand of my father resting on my shoulder telling me it was just a fish. I remember how I sat there, my mouth open wide in amazement and intrigue. I had never before crossed paths with a fish as large as the one I had noticed then. I felt secure and I felt relieved, and I laughed. I laughed like a child would laugh after seeing something he likes. The laugh that I laughed, my dad would never hear again.

The tide had risen even more, and I heard the waves beating against our little boat. The clouds had covered the sky and the morning sun had disappeared into blackness, into nothingness. I stopped laughing about the fish as I felt a cool chill pass through my body. It was getting very cold.

I heard the rumble of thunder in the background and I saw the spark of lightning near our boat. I remember my dad screaming at me to row the boat as I just looked at him blankly, hesitant to row. I remember the wave coming at us, lifting the boat into the air, my father falling over. Although I never heard the fall, the roar of thunder was almost deafening.

That night the lightning was almost soothing. That night, this divine-like lake stabbed an eight-year-old boy with a passion of fear and regret that stole something from him far more precious than any mortal could take. That night I thought about the paint brush my dad would never teach me how to use.

Hit

Christopher Eck

I see behind you a hungry boy's shaggy bones
and broken toes, praying to feed the lackluster shrine
of lies meant for love. Sincerity
sinks like lead wiring between the chaos interface
(completely user cruel) to email gluttonous wishes
of fortified survival. Your mind
makes a fiction we dare to ignore, stationed in the pithy
decadence of pride.

So, now to war?
The dumb-sculpted sight trains
for the red surrounding her,
sure to falter blue or green.

In Attic town the navy sleeps and
assassin rent's been paid to lift Helios into his Dawn.
 Fingertips of pink meld red
 inside the venom sack. You say,
 "Remember love?"
You pull the trigger.

My Cover Letter

Christopher Eck

A tiresome lexical reliance
stands me in the forum
facing east
waiting for the sun.
It's Tuesday, and the bus route
breaks at 10:24 so,
trend me such a poetic offering,
the walker journeys
past an asphalt desert
taking me here,
like Perseus only
not quite so attractive
or good.
Destined to
hear the voices
in the magic box and
radio.
Begging to be told what to do,
my cover letter says brightly,
"Slave,"
make sure to give him a cookie
and whip, salad extras with
carrots and
sticks or
avoid your neatly sealed
word revolt
plague pit because
hey
it's just a poem
and I
a poet.

Forever Yours amy key

Why, glutinous obstinacy,
Do you stretch and sigh
Out some exasperated, selfish complaint
When, through your portrait window,
You see The Raft of the Medusa and
Rodin's picturesque gates
Enmeshed-
Wretched, teeming, groping
Humanity?
Drink in the unpleasant, aesthetically
Displeasing masses
As you order your second Bordeaux.
They are forever yours.

Memory

amy key

My head lying heavily on warm, damp hands,
The light floods in from the left.
I watch the wrinkled sheet
Jolt softly in time to your
Pulse;
A silent syncopation
To the rhythm of the rise and fall
Of your chest...
The nonchalant way you French-inhale,
Pensive; reveling in your
Perpetual discontent.
Or is it I who inspires the slow smile
To creep across your face?
Come closer, Love.

21ST CENTURY DREAMS

K J Hale

Once when but a child of ten, in the mind behind my eye, I sawr an orange colored cloud through a green and yellow sky. Per haps when I am all grown up I'll leave these skies so blue, and go through space to the kind of place that'll make my dreams come true. I may find trees made out of bone and growing upside down, or people with six arms and legs living in some Martian town. Per haps I'll find a much better world. Or it may be much worse, but I'll not be an earth bound soul, my world's the universe.

Freeze Frame

John Hulse

My eyes
can't quite
open
and just
outside
our bedroom
window
subtle glances
reveal
your grace
breathing out
cool caresses
with every
liquid syllable.

Hopeful Romantic

John Hulse

He used to
put fresh
pillowcases

on a large
bible
inside his
closet

hoping that
when he
used them

heaven
would bless
his dreams.

CHAIR OF PAINTER

Tom Kretz

The shadow goes back
to the day he painted it

waking up like a chief
perfect harmony with nature
embarrassment only of choice
and the perfect shade of brown

silhouette outstretched by shadow
yawning and reaching
for more wicker

French maid keeps dusting
furniture she will never own
waiting for Gauguin to sail home
and paint her electric red

trying to assert her dreams
with the breadman in the pantry
she finds everything as stale

as Paul finds breadfruit.

you killed your dreams
and imposed a new
reality consisting of
fifty hour work weeks
nights of mediocre
sitcoms, trips to
WalMart, and the
occasional bottle

a little money in

your pocket and a
Mastercard with a
three hundred dollar
credit limit

soon a wife
then a child
maybe a mortgage

all of a sudden
there's a weight
on your shoulder
dragging you down

this is where you
find Jesus or
Jack Daniels
some sort of savior
to alter reality
and alleviate
the hopelessness
the outrage of
having your dreams
aborted in bloody
fragments night
after night after
night

entropy

Karl Koweski

lost at sea

Karl Koweski

I know life is an ocean
a sea of experience
vast and mysterious

I am only a sailor
piloting my makeshift raft
navigating is useless
when enslaved to the
will of the waves

I feel the weather is changing
I feel it in my bones
a turbulence is rising
as I search for serenity
an encompassing calm
to sleep my life away

I often dream of those
still lost at sea
my captian, my father,
in the depths of
midnight waters

this storm will never break

finding a voice

Karl Koweski

I don't recall ever
not wanting to be a writer

even my grammar school days
were passed feverishly
working on a screenplay
featuring a young man
yearning for excitement who
hooks up with a princess,
a scoundrel and his alien
sidekick to battle evil
personified by a dark
android possessing
mysterious powers

I was only vaguely aware
I was simply retelling
the Star Wars saga though
I remember the similarities
being pointed out to me
again and again

from there I segued into
Stephen King novels and
it was like a new world
opening up to me

I began cranking out my
own horror stories where
terrible fates befell
friends and neighbors

the horror phase lasted
a good six years until
I discovered sex

and I've been stuck ever since

BACK FROM THE EDGE

Shoshana Kurzweil

I've wept the tears
that emptied my heart;
mouthed the cries
in silent
fear.

I've looked over
the edge
that dropped to
blackness.

I've felt the fire
too near.

I'm back now
from the edge of nowhere;
back within
the rays of light...

Risen
from the grave
of weakness.

Back
in the battle
and ready
to fight.

OH THOSE FRENCH

Tom Kretz

As the train slipped Barcelona
Curled up the way it all began
Fail-safe in woolly womb of dream

The Jesuitical tour guide
Never slept and had no pity
On rough goldbricks needing their eight

Ragged from a week in a cave
Wrestling with hot demons of hell
As well as the cooler angels

Insomniac shook me awake
Took me to an eagle's villa
Above the horn of St Tropez

Left me alone on Cannes business
With Raquel Welch's first cousin
Almost everything once removed.

I worked once as nurse in OB
But not in France on Ms BB
Here I was having IV pain

Distressing to feel like a boob
Among so many exposed breasts
So best to pretend I rarely

Have my quiche that way for breakfast
Guessing what Ignatius would do
I flew into the black swan pool

Swam around like Mr Dolphin bored
Ignored commands to somersault
Wiggle over for a dead fish

When darkness rose the owl came back
With tickets to the Festival
Hugs for me and baby sister.

UP TO THE TOUR GUIDE

Tom Kretz

A Mediterranean lover lies supine,
does not want to dance in the dark.
Tonight no undulating hips to follow,
only silent reaction to Spanish rock.
Sitting this one out under an orchestra
of stars 39 degrees N and 3 degrees E.

A group of single parents and teachers
from wild public schools of Baltimore
whisper about a calm sea surely cold,
nocturnal habits of sharks and Latins,
fearing but hoping more for the stark
unusual, each daring the other to strip.

A pretty Black of abundant buoyancy
dregs her bourbon, drops her dress,
and runs determinedly if not gracefully
into the limbs of the somnolent sea.
He draws her under for a longer time
than she is used to, then turns over.

AUTUMN'S PALETTE

Shoshana Kurzweil

Last bright leaf drifts down,
completing Autumn's palette;
brushes waiting ground.

AUTUMN MOVES ME

Shoshana Kurzweil

Autumn moves my heart,
painting the world with rich hues.
Brisk winds call winter.



NIGHT LIGHT

Shoshana Kurzweil

Moon and stars shine bright
on evening ground...lighting paths
for creatures of the night.

NIGHT WRITER

Shoshana Kurzweil

It's late at night
as I sit here writing.
I hurt, and the writing helps
to put the pain in one place.

As I write it on the page,
It seems to ease from my heart.
At least a little.

I look at what I wrote
and say: "there's the pain" ...
It's not in me anymore.

Of course, I know that's not
totally true,
but there is comfort in it.

So I write.
After I've cried,
and after I've prayed.

I believe
things will look better
when daylight comes.

OLD CANVAS

Shoshana Kurzweil

Old canvases,
Tucked away and hidden
In dry and darkened places,
Gathering dust and wasted;
One of these so easily
Could be
Me.

I've thrown away some
That looked better
Than I did then,
(So torn and stained and scarred).
But, the Artist refused
To discard
Me.

He took me out of hiding,
And went to work restoring.
He thoroughly dusted and cleaned me up,
Mended all the tears,
Sanded all the scars,
Until His good design
Showed through,
And the colors glowed
Clear and
True.

But...
He didn't stop there.
No, with great care,

He took His brush in Hand,
And dipped it into a
Palette filled With
Grace and
Favor.

He painted some,
Then painted more,
Until I was, not merely restored,
But made
Anew...
Washed in
Heavenly hues,
And now of great use
Adorning His
House.

He isn't finished though.
No.
He goes on painting,
Never ceasing until the final
Showing,

Because,
Though it's the Artist Who paints,
It's the canvas that's
Seen.

Old canvas...
In the Hands of the Master
Becomes
A Masterpiece.

MY GIFT

Shoshana Kurzweil

Lord, here it is...my gift to you:
My dreams.
That is all I can give,
And I give it painfully
And still somewhat fearfully.
However, I do so, knowing
You love me more than I love myself;
knowing You desire my peace,
My health,
My prosperity.
Of course, my mind chimes in to say
“Yes, but what if he loves someone else more,
And your well being conflicts with theirs?”
What then?”
But, my spirit takes over and reminds me,
That, if I love you,
(And I know I do),
And if I’m called according to your purpose,
(And I know I am),
Then all things work together for my good,
Therefore I will delight myself in You,
And You will give me the desires of my heart.
I know this, so...here goes, Lord,
Take my dreams.

SLUMBERING SPIRITS

Shoshana Kurzweil

We live...
our slumbering spirits
dwelling in a world of deep dreams;
shuttered eyes keeping out reality.

We wake...
for brief hopeful moments,
our eyes and ears straining
against the darkness
that permeates both day and night.

We listen...
for a voice
to call us to Light,
to end the seemingly
endless sleep.

But, we do not hear that Sound,
for our ears are not tuned
to the right frequency,
and the noise of the world
filters out any sound
that would otherwise pierce our
deafness.

Until...
we reach the deepest place
in our valley of sleep,

and silently call out
with all the heart, mind, soul,
to the only One who can
wake us
and make us whole;

And He does...
if we will.
Till then
sleeper,
sleep on.

SUMMER HEAT

Shoshana Kurzweil

Sizzling streams of light
scorch well trodden sandy paths.
Palm fronds fan the birds.

THE OTHER SIDE

Shoshana Kurzweil

Young, and at the point of death,
She saw her dreams all die,
Never knowing what she'd find,
Once on the other side.

Barely more than just a child,
A young and lovely girl,
No one understood why she'd be
Taken from this world.

It seemed so sad and such a waste,
That she would die so young,
Leaving so much unfulfilled,
So many songs unsung.

Still...she'd grown up strong in faith,
That God controlled the plan,
And now she had to trust that this
Was somehow from His Hand.

Resigned, she turned her head away,
And with the softest sigh,
A gentle smile upon her lips,
She closed her eyes...and died.

And found, to her great wonderment,
She still possessed her sight.
She saw, around her, shining bright,
A tunnel filled with Light.

Now, soaring, flying, rushing through,
To reach the other side,
As eager and as filled with awe
As any mortal bride....

She felt such overwhelming love,
And looked into a Face,
Aglow from deep within the Light,
Its essence, Strength and Grace.

And, as the Light illumined her,
She saw, with joy so sweet,
Her life; not short or unfulfilled,
But perfect and complete.

SILENT SONG OF SNOW

Shoshana Kurzweil

Lacy drops of snow,
sparkle on a pristine sheet;
sing a silent song.

SEEING TREES

Shoshana Kurzweil

Today
I noticed
the Trees.
They were Brown
and Green.

This may not seem
remarkable to you,
but, to me,
noticing Trees,
or even seeing
Brown and Green
was a wonderful thing.

Yesterday,
I only saw
black and gray,
so imagine the way
it felt to me
to see those trees.

I breathed in the scent,
and went on my way,
thinking:
today the trees...
what of tomorrow?

Who knows,
maybe tomorrow
I'll even see
flowers.





"Swimming in Zen"

Benjamin McCabe

The ocean's panting surface lashes blindly
At the crescents endless tugging
From above;
The focus of its unrest,
Always eluding its turquoise touch,
Coaxed hesitantly,
Again and again,
To embrace the earthen beach;
Only to be sucked,
Snarling Throatily,
Foaming spittle lurching from its pliant lips;
I dive deep to avoid the
Ferocity,
Deep within its lusciously serene undercurrents,
Where it forgets.....
And I am swimming in Zen.

The Timeless City

Benjamin McCabe

Our scene is a city untouched by time,
Not unique of itself though not wholly sublime.
Its fire and intrigue come from within,
Its misfits and matriarchs, sanctity and sin.

WHO ARE YOU?

Looking for love,
and wanting acceptance,
You want to fit in,
but still make a difference;

Go your own way
and follow your dreams;
Be who you are
and say what you mean.

It seems too much
to have and maintain,
Though you labor and try
again and again.

So, wanting to rest,
you search as you run,
For a place where your quest
for a refuge is done

A place where balance
and order and truth,
Enfold you and hold you,
and you can be you.

Not by your strength,
your mind, or your might,
No, God is your strength,
your hearing, your sight.

He shapes you and molds you,
and when He is through,
You emerge from His Hands,
simply as you.

Shoshana
Kurzweil

c.h.

Anthony Lucero

you won't be young
much longer
they took you for a
long short ride
it isn't fair
of course not
but fair is like hope
better not to count
on it
and now the grin
of the sun
later the wink
of the night.

June 11, 2000, Little Rock Pond

Jon Mathewson

There is a certain part of all of us that lives outside time.

Milan Kundera

Nick-nack, paddy-wack
the old folks sit, play cards
in the newly-paved
trail-head parking lot.

One warns of impending rain,
but the best time for stillness
is when no one else enters,
so I head up the damp trail
through moist woods, the brook rushes
strongly, birds chatter freely.
Drizzle cools all at the lake,
mountain laurels in full bloom
their aroma fills the path
there is no sky, just thick clouds
joining with the lake's water.
The sun breaks through and hatches
of newborn insects appear.

Tired when I hike out again
the old folks still play cards on
pavement, I'm not there yet, but
this old man keeps rolling home.

desert null

Javier Mora

Wondering in the desert Null,
A fraction of a glass remains
Of hours which gage a tempered sol,
While dunes repeat to horizonís gate

Canteens that nurtured life,
Emptied by friends now gone,
Memories of Oasisí past
Clang with the hollowed cans.

Why drag vessels of discontent
When waters nestle where the mind canít sea,
And purgatory seems like bliss
Compared to the ravenous sifting sands?

golden dawn

Javier Mora

Amber haze from the fires of dawn
Billow forth images of yore,
Bring clouded ceilings of despair.
They roll with fierce, relentless rains
ëTil down-pours drown the shallow life.
But emerging from insipid pools
A Thor whose power deep within,
Divinity chiseled by hellís caldron,
Magistrates the elements of Gods.
Now claps of thunderous supremacy
Abate the tepid storms
And fashion golden dawns.

“The Evolution”

Benjamin McCabe

Thriving on constant stimulus shelled out
By the starving hand of a society
Without rituals, inhibitions lost,
Where the only thing sacred is the now.

Vulgarity is sublime, pain is quaint,
And every generation stares breathless
At the next in shocked anticipation
Like dumbfounded asses, they feign surprise.

Hyper vigilance is a profession
Embraced hesitantly, desperately,
To appease industrial gods, icy
With indifference to the average man.

Coyote Road Kill

Annie Monfort

Squashed by the road,

Mangled and bleeding,
Almost unidentifiable
Was the victim.

The only movement exhibited
Was brought by
The rush of wind
As speeding cars flew by.

They never stopped
To help the victim
Or report the body.

Crushed bones left to crumble,
Flesh remaining to rot
And leave a rust-colored
Stain on the cement.

A significant member of his society
Now lays untouched
By the people who destroyed,
They only revolt at the sight.

And they never stopped,
To help the victim
Or report the body.

Magnified Moon

Annie Monfort

Your fascination amuses me.
You gawk at the magnified moon
And expect me to wait patiently
While you adjust and finely tune
Your lenses to view imperfection?
There is wonder in unknowing
But you insist on close inspection.
And now my impatience is growing
I'm tired of taking the backseat
to a rock suspended, glowing
In the sky. You think this is a treat?
My darling, I can't take this.
I had other plans in mind tonight.
Please, let me give you one quick kiss;
Let me show you I am right.

When Death Takes a Holiday

Bruce W. Niedt

When Death takes a holiday,
does he pack light?
Does leave his scythe at home?
Does he take a travel scythe?
How many changes of black robe does he need?
Does he pack a Hawaiian shirt,
just in case?

Does he like the Caribbean?
Does he sip rum drinks with little umbrellas
in his beach chair?
Does he bother to put sunscreen
on his bony frame?

What does he say on his answering machine?
“Hello, this is Death.
I’m on vacation now,
but leave a message,
and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.”

When he returns,
is there a pile of paperwork waiting for him?
Does he go out looking
for the ones who got away?
Or does he start to harvest
the more convenient, silent souls?

THE LION THAT QUIT EATING

Jason Polecheck

Once there was a Lion, and his name was Dave. Dave was a nice pleasant lion, but sometimes got sad and liked to be alone. Despite his propensity to go off on his own, he was well liked in the pride, although often he thought that the members of the pride just tolerated him because he was funny, and sometimes brought nice looking lionesses to the jungle.

Dave the lion had a habit of eating more than anybody else in the pride. He would eat more than the other lions, and he would eat every day, even when he had to hunt in the morning. At first this was okay with the other lions, and they laughed and joked about it.

“That Dave sure is a big eater.” they’d say

“Dave could eat just about anyone under the table” they’d comment

“Jesus Christ, did you see how full Dave got last night? I thought he was going to shit himself” one would say to the other.

After a few years of Dave always being full, even on holidays with the family, the novelty began to wear off for some members of the pride, and they began to try and drop subtle hints to Dave.

“Want to go to the monkey swinging festival tonight instead of eating Dave?” they’d offer.

“Nah, I’m just going to get a bite to eat and then go to sleep” Dave

would say Lions were beginning to become more concerned, although some of them were still happy to have him around because secretly they thought that as long as they didn't eat as much as Dave they were doing okay.

"He gets so aggressive when he is full" they would say.

"I don't get that way" they would say.

"well you don't eat as much as Dave either bro." they would say as they nodded their big maned heads.

One day Dave disappeared for a few weeks, and lions began to talk, rumors began to circle in the pride.

"I heard that he hooked up with the Pride from across the Nile, you know the ones that are always eating and fighting other Prides." they would say.

"Really? I heard that he had eaten too much one night and started playing rocks with the King, and when he lost, he tried to take the pride, and...well I don't have to tell you what happened then, you know the king, I hear he's paws up in the elephant graveyard now." they would say.

Then one day when the rumors were starting to subside, Dave walked back into the pride, with a beautiful Lioness at his side. The other Lions were smitten, and quite jealous of Dave. Their only solace was that they knew that his eating would make it impossible for this mating to last very long. "You quit eating?" they said in awe.

"Yes Katrina made me quit" said Dave when he was alone with them.

"How do you feel?" they asked.

“I feel fuckin hungry what do you think!” Dave yelled.

The lions recoiled at his roar, a side of him none among them had remembered ever seeing before.

Weeks went by and Dave held up his end of the bargain as he told his mate that he would, going hungry day after day, all he wanted to do was sleep, and Katrina was becoming rather disenchanted with him. “You aren’t the same Lion that you were when I met you.” she said to Dave.

“What are you talking about?” Dave asked her.

“You used to be fun loving and sweet.” She said to Dave.

“I must have been FULL!” Dave screamed at her.

“Your acting like a human!” she screamed back at Dave.

By this time the pride had gathered to see what all the commotion was, and many of the lions were cocked back on their haunches, uttering low roars, and pouncing on Dave. They knew that Katrina might be in trouble, and each wanted to be the one to save her. The stench of possible procreation with a superior female of the species played its olfactory tune across the jungle. Dave became aware of this and crouched low backing up on his powerful haunches, ready to fight.

In an instant it was over, all the males of the pride claimed the striking blow as their own, Dave laid dead. In the game of survival of the fittest, The Lion that doesn’t eat, is destined for vulture fodder.
Katrina walked away.





THIS IS THE SOUTH

Diane Payne

While I was interviewing for a job,
and finally on my own, wandering

around town, away from the search committee,
I talked with locals, and discovered

this was a dry town, a town with a church
on every corner, and that the races didn't mix.

One color goes to one church.
Different races don't socialize.

When I asked why, I was simply told:
"Ma'am, this is the South."

After moving here, to this South,
a man looked at my daughter,

then to me he said, "I hate how these
niggers are dating our girls. I don't

believe in mixing races. It ain't right."
My daughter wasn't sure what he was saying,

but knew how it felt, and tomorrow school
begins, and I remember how a black woman

told me my daughter wouldn't be accepted
by either race because people don't mix,

and I'm sitting here worrying what she'll tell me
about her first day of school, hoping children

know a different South, and things will change.

House Guest

marcus rome

It's the feeling not the words that give it away
every time you're here in my house
eating my food drinking my drink
I watch everything that passes your lips
and imagine the taste
every time you swallow
and I think suicide
us that what you're after
the way you tear at your meat
and swill your wine
I can't think you're after anything less
than what you came here after
a piece of meat and the feeling
of warm blood on your tongue
after giving a second thought to the infection
that lay in wait inside the pyramids
where your ancestors were laid to rest
where once inside you may have no choice
which way the wind is going to blow
from where you came from or
where you're going to go
and before you have time to make up your mind
you're right where you're supposed to be right about now
as your bare neck catches my eye.

Decisions, ever constant,
cruising for resolution.
Two choices, ever present,
begging for a solution.

Treading lightly,
on soft paws,
with a swishing tail, and
white whiskers.

Food is plentiful here,
but it comes with a price.
They want me to stay in the house,
but I want my freedom.

Dogs, always barking
lurking for a chase.
Hiding places, always limited,
is the chance I choose to take.

Meowing quietly,
sniffing through a pink and black nose,
with pristine fur
of black and white.

Care is abundant here,
but it comes with expectations.
They want me to rely on them,
but I like being on my own.

Birds and bugs, always flying
zipping to and fro.
“Hi there. Thanks for feeding me.”
“Hey, there goes another bug, see ya later - gotta go!”

A Cat's Prerogative

L.B. Sedlacek

There was a rumble in the air
You could smell the ozone all around you
Even though a storm was coming,
It was hard to run for cover
Because it had not yet started to rain
And the lightning show in the clouds
Just over the mountains was glorious
I sat on a rock, perched above the city
Streets and hugged my legs to my chest
In me was the primal urge to revel in
The ultimate show that mother nature
Desired to perform
Not only for me, but it was still
So very personal. I felt I was the only
One in the world. One with the world.

SHAMELESS

You shame yourself into doing
Something
For those who wait

(Listening)

For you to tip your hat

(Salvation)

It's so easy for someone
Who's better, who's wiser
Who Can deny fact
Play into fiction
Just you roll over and go to sleep
It's not your problem
It never was

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Jennifer
Rowan

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

Jennifer Rowan

It's dank and it's a hole
One of those places you warn your mates about
"stay away from there; the liquor is watered down and the girls
are trailer trash"
but still, you find yourself sitting around on Saturday night
wondering, what should I do and who should I do?
So you go down to that hole,
Called something like the Well, the Pit, or maybe even the Hole
(self-depreciating nonsense)
for some reason, the bartender recognizes you.
You nod a cheery hello and wonder if you've become a regular
Like that fat guy on Cheers who has run up a tab
That's larger than your rent for a year.
The girls are dressed for clubbing, but you thought the dress code
Was more casual.
You have your JCrew knit sweater on and maybe even a pair
Of dark sunglasses
(you still admire Cory Hart and think only the cool guys
wear their sunglasses at night)
just to keep yourself a little mysterious.
A pitcher of beer and you think to yourself,
"My tolerance is not as good as it was back in the day"
when sex was always welcome in every shape and form
and even your friends mother looked like a supermodel.
All this happens before you lie there, passed out on a pool table,
Your tongue hanging out of your mouth like an over-excited dog
The Shark still shooting stick, not even trying to avoid your head.
Just another Saturday. You wonder if maybe next week you shouldn't
just stay home.

Up in the attic above the ceiling. . .

Aaron Smith

Up in the attic above the ceiling
Is a treasure that fulfills all feeling
A father placed it there
For his child, because he cared

He wanted him to never worry
Feel no pain and no fury
To the child, He gave one warning,
“Don’t touch that clasp, no matter your yearning.”

The clasp by which he forbade
Held a ladder up to the special place
It attached all hinges and windy things
To keep the steps taught to an opening

But from his curious wonder,
The child made his little blunder.
Unable to keep a simple task,
His hand trembled and touched the clasp.

A clamoring clatter shot down through the hall
Before crash and crumble of the fall
The child sprang away in sudden haste
To hide far away from his disgrace.

Awoke in a start from the slam and the scramble
The father took up a lighted candle
His steps thundering up the stairs
Each getting closer gave the child quite a scare.

“What will he do, what will he say!
I touched the clasp by which he forbade.
O’ he’s angry, I’m sure to be hung
I know! . I’ll just play it dumb!”

Quickly he thought up a clever scheme.
“The ladder fell because of a faulty string!
It’s falling was a natural thing!
This is something he will believe.
(O’ I’m so clever in the ways I can deceive!)

With a rumble and a shake,
He could feel a stepping quake,
(Surlly the father was near the hiding place.)
“What will he do if he sees my face?”

Dad stood by the trunk where the boy hid
And reached down and lifted the lid.
He pulled him out, and asked, “Why do hide, why the tears?
If you are innocent, there’s nothing fear?”

“Oh I am!” the child exclaimed,
“It was not my fault, I’m not to blame,
I meant no harm and delivered no crime,
This ladder fell from faulty design.

Its clasp was weak and so was the string,
I could no help it; it was a natural thing!
I hid because I was scared and afraid . . .”
The Father’s voice roared - “ Because of the clasp I forbade?

Did your hand touch it yes or no?”
The little one whimpered, “yes, it is so. . .
But I was just curious, dad
Please, it was a little thing, don’t get mad.”

“You sadden my heart, I’m not irate,
But with this little task you cut off a special place,
Up in that attic was just empty stuff
I just wanted to see if it was you I can trust.

I gave a you little duty and you tripped,
What would you do with a task bigger than this?
I have a kingdom for you more important than an attic
But your wandering mind is problematic

The Color of America

L.B. Sedlacek

Red,
white,
and blue —
representing
freedom of meaning
cautions in its repair
cement cracking
wood decaying
bricks chipping
in an old Southern mansion
tolerating
perseverance,
and time
and progression
not by choice
as with the direction
of a swaying beam
having trouble
fitting into its new home
soon to be a New York City skyscraper
reaching
into the sky
searching
for meaning
because it can.

Rhythm of the Rain

L.B. Sedlacek

Liquid comfort that's
warm on the skin.
Rain pelting down
like water on creatures with fins.

Soothing sounds
breeding dampness in the air.
Sleep induced state
motivated from lack of care.

In some places warm,
in others cold.
In some places quiet,
in others bold.

Whatever the reason
it falls at a whim.
It can become traitor,
or sometimes a friend.

A Walk in the....

Scott Shay

Big fat Buddha bellied rain
Bursting like rockets
On the hood of my car

Me sitting porch worn
Like the chipped leper chair;
In a sphere of screen
And wicker.

Pounding like thuds
Of liquor drawn fists
Or bats against piñatas,

Dam busted sky
Throwing heavy confetti
Through its gauzy walls.

Perimeter lost;
Elemental bombs,
Bust past wire
And Hit me.

Half soaked now
With nature's fret
The inspired thing to do

Would be to bust right out of here
Like the Sundance Kid,

And throw myself at that gatling sky.

The Righteous.

Aaron Smith

Love with all thy heart, soul, body, and mind,
And, as you are with you, to your neighbor be kind.
Forget the rules of “right” and “wrong,”
These fossils have been left and are gone.

A pact was made when we said we would follow,
And it has no part in our shame and our wallow.
To be “forgiven and freed” is a life to love he
Who sent his son on a cross to bleed.

There was no “magic” in this act,
There was no fight with the devil, no attack.
It was not by evil that he was hung,
But by our bitter hearts this was done.

He did not follow a list of rules,
Just a couple of commandments, only two.
Yet we are not pleased, because he refused to judge.
So with him we hold a loving grudge.

Making up things inferred from what he said,
We twist his mission and keep him dead.
Standing ready to make claims of “us” and “them,”
We destroy the “unity” proclaimed by him.

Blame. . .

Aaron Smith

There was a “bad” when there was a “good,”
But times have changed like dizzy moods.
Now men and children play with fire
With no worry of their final pyres.

To throw in laws and to oppress,
We have traded for the “second guess.”
Prevention has come after the crime,
Because to do otherwise takes up time.

Blame has become our money,
To find its owner is sweeter than honey.
We trample lives and condemn souls,
When all the time the “blame” was ours to hold.

Courage . . .

Aaron Smith

What happens to a man if he never takes a stand,
If he lets what he loves go so that his world will better flow?
To ease the stream of his life and run from any strife,
He'll move with the grain, and hide from lurking pain.

But in his leisurely wallow, he will have to swallow
The bitter pills that come his way each and everyday
And parts of him will go with them and he will begin to die within.
For every battle he didn't take he was conquered and he was raped.

ALT-CTRL-DELETE

Roger Taber

Blank screen staring at me
like a dead man's eye
as if taken by surprise
at the moment of execution,
expecting pulse, heartbeat,
a flow of blood to the works
in spite of those quirks
of human nature - that put a body
on hold whenever its world
ceases to turn, civilization
burnt out among the ashes
of personal ambition;
From inspiration, no helping hand
to guide pen or brush;
Desolation, a lush
wading through risen waters
of the earth, baring pain
like a rose its petals
in acid rain, deserving better
at Nature's hand than a travesty
of imitation urged by Man's
jealousy of God

As melting ice caps start to flood
this world of ours - we can lose heart,
drown in its worst nightmares (poet
found dead at the keyboard)
or find a voice

Our choice

What is property?

Aaron Smith

O' How funny is a man,
Only he thinks he owns the land.
Though' in its creation he was idle,
He feels its ownership is a "vital."
Jefferson, Franklin, Locke, and Smith
All believed we're nothing without it.
These men rise and they fall,
Yet, to them, a piece of land is worth a brawl,
But how great is that deed
When you become food for weeds?
You were born with one "vital"
And it is yours, though you were idle.
At your end and at your start
Keep one care, that's your heart.

QUEEN

Caroline Stark

“... Elephant princess.” ...? Maybe TV’s
Not so boring, or maybe I heard it wrong.
Tonight we watched Miss America, wondering
What was the point? She got a whole bunch of money
For looking good in a swimsuit that very closely
Resembled a bra and a diaper. Coincidence?
I have to say this woman was well accomplished.
If I’m not sweeping kitty litter, I’m making
Stuffing. Don’t mistake cilantro for parsley.
The gravy’s congealed. Miss Missouri’s tiny
New nose doesn’t match the rest of her face.
She must regret it to some degree, poor thing.

Hovering

Howard F. Stein

Were my face any closer to yours
I should have disappeared into your likeness.
I hovered, gazing, sipping slowly
On my portion.
For I wed you, though
I did not know this moment would be,
Or, between and lovers, could.

CLIMBERS

Roger Taber

Outside, looking in
on a clothes rack of the skin;
Designer labels demanding
attention, sporting a toothpaste
grin, token companion
of an endemic
prostitution

Devil's own luck
they say (but never
to the face), forever
contriving a place
at the top table, laughing
aloud - alone
in a crowd

Fat cats pawing
each arm (suckers
for a wicked charm);
Life and soul of the party!
Sweet smell of success
like honeysuckle, in
a cemetery

The river is Monet

Bruce Tomczak

The river is Monet.
It reflects an approximate image of the world, less clear, more beautiful.
The trees, the brown grasses, the sky appear dreamlike.
You were the river.
You reflected the dreams of what could be against hopeless odds.
You treasured the colors of sunset on the water.
I tried to touch those waters.
My fingers never reached past the surface.
You stole all the light and memories to light dreams not yours.
I found a photograph of you, recently.
It was held under old papers on my desk.
It was startling to see your face.
a stark image, without color,
without the magic veil of a beautiful story.
The camera had caught you off balance and stole your immediate soul.
Tired frown lines webbed your eyes and cheeks.
Your narrow lips pinched your small mouth, smaller.
You were caught in mid-complaint,
trying to hold your wild hair, words, and dizzying world in balance.
Monet was the river of memory reflecting you.

My first solo flight

Bruce Tomczak

When I was eleven, my dad gave me my first flying lesson.
I was a dreamy child.
I could stare into the fleece clouds and blue skies
and travel with them between lunch and supper.
If asked, I couldn't say where I had been exactly.
One late afternoon, I had been watching a spider
mend its web in the wind.
My father had been in his workshop.
You could hear his expletives explode from the open door.
He hated when anything went wrong.
He had a Manichean view that the world was against him.
We tried to avoid him then.
We had a sixth sense of skirting his erratic anger.
But today, I was detained by reparings of a tidy spider.
He saw me.
His anger had an object.
I saw my error and tried to edge away.
Too late! He called me to him.
His left hand gouged my clavicle in a deepening claw.
He loved interrogations. His face twisted in a sneer.
He asked what I was doing.
I told him. He laughed, "Spiders!"
He talked close to my face.
I could smell his lunch and nervous stomach.
I backed away. He pushed forward.
This set the rhythm for our dance.
We turned in a small circle.
Then he reached and grabbed my left leg and arm.
He twirled me, round and round.
I was getting dizzy, but I could see the look on his face.

There was a maniacal glee.
We whirled through his past, his gorge.
He knew he was hurting me, toying with me.
It reminded me of the times at the county fair.
He would ply me with food and take me on all the dizzying rides.
He would laugh and laugh like a demented clown.
I always threw up. I knew it disappointed him.
No one could fly like him.
He had wings from the U.S. Navy to prove it.
I saw another look on his face as he spun me, one of wonder.
Round and round and round, the speed and pull increased.
I knew, instinctively, he would let me go to see what would happen.
It was the bully in him, born of being bullied.
I flew with surprise, uncomprehending his cruelty.
I fell and my breath was forced out me.
I thought I was paralyzed, staring blankly up at the sky.
My father ran around the side of the garage.
Where could he run to after this?
How had it come to this?
He had given up all rights.
In one instant I disavowed his world.
But he did coming running back.
He knelt over me.
I waited, trying to catch my breath.
His breath was close, smelling of sour stomach.
He leaned close without touching me,
whispered a few words and left.
I lay in the grass.
The clouds and blue sky shrank above.
His words came to me after a time, well after he left.
His tone was threatening and pleading with restrained tears like a child.
“Don’t tell your mother! Don’t tell!”
As if my silence would alter his life.
Because you see, she was figuratively his mother, too.
He had never left home.

Shards

Bruce Tomczak

Eight pigeons fly in close formation, north
toward the rail line and spilled grain.
Their wings are slate gray, bodies misty blue.
They cross a sky of the same color.
Black ice and remnants of snow patches the road.
Moisture in the winter air is captured by the road surface.
I walk haltingly down the bent grass bank to the river.
The frozen hummocks are unforgiving to awkward feet.
The dog bounds in energy and certainty to the ice edge.
The river ice has cracked and bled its brown water on its skin.
It is too warm to refreeze quickly.
The water lies in long, slushy puddles.
The dog is unsure if he should wade in the water.
He steps warily.
We keep to the thick center
where the air bubbles and fractures are trapped.
Thin ice is piled in shards near the shore next to the brown rushes.
It crunches underfoot.
It is a milky translucent blue
as though the sky had frozen, cracked and slid to the river.
It holds every color of the winter sky.

Midas

George Clayton Upper III

I understand she forced her son to drink such large amounts of water that he died of poisoning-no lie! Who'd ever think that such a thing was possible? He cried, but not enough to save him. Did you know that sunlight helps the body to produce some vitamin to keep us happy? (Though I'm tempted by my scarlet skin to choose depression.) Did you hear about the queen? The king has eighteen bodyguards and one attacked her-true! The other seventeen reacted late but took away his gun.

I'd rather be with you than anyone else. Should I take for granted that we're done?

Barren

George Clayton Upper III

The spare was also flat; thus
we are forced to pass our time
waiting, hopelessly filling
the intimidating silence with vanities.

Your smile dims in twilight smoke-
your eyes were never with me,
stuck here, airless, loud exhales
echoing, echoing with silent vanities.

My face feels dead and heavy
as a boated tire, dripping and
snagged. Brackish water and
blood on my tongue, vain in the camouflage silence.

Headlights. A sharp intake of
breath, holding it, holding it...
but we will not be rescued
that easily from the vanity of silence.

Horizon

George Clayton Upper III

There is only one line in the first group-
about ten in the seventh, but they're so
close together that I cannot count them
without getting closer, or asking the

artist, which would embarrass me. They lie
in different directions, achingly close
to right angles. I could ride them like
a playground slide, like a futurist, up

and down, arrogantly like my son. But
the lines would have to be turned upside-down
each time I reached a peak, or else I'd have
to find a way to sucker gravity.

Miami

Yosh

sun is clear
I have no fear

go to walk down south the beach
about to breech

the contract I signed, long ago
with I-self, not to show
what I know

so I pray,
and . . .

the center of the Universe
welcomes I in and swallows I
I'm ready to flow
to show self what I know
and I'm ready
freddie
and the Y2K
is why I lay...
down
the tracks of time
the fightful rhyme
and the devine crime
was that loss of time
thought I was behind, all the others
til I found out, they're all I brothers
I throw off covers
strip down the force
over spinning weeds
shining knight on I horse
and of course the charge
is a call to arms
to move I body, and show I charms
found when I danced, there was no
boredom
realized it made I, feel like Michael
Jordan

one must step up
I fill I, cup
sup?

and it may be Yourami
but its Miami too
where life seems free
for I and U . . .

and in this think, with a smile and

sigh
we should simply call it, I am I

you sigh, you sigh
still, I am I

and in welcoming in
the Energy fills
and chills

as one kind am I
Yourami
Miami
I am I

of course the glitter, and neon lights,
no faces bitter, always moonshine delights,

and the Am I's are truth
be it cooth, speak of Babe Ruth
and wander above, the hush fed deep
as to try, not to sleep

reap

the benefits of where you sow,
what you know
and how you flow

and yo

when its time to show,
show.

Steamshovel

Yosh

40 days of extradition
ask to Her, receive permission

wishin,
the world was easier to deal with at times

rhymes
fill I heart, and I dart to release -

the paper starts blank, and I think an idea
the hand moves to crank, time to make it all clear

fear,
is poured, straight out of I veins
as words release, this blue inner pain,
as well the reign, of an overworked brain

The Train
is started, by an idea, but then it starts a rolling,
kinda like you have control, when the ball's in-hand, you're bowling

but then you release it, and does everything change
realize the emotions had a varying range
and with the pins down, its easy to see
that She had some control, between there and me

so I crank off a tune,
and I howl at the moon,
remembering 40 days of life,

each one did I learn,
brain fat did I burn,
as the train, cuts days, like a knife...

Sunrise

Yosh

I wake
watch the sun touch the lake
rake in the rays,
a mysterious maze

through
the paper.

welcome energizer
welcome rejection
welcome brilliance
welcome bunny

the terms in which the
studious soaks
knowledge spills

and welcome it in
the seeming way
sustain the grin

and take heed to what
truly
tickles the toes

Rows and rows of people
journey forth in this endeavor
knowing that welcoming
I
is forever.



down in the dirt writing additions

Critique

(inspired by a sweet poem on the internet)

Charlotte Kellison

I feel the pulse of that poem,
but I can't hear the heartbeat.

But beware of my criticism...

I have ripped my heart out from my chest
holding it out,
offering it,
thumping,
quivering spasms
slimy with blood.
Its cords and connections
squeaking and slurping against each other.
The hot stench squelching breath.

Discovering:
the real heart inspires aversion.

I am learning to accept the discomfort.
I cannot but accept
the hand raised like a shield,
the wince,
the rapid exit without comment.

Ten paces past the metal slam of the auditorium doors
giddy as children,
loud groans,
shudders,
bursts of laughter into the cold fresh air.

I LOVE MY GAY SON

Jason Pettus

I have a feeling... well, we've never talked about it — but I have a feeling that you thought I was gay. After all, I was an extremely late bloomer. I didn't even have my first date until I was in college. When I was in high school, I didn't go out very much, and when I did, it was always with other men who exhibited the same effeminate traits that I naturally exhibit.

I have a feeling that you struggled with this while I was in high school. I imagine you getting the first inklings of the idea, being confused, being defensive, going into denial, finally accepting, just like any parent of a gay child must do. I imagine you practicing being able to stand up and declare, "I love my gay son" when the time came when I would finally come out of the closet.

It's funny. I have plenty of gay friends now. Well, I guess I always have. And over half of my friends have parents who haven't come to grips with it yet. My friends actually are gay, and their parents won't admit it, won't let them bring their lovers home. Some of them won't even let their own children come home.

And you. You were completely accepting, completely loving and ready to take your gay son into your life. And I'm not even gay.

DAMN THAT MR. RUFF

Jason Pettus

You received a nursing degree before you had me or Colin. And all through our growing up, you worked part-time as a “substitute” school nurse for our district. You would come to various schools at various times, whenever the regular nurse would get sick, or go on their cycle break.

God, it was always so great when you’d come and work at our school, ‘cause you’d let us skip classes and come hang out in the nurse’s office, let us practice popping wheelies in the wheelchair, let us sit around and hit on the student aide. Plus we never had to ride the bus home on the days you’d work at our school.

So you were working on the first day of my eighth grade year. And I went to my 6th period class, Science, with Mr. Ruff, the school’s teacher-clown. And I don’t even know anymore how, but somehow the subject of you, the nurse, being my mom came up. And Mr. Ruff got this mischievous look in his eyes, and he said, “Hey, you know a really good trick we can play on your mom?”

Mr. Ruff took a two inch splinter of wood off a ruler, and placed it right under the dead part of my fingernail. He told me to squeeze my finger with my other hand, so that the skin would come up and hold the splinter in place. And then he took a pencil and a red pen and drew on the rest of my fingernail so that it looked like the splinter went all the way down the inside of my fingernail down to the cuticle.

“Okay, Jason, here’s a pass. Now go running into the nurse’s office screaming your head off!”

So I did. “Mom, mom, mom!” I yelled into the secretaries’ faces, running into your office.

You took a glance at my finger. “Oh my God!” you screamed out. “Oh my God! What happened to you?” And I started giggling uncontrollably and let go of my finger, making the splinter fall out.

You had a little talk with Mr. Ruff after school that day. But he and I both agreed the next day that it was a pretty funny joke. Even at the end of that year, when Mr. Ruff signed my yearbook, he mentioned it. “That was a pretty funny joke we played on your mom, wasn’t it?”

DOING THE JOB

Jason Pettus

I think a lot about my own hypothetical children these days. It's a big reason why I'm writing this book. I think about the way I'd like to raise my children. I think about the ideals, the concepts, that are important to me, and that I'd like to instill into my offspring. I think about the way I'd like my children to be, what their sense of good and bad is, what their sense of duty and honor and hard work and priorities is.

And then I second-guess myself. I think that maybe all those things that I originally thought were important are not important at all. Everytime I think of some specific thing, some specific lesson I'd like to teach my child, minutes later I think that the lesson might just lead my child down the wrong road, might be learned wrong and lead to dysfunction or neurosis or a long-standing hatred of me for ever. And Jesus, if I ever have children, I know already that I'll constantly want to ask my children, over and over throughout their childhood, "Am I doing a good job? Am I getting it right? Am I doing a good job?"

Mom, you did a good job.

GETTING THE JOKE

Jason Pettus

You were frequently left out of the jokes that dad and Colin and I would tell each other. All three of us were into things you didn't really like that much — Monty Python and the Smothers Brothers and just generally these very dry, very black witticisms.

But one time, once Colin and I were both college-aged, you forced us all to go have a family portrait taken when we were both home on holiday. You dragged our groaning, bitching bodies over to the grade school you work at, and we sat and sat and sat, and finally it was our turn.

And it was one of those typical portrait photographers, those tired, cheesy guys who work assembly-line photo shoots. And he was referring to us in that third-person way that photo guys do that gets you pissed off — “All right, and let's have older brother stand here, and younger brother, put your hand there, and mom, let's turn our head a little bit, and dad, you stand up nice and straight in the back.”

And Colin blurted out really loudly in a sing-song voice, “THAT's not our dad! Tee-hee!”

And you got it. You broke out into loud laughter, just like the three of us usually do. And the four of us all sat there, laughing riotously at the poor, dumb, confused photographer.

It's the only family photo shoot I ever liked.

LITTLE GIRL

Jason Pettus

I know that there's a part of you that always wanted to have a girl. You've never told me outright, but there have been plenty of clues.

When I was growing up, you were always trying to get me to let you fuss with my hair, try new styles. I, of course, being a male, would never let you.

You were absolutely heartbroken when I decided not to go to prom. You still bring it up, even to this day, when I am twenty-eight years old. We'll see a particularly dapper man in a tuxedo, like at a wedding reception, and you'll say, "Now see, YOU could've looked like that if you had gone to prom! I can't believe you didn't go to prom!"

You would always get really excited when we went shopping for new clothes. However, I happened to love new clothes, so that one worked out well.

Now, sometimes, you try to have female bonding moments. Once, at another wedding reception, you had a little bit to drink, and you whispered, "You know, Jason, everytime I have a glass of wine now... I have hot flashes!" And I was, "Jeez, mom, don't tell me this stuff!"

Sometimes I want to apologize for not being a girl, or at least that you weren't allowed to have one male child and one female. I know there's nothing I could do about it, I know you wouldn't accept my apology, I know you love me just as much as you would any girl. But still, sometimes, when I see you really wanting to have a female bonding moment, I want to take your hand and apologize to you for never having the chance.

LOVE BUG

Jason Pettus

I have a memory that's older than my oldest memory, but I don't know if it's real or if I made it up.

When I was three, I put my arm through the backdoor window, you told me. I was running around the house, acting like Superman, my arms straight out in front of me as I soared through the air, battling evil. And, you said, I whipped right around a corner and put my arm straight through the backdoor window.

And my arm got cut right on the wrist, right on one of those veins you can see if you flex your muscles. And there was a tiny little fountain coming out, spurt, spurt, spurt, and you freaked. You were trying so hard to stop the bleeding.

And then your friend who was over at the time noticed a bloodstain at the top of my arm. And you took my shirt off, and up there, near my shoulder, was a gash over three inches long. Which, for a three-year-old, is a pretty big gash.

And you and me and your friend jumped in your friend's car and she drove the three of us to the hospital, you on the verge of complete panic.

What I never told you was that I've always had this tickling of a memory in the back of my brain, as long as I can remember, of riding around in Herbie the Love Bug, from the old Disney films. I am in the back seat and Herbie is going up on its two left wheels, and then its two right wheels, over and over, each time it takes a turn. I had always thought it was a dream I had once had as a child.

So one day a couple of years ago I asked you if you happened to remember the kind of car your friend drove us to the hospital with.

"Hmm," you said, "I think it was a Volkswagen. Yes, it was a Volkswagen Bug."

I still have the scars, one on my wrist and one near the shoulder. The upper scar is still the same length, still slightly over three inches long. You see, scar tissue never grows. Scar tissue always stays the same length that it was at the time of the accident.

OH MY GUYS

Jason Pettus

Dad and Colin and I can really be a bunch of little shits when we get together. Once, we went to our cousin's wedding with a free bar, and the three of us each took our complimentary wooden matchbook and laid out one match everytime we had a drink. And soon there were matches just scattered everywhere, all over the table.

And at a certain point in the evening there was a completely obnoxious little girl running around the reception, getting on everyone's nerves. And dad and Colin and I started talking about how we were going to kill the girl, started discussing possible ways to unobtrusively get rid of the body, drunkenly laughing and guffawing the whole time.

Later, we found out that the girl's grandfather had been sitting at our table, the whole time. And you smiled, put your hands over your eyes, shook your head, and said, "Oh, my guys."

Open Mic Goose Chase

Jason Pettus

She writes about me, and I write about her.
That's the way it works, you see.

She writes about me, and I write about her
and in our obsessive performing schedules we have
it ends up
she reads about me, and I read about her

all over town
Wicker Park, Lincoln Park, Irving Park,
and yes, sometimes, Humboldt Park
she writes about me, and I write about her
and she reads about me, and I read about her

all over town
and the people know
they know that she's writing about me and I'm writing about her
because they are friends of ours
and the scene is incestuous to begin with
because getting older does not mean getting better
and a larger population does not mean a larger dating pool
they know that she's writing about me and I'm writing about her
and if they don't we drop in hints every so often

and they talk
and they giggle
and they say to us
"Hey, didja know she was writing about you last week?"
and
"Hey, didja know he was reading about you over there?"
"And over there?"
"And over there?"

as we hit the dusty trail
of open mics across these big shoulders of ours
and narrowly miss each other
by ten minutes, by five
“God, she was just here, she was just reading something about you”

And sometimes,
sometimes we do end up at the same open mic
where she doesn't read something about me
and I don't read something about her
but we still indeed read to each other

Subtle hints, clues
that I wonder if the audience picks up on

“This next piece is about the way one of my ex-lovers made me feel”
“This next piece is about how important my sexuality is to me”
“This next piece is about how I want to be a writer for a living and if you are thinking of getting involved with me you should understand that up front”
“This next piece is about how I got hurt really badly in a relationship not too far in my past and you better fuckin' pay attention because I don't want any idle flirtation from you because I'm too weak and frail from this previous one to be able to take something that you might be doing just because you're bored and not necessarily actually into it”

Subtle hints, clues
that I wonder if the audience picks up on.

And we sit together
and we laugh
and we drink
and we laugh, and we drink, and we drink, and we talk, and we laugh, and we drink, and we talk and we drink and we laugh and we drink and we drink.

And she goes to the bathroom and my friends run over and say, “Wasn't that piece about... you know, HER? Doesn't she know?”
And I say, “Of course she knows. She writes about me and I write about her. It's how we communicate.”
She understands this because

we are two peas in a pod
cast from the same mold
long-lost siblings separated from birth
and a thousand other metaphors, none of which exactly work

And we have talked about this
and we have decided that having sex together would probably be a good thing
and hell, it seems like a foregone conclusion at this point, not really much we can
do about it
But still, we can't make that final leap
because we are both deathly afraid of losing that
pea
cast
sibling
muse
and all those other metaphors that didn't work the first time

And so she writes about me and I write about her
and she reads about me and I read about her
It is our way of dating
It is our way of having sex

And she gives me a ride home
and we sit in her car
and she says how regrettable it is that we have to separate for the night
and so I say not if you come in
and so she says do you want me to come in
and so I say do you want to come in

And we both know we're going to chicken out
but we're playing a game to see which of us will do it first
which of course... would be me
but as I'm getting out I see a flash of brilliance in her eyes
like tonight was the night she was waiting for me to not back down
like tonight was the night she was waiting for me to insist on her coming in
And I stop and think about that tonight in my bed
typing in my bed
smoking in my bed
as I continue writing about her
as I know that she continues writing about me

spamtime is over

Jason Pettus

well because I'm a quote enquote writer
and because I've got eyes bigger than my stomach
and lord knows it can swallow just about any explanation
as to why I am here
with you at 4 am
with you at 6 drinks past reason
with you and you - him and her
aaaand me clunk
as there's a long pause
too long it's hitting the back of my throat
I'm gagging
and it's almost like the both of your drunk asses are ganging up on me and
pressing down on the back of my neck going "take it! take it!"
and because I am sometimes the I that is saying "I"
in stories talking about very interesting the I that might be I
that is what I am thinking
as I watch you two
a wacky duet needing a narrator
the "I" that I will become
taking the whole scene in at once man
swallow baby
and I'm gulping hard cause
as the eye that is looking around nervously
while you two eye each other
and I see and tomorrow
I will spit out "I" as in
"I see what they don't cause they're
too wrapped up in their quote romantic tension enquote moment
that I'm gulping down
I see out the window
weiner boy

who is always sticking it into these
situations at the wrong time
who is not an eye
not I
and they don't wanna
be seeing him
but this is what I
am here for
so I can talk about it"
and weiner boy
who you
and her
have been discussing as her soon to be ex that I
now know all about and will fill in as a key detail
when I talk about it
weiner boy is coming up the sidewalk
about to serve himself up with all the mustard
and I'm thinking
"Just because
I'm a writer
I'm a fool with little better to do
I'm a third no
fourth wheel
on this little drama vehicle
the one who's supposed to drive it on home
for the people I will tell
I'm suppose to spread myself all over this scene
and glup myself down
like some cheap meat substitute
for private moments
post-modernists can't digest
well, spamtime is over
and when he bursts in full of recriminations I can already guess
cause I'm a writer
I will leave"
at least that is what "I"
will tell them that I
thought

THE NIGHT I FOUND OUT ABOUT MY SECRET BROTHER

Jason Pettus

I was constantly trying to sneak in on you and dad's dinner parties. Even when I was a little boy, even then, I found the witty dialogue of adults so much more fascinating than all the pointless drivel the kids my age would talk about. There was something so completely entrancing about it, the way the adults would talk about politics, and the truth, the way they would so casually toss around curse words without a second thought.

However, the point of the dinner parties was always, and will forever be, to get away from the kids. So everytime I'd try to sit down and listen, you would politely scoot me off to bed. But I would sneak back out. I would sit right there at the crook right next to the refrigerator, lean my head forward so that I could hear all the cool, sexy banter between the grown-ups. Oh, the things I could tell you.

So, one night I was doing that, and you and dad were talking about how "difficult" it was.

“We weren’t sure we’d ever be able to have one again,” one of you said.

And someone asked you something, and you said, “I just woke up one day and there was blood everywhere.”

And it slowly dawned on me that I used to have a brother, and that he had died. Later in life, I would put it all together and realize that you had had a miscarriage.

I’ve thought about this a lot since that night. A lot. I’ve thought about the fact that I was supposed to be the younger child, and I wonder what that would be like. I wonder what my brother would have grown up to be like. I’ve thought about the fact that Colin would most likely not exist if my other brother had lived, and I wonder what that would be like. As I’ve turned into an adult, I’ve thought about what a horrible, horrible experience that would be, to be a twenty-five-year-old boomer in the middle of the Camelot years, newly married, just moved to the suburbs, your first home, life completely on track, when one morning you wake up to a pool of blood between your legs and a dead child. I think about how similar experiences have driven many, many young couples apart, made them divorce, about the long-lasting terror it produces in some women, to the point that they would never get pregnant again. I wonder if I was twenty-five and had a miscarriage, if I would have the courage to try again. I don’t know.

There was a couple of hushed lines in the living room, and then you said, “It was the most difficult thing I’ve ever been through.” And then there was silence. And then I went back to bed.

THE THINGS WE TRY TO HIDE FROM OUR CHILDREN

Jason Pettus

When I was little and you and dad would fight, you would go into the bathroom to cry. You would make sure that the door was closed before a tear would fall. I assume that you didn't want to upset us, to see you in that state.

But I remember this. I remember these incidents very clearly, the soft sounds of your sobs coming from behind the door. And I wanted to hug you, tell you that everything was going to be okay, just like you did so many times for me.

When you're with your family, there's no reason to hide the pain. They understand.

American Rain Forest

Tom Racine

This is what we have—
blue dishes, Van Gogh prints,
a burnt out air conditioner, poetry books,
African music, gypsy dances,
you swaying, singing under the fan
against the backdrop of beads in the entrance way
where beyond the bed awaits like the sea calling.

But I am good and finish most of the meal
of artichoke leaves
and salmon
and grapes and strawberries,
but not all is eaten
as I ooze the strawberries
onto your breasts
and kiss the sweet ocean
and enter—

behind the beads
where
another fan awaits
and Cuban songs,
the cat purring
and the heat of a
summer
Florida night
with you.

Full Moon

Tom Racine

I was standing doing the dishes
after Rebecca and Yuki
invited me over for Sunday omelets
and poetry.

Yuki leaned over the dish water and
whispered, “We should get together someday soon—
we could have sex.”

I chuckled and answered, “Perhaps after our first
coffee together.”

Later, I walked Yuki out to her car,
“I’d like to go home with you and
have sex all night, but I have to get
up early tomorrow and teach Spanish.”

“Yeah, that’s OK. I’ll call.”

“My birthday is in October, I’m Aries,” she said,
and she went off somewhere talking about Jupiter
rising and left me standing there for
6 minutes. “What’s your birthday?” And off
she went again—Mars to Leo descending somewhere—
as I scanned the sky.

“Come here, I finally said softly. Come here.”

She moved in close.

I took her by the shoulders and gently
turned her around.

“Look over there. What’s that?”

“That? That’s the full moon,” she said.

We both laughed,
and I held her close
as we stood watching it
in silence.



last-minute entries

he's gone

staring
i move toward it
it grips me with great fear
i want to close the coffin shut

knife

life is
like a
knife

always
cutting
always
killing

three poems by
sydney anderson

i play the game

i play the game
the cards are dealt
should i take a better hand

she curiously stares
and wonders
why the path
looks so familiar
the road
twists and curves
the trees hang low
and yet
even the cracks
in the ground
where the grass
creeps up from
seem familiar
her eyes widen
hoping that the
understanding
will be more
visible

puzzled
she takes a step
the confusion
disappears
as the memories
of the road taken
flood her mind
then
she realizes
that she has made
the same mistake
twice

the road
not taken

shannon
peppers

Enough So Far

mackenzie silver

I appreciate your honesty
I'm not used to honesty, you know
I'm used to people trying to screw me over
and I know I'm a girl
but I have to act like a guy sometimes
so that people don't try to make my life tougher

hasn't it been tough enough so far?

when you're so used to
not getting the truth from anyone
well, honesty is nice

I want to know if I should have hope
when you talk, you give me reason to have hope

and I don't know if I should
but now I'll take whatever I can get

Hasn't Happened Yet

jacob best

there is so much in me that is ugly

people can give me compliments
but it is never enough
it's never what i want to hear
it would be nice if the right someone
came along and told me everything
I needed to hear

but that hasn't happened yet

people keep trying to make me feel better
they talk about the sunrises and the
stars in the sky and the babbling brook
when I look right over my shoulder
I should see the beauty in things

well, I never get to the beauty part

I never get there

so no, I don't know what the answers are
so no, I don't know where the optimism is
and I don't know how to make things better

Had A Point

helena wolfe

Maybe you had a point
maybe it's not just me that does the thinking
maybe I have to stand up for myself
maybe I'll have to take your advice

I know I'm supposed to take my time
I know I don't have time
I want everything and I want it now
I know, I know, patience is not one of my virtues

I know there are so many things I want
I know there are so many things I need
I want all my dreams to come true

and I've always been afraid to ask
I don't know how to ask any more

There has been so much going on with me
I've seen friends dying and
I've seen friends dead
and they've tried to test me too
and I fought back
and I won
and this is all I have to show for it

there was so much I wanted
I've had to shut myself off
over and over again

But you are one of the only people I know
that wants to listen

who thinks I have something to say

I need that sometimes, you know

but thanks for listening,
thanks for being supportive,
thanks for letting me feel
like I'm not the
only one in the universe who
has feelings, who is human

well, thank you for that

Supposed To Be

helena wolfe

You suggested to me that I
should tell him how I feel
I'm afraid that I would tell him too much

You're not the first to tell me that
okay, you're the second
but now I'm starting to think
that on some levels
this might be a good idea

He called me when he got back in last night
he must have only been home for five minutes
and he's either honest and he misses me
or something
or he thought of me
or he was bored
I don't know

I need to be pushing that line a little farther
far enough to still be safe
but far enough to still be a risk
I gave him an idea;
he said we'd talk about it
when he called me today
well, he hasn't called me yet

Yes, I know he loves me
and yes
he has thought about marrying me
but there is no ring in my finger

Who knows if this will work
but the idea is there
and well, that's something

Maybe you were right
that I should take my time
but I'm an impatient girl
and I want the answers yesterday

maybe life won't be on my terms
and maybe I'll have to get used to that

Get Me Through My Life

marina arturo

there was a time tonight
when i thought you would come up to me
and act like you had never met me before

and well, i did not know what else to say
and so i did the same

it is strange to be in a place you have not been to before
because i think that when i see something familiar
and then see something different

it is at times like that
when i try to come up with stories in my head
to get me through the days and get me through my life

You Know What I'm Talking About

aeon logan

i know it has been years since we have talked
and I know you probably hate me
and maybe you want something different in life
and maybe I would be a nice diversion for you

and maybe I could tell you
that I have gone through a lot too
and maybe we could find consolation in each other
provide relief

maybe you would talk to me
and say things that you could not tell anyone
well, at least not in open places

well, maybe you know what i am talking about
I have been looking for things
and maybe, just maybe you are looking for things too

maybe something out of life
maybe some comic relief, some attention
maybe I could be that for you
maybe you could be that for me

That Adorable Together

alexandria rand

there are times
when you feel a loud thunderous boom
and you think everything is going to be destroyed
and you can hear the destruction
you can see its remnants
and the world is crashing all around you
and there are times when you see that
and want to fall to pieces
until you get a glimmer of hope
and then you cling on to those glimmers of hope
because you swear that is all you've got

and now that i live here and see the places
i used to frequent
i think of bad things that have happened to me
bad things here, bad things there

and then i think of the nice things you did for me
the way you used to be so good to me
still looking back i think about how nice you were

i wasn't looking for the football player type
and you just happened to be that adorable
but i knew that you were a good guy
even if you were a football player
but you were worth it

yes, i made you suffer, never meaning to

my friend andy in school called you mister superman
because he never saw you
and he knew you were a football player

i still have photos of you, ones i used to keep in my wallet
because i was not willing to let go of every image of you
well, not that fast, that is
and i don't even know if we were that adorable together

yes, after all the pain I go through, I still think about you
and how smart you were, how strong you were

after i see the world falling to pieces around me
when all I can see is that desolation after the holocaust
when I find that glimmer of hope,
no matter how small, no matter how far away,
you cling to it

in so many ways they were my silver lining
my glimmer of hope, my ray of light
like a hand from God in the sky coming down to save me

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