

table of contents

volare	1	abby stotz
naked in the same spaces	2	nithya joseph
epigrams for dorothy	4	sarah sala
dear red shirt,	7	lauren keils
octaves	8	ethan milner
midnight in march	10	jenny cunningham
moonroof	12	megan giddings
we sleep	13	audra puchalski
midnight (art)	13	megan giddings
hiromachi canal	14	jenka eusebio
colt	15	alex bryan
no smoking	16	alex bryan
terraza 1	17	stephanie williams
terraza 2	18	stephanie williams
terraza 3	19	stephanie williams
phone lines	20	sarah sala
geometry	21	tabitha berry
michigan avenue, day after christmas	22	zach hoskins
the yard	24	joe varkle



dinner talk — 31 — julie kim
american family — 33 — jocelyn gotlib & ilana goldzer
shattered desertion — 34 — sara schneider
a is for apple — 35 — dana boutin
kingsley and state — 36 — geoffrey s. george
break on the horizon — 37 — stephanie williams
black and tar — 38 — christopher peplin
street corner missionary blues — 39 — liza frolikis
(art) — 39 — geoffrey s. george
the last time i saw david — 40 — caitlin cowan
prague evening — 41 — zach lupetin
out of habit — 42 — brittlyn riley
on reading anais nin — 44 — rosa moore
 $5/4$ — 45 — whitney pow
because i am so easily lost — 46 — emily mitchell
portrait of new york — 47 — andrew klein
monster (art) — 47 — jocelyn gotlib & ilana goldzer
solitude — 48 — alexandra milidrag
half and half — 49 — tabitha berry



snow on state street — 50 — geoffrey s. george
a perspective of today — 51 — christopher peplin
final walk — 52 — alexandra milidrag
higashi-nakano station — 53 — jenka eusebio
risk — 54 — alexandra milidrag
(art) — 55 — sara schneider
the beach at enoshima — 56 — jenka eusebio
brown and blue and white against the sea shore — 57 — megan giddings
baghdad bedposts and tel aviv tables — 58 — beenish ahmed
watercolors — 59 — iris brilliant
the city explodes — 60 — zach hoskins
102 — 61 — audra puchalski
eastern washington bicentennial — 62 — rosa moore
the man-eater sated — 63 — mike walsh
church is — 64 — lauren keils
a letter — 66 — jane cope
a world closed off and secret — 72 — beenish ahmed
patagonia — 79 — jenka eusebio

Volare

Mike O' Neil and me washed dishes in the back of Finnegan's
Five days a week from 8 to close, we fed a shiny Hobart
Plates sloppy with ketchup and grease and shit
Mitch, the night manager, kept a stereo on a shelf

Half-way between the dish machine and the grill line
(The cook's chose the tunes Monday, Wednesday and Friday
I got Tuesday, Mike took Thursday)
Old but it worked, bass lines that move the floor

Cantare, Mike picks Dino, Sinatra—the stuff grandpa and
Uncle Vito
Listened to at picnics when I was a kid—Whoa-oh-oh-oh
A big guy like Mikey, liking old stuff like that.
No accounting for taste, I guess.

Volare, He never worked better then on Thursdays.
Mike would sway as he sprayed at the crust on those plates
Like we're at the fucking Sands instead of busting our backs
Washing the goddamn same plates that'll just come back
again.

-Abby Stotz



1.

naked in the same spaces

Night Time
Lovers meeting on the pages of a book,
Undress slowly, silent
Smiling
As they slip into each other's
Shadows

A tired mother
Struggles as she
Throws off her saree,
To nurse her
Screaming infant,
Sighing

Television couples
Showering,
Soap each other
And then stand skin to skin,
In a capsule
Of glass and steel

Cousins strip
Happily, marveling
At salt-soaked skin and
Striped swimsuit tans,
After a day of sea shine
And sun water

2.

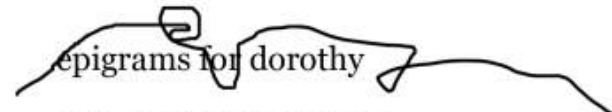
She remembers being seven

And wondering whether

Love
Is the reason for,
Or the result of,
Being

Naked in the same spaces

-Nithya Joseph



epigrams for dorothy

gram ran away from home
& drowned her cat in the lake
i hope she makes bail

i want you to be
an animal pancake
again: we all do
i'm gonna keep wishing

gram's eyes are blue marbles
caked in vaseline
like how a whale
would see without the ocean

gram ran away from home
& almost drowned in the lake
what in her mind drew lake?

i am the emerald dome of sky
you saw before the stroke
i gave you back the memory
of your first daughter eating corn
i am her raven black hair

you are a cat's whisker
plucked from its face
i am just the drop
of blood
left in the fur

i am the cat you drowned in the lake
a fisherman ran in to save you
but i got held under
i sleep with the fishes

your mind is john cage
you used to be a redbird
but you molted to a moth

i am the stroke that wracked
your brain with high voltage
the blue electricity
you saw in heat lightening once

gram's hands are as smooth
as satin pajamas
her wedding band
just as polite

if the memories in your brain
shook loose, they must be the blue
pebbles that line the bottom
of fish tanks, yes?

i am your ears
you haven't made a phone call
in over seven years

i am the shitzu you put to sleep
i am waiting for you
on the other side
will you bring gumdrops?

were you trying to drown yourself
in the lake & needed the cat?
did you see the fisherman?
he never saw the cat

on visits i'd sleep in your bed
you kept your teeth in a jar
is it okay to admit
that's all i remember?

5.

the confusion of your mind
is the delicacy of holy water
the grey one sees in sculpture

i am the persian cat
you call kitty-doggie
i don't care what you call me
i won't come near you

i am the letters your granddaughter
would write you
we lined the pockets of your winter
coat, the bottom of your purse

i am your neighbor lady
from iron lake. our kids
would play together
now we're roommates
in a nursing home
& we don't know it

-Sarah Sala

6.

dear red shirt,

Why do you pick on me &
Veronica? Why do you
nibble on our wills? You
are like a fire hydrant,
1950, a Beatle, 1965, a
worldwide website, 2006.
Choke on that toothpaste!
It's so bitter and smells
like the factory! These are
war times, this is a tattoo.
My hands are like squirrels
on your neck; my hands
are one deer checking the
pulse of another in front of
a café where the accident
just occurred. How could

I just write about my Real
day when I hate my life
& I hate you in it?!

-Lauren Keils



7.

octaves

Let's see
The milk we sleep in
For ourselves, with
That garden of
Unopened animal eyes
We wear

Let's go
To the first womb
Beating at a frequency
Whose resonance
Sounds so strangely
Like home

Let's live
Let's do and feel
Let's drive towards Orillia
Where the land bridges
And the silvered freeze of the lake
Can be our canopy

Let's set
The tone for tonight
And cast our shadows upward, toward
That heavenly light
Whose frequency
Resonates at a rate too high to reach
Beating in rhythm with our pulses, yet
Too bright to see

Let's sit
In the milky river
Whose lush flux
Loves us, lives through us

8.

Carries us inward
To the same place
That same water
Splashing notes against
Our nakedness

Let's listen with care
To those tributaries
For the frequencies

Let's delve deeper
Into each droplet
And break apart those atoms

Let's sing hymns
In harmony with those particles
Whose rapidity dictates each tone

Let's see
God's milky waters
Let's see
The motion that makes sound

Let us see each note
Each prayer
Each hymn

Let us see
Each rapturous harmony
Separated by octaves of liquid

Let us see
The milk, the Movement
And the Sound

Let us see
New octaves above
Our animal blindness

Let us see, God
Let us see God
Let us see

-Ethan Milner

midnight in march
tonight
my roommate is talking to
berating
lecturing
her best friend over the phone,
who goes to parsons
(school of art and design!)
in new york city
and needs to be
talked out of
cheating on her
suicidal boyfriend.
beth orton is crooning
on letterman
The air in this room
Has not budged all day
It's like a second skin
A moist dirty sheet
Wrapped around my body.
In this month
The inkling of spring
When it smells like
My nose is
Scraping the stratosphere
And I feel the grass screaming
Under my feet
This of all months
Deserves an open window.

"you're not a dirty whore!"
she exclaims
laughing lovingly.
"get your vibrator out!
...you left it at home?"
i pipe up,
suggest over-nighting her
A sex toy
"it's a dildo emergency!"

my laughter whips
through the air
the atmosphere
bounces off satellites
and forms into molecules
that enter the delicate ear
of a girl I've met once
who is on her floor
with a bottle of red wine
on a monday night
in new york city
(art and design!)

"you don't have to
bend to his will!"
but she will.
we all will
especially when he's promising
nothing at all.
we fall in love
in the very moment
when he makes us
shit our hearts out.
we learned it young
That suffering
must mean it's love
middle school martyrs
joan of arcs in training bras
burning beautifully
on his stake.

-Jenny Cunningham

moonroof

fifty-five fake spring fever
my mom hits a button & the roof falls open
look at that moon-roof she smiles

moon is a little speckled egg
dipped in black black chocolate

we zip beneath curved trees bent in permanent hellos
& i see the ghost of seven years past
bumping on her purple bike in the shadows

it will fall down down down
& i will eat it slow

oh & the grass is full of silver
diamond gravel that left marks on my knees
look mom there's where i crashed

i will take small bites
& make a wish after every swallow

-Megan Giddings



We sleep
in zippered bubbles
we wrap ourselves in feathers and air
changing cold clarity to warm humidity
our breath condenses and slips
between the cracks of our movement

We learn to listen
to what touches us
so we know the snow by its lighter-than-rain sound
we learn that stars are spaces
in a batter-thick night

We sleep
in Lake Superior's cold lung
as it exhales into the ears
of sandstone cliffs that lean in
to listen.

-Audra Puchalski



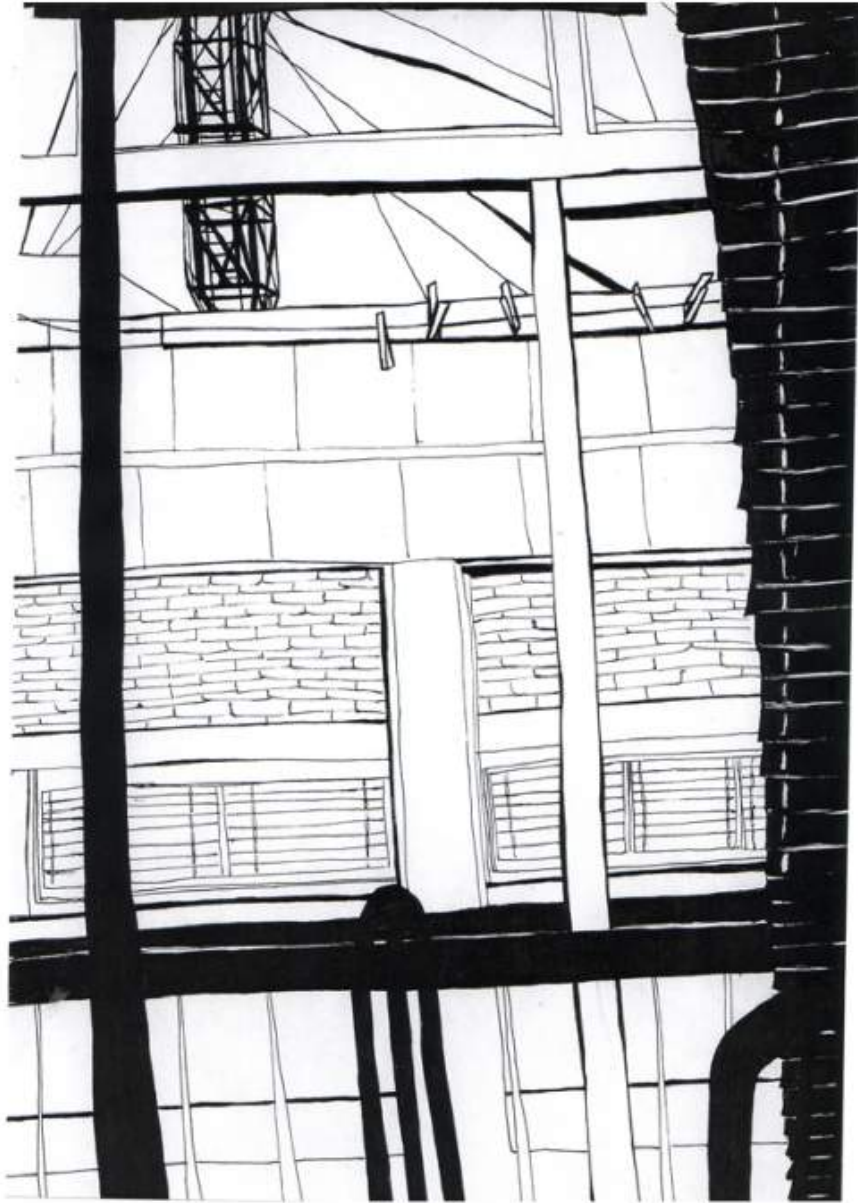
-Jenka Eusebio



-Alex Bryan



-Alex Bryan



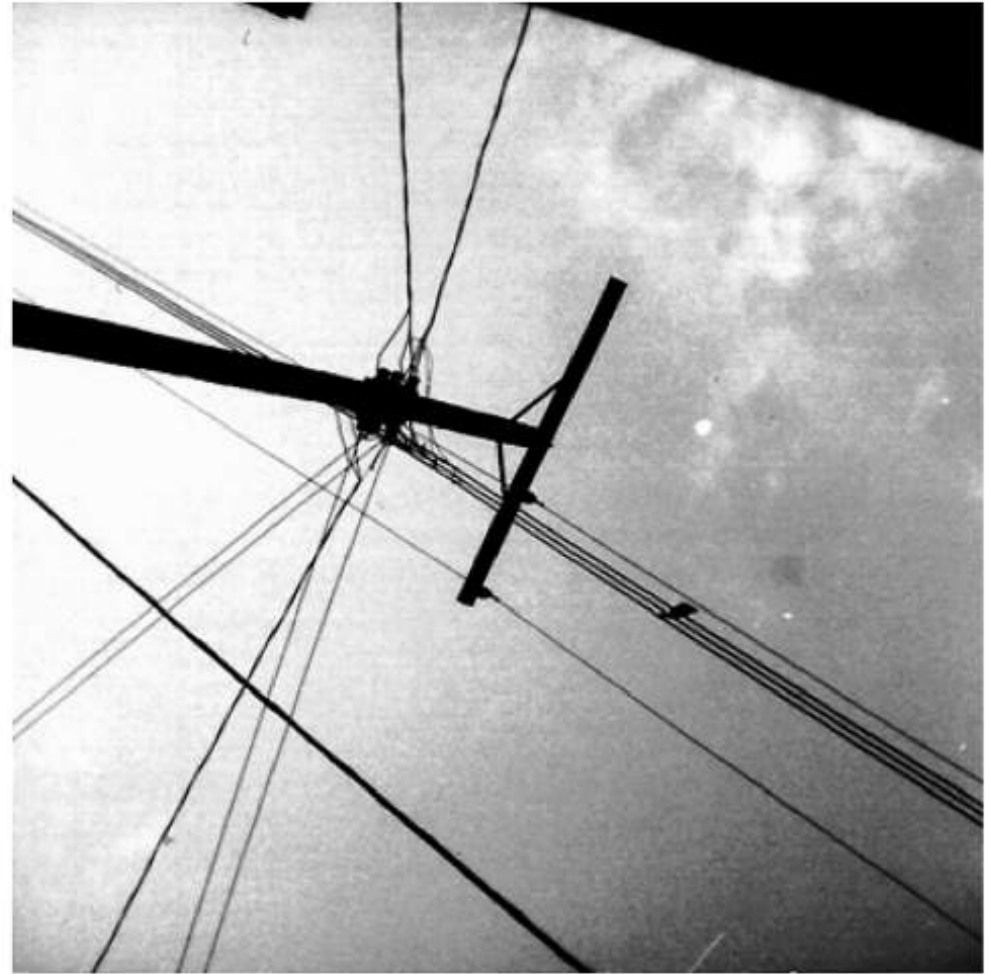
-Stephanie Williams



-Stephanie Williams



-Stephanie Williams



-Sarah Sala



-Tabitha Berry

michigan avenue, day after christmas

“What do you think, madame?”

“Show me the other ones. The sterling silver.”

The clerk nods his head curtly and sweeps the earrings out of sight. The woman lets her eyes wander, following her nose to the heavily scented cosmetics counter nearby. Salespeople in black slacks and dress shirts flit to and fro between smartly dressed women who clasp their purses protectively to their breasts, listening to pitches for designer colognes, lipsticks, eyeliners. Stone-faced urbanites maneuver expertly between the counters, looking straight ahead, their heels clicking past tourists ogling the after-Christmas clearance displays. Soon they’ll be disappearing into racks of clothing, up and down escalators, or out into the blue-grey late December air, never to be seen again.

She hears the clerk approach her once more, the soles of his leather shoes moving softly behind the counter. But just as she’s about to turn around, something catches her eye. It’s a man, probably in his mid-thirties; he looks to be at least six feet tall. He’s wearing a grey suit with a deep red tie, beneath an overcoat the same color as his slightly thinning, sandy brown hair. There’s an urgency in his walk that draws her attention, a haste and even carelessness of gait that sets him apart from the sea of purposeful shoppers. On his face is a look of dull confusion and...blood. There’s blood on his face, just a little, but it’s there; it trickles down slowly from his forehead and past his eye. She almost wouldn’t have noticed if she hadn’t been looking at his wire-framed eyeglasses, the right lens of which had been shattered into an intricate cobweb pattern. But he’s bleeding, all right. Her eyes deepen with concern, and she watches the trail of blood make its way further down the man’s face.

That’s when she sees it: a gash in his head, small but deep, at the point where the topmost part of his brow and the bottommost part of his scalp meet. As though just becoming conscious of the bleeding, he raises his hand to the wound. His lips part; he seems to moan a little, but he’s too far away for her to hear. In bewilderment, she glances again around the store, but no one else seems to notice the man with the gash in his head: not the salespeople and their patrons, nor the child who tugs on his mother’s coat, pointing at the picked-over Christmas displays. She watches in a kind of horrified fascination as the wounded man continues to move through the crowd.

Now his palm is pressed tightly against the gash, his fingers splayed out and rigid. His mouth hangs open like a guppy's; his eyes are dead circles. He doesn't know where he is at all.

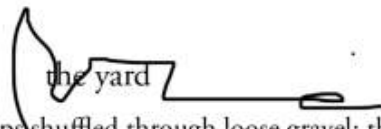
Finally, he passes the jewelry counter where she stands. She listens to hear if he'll make a sound, but she hears nothing. She wants to grab him by the sleeve as he walks by, ask him what happened, if he needs help. But she doesn't. She just watches him stagger away, now just a sandy brown form retreating into the distance, then nothing but a speck, a single drop in the sea of after-Christmas shoppers. She thinks she might see him pushing his way out of the front doors, into the snow that's begun to swirl above the street, but she isn't sure. It could be anybody.

Slowly – it feels like forever – she turns back around to the jewelry counter. There's the clerk, waiting expectantly with the sterling silver earrings held out in the palm of his hand. The slightest gleam of irritation in the corner of his eye.

"Is something the matter, madame?" he asks.

"Not at all," she replies, and by instinct the corners of her mouth twist upwards into a weak little smile. "Not at all."

-Zach Hoskins



Footsteps shuffled through loose gravel; the morning sun began to rise over the tops of the tangled junk trees surrounding the old salvage yard. As he did each morning at six o'clock sharp, Harry Stanzak inspected the lot before opening, looking for any indication of thievery, and hoping the dogs had been merciful to anyone foolish enough to attempt it. As he walked, his mud and grease-blackened boots lifted and discharged gravel with every step. The narrow, oil-saturated aisle was flanked with piles, some fifteen feet high, of those unfortunate road machines that, after years of dutiful service, are often forsaken for the price of a can of paint.

Harry noticed a cracked seal beam lying in his path, and with a grease-stained hand picked it up and nonchalantly tossed it into the row of cars to his left, where it shattered on the side of a late-model Buick. Something moved in his peripheral vision; the glare from the rising sun seared his eyes and he shaded them with his right hand, pushing aside the wisps of long gray hair on his forehead. In the corner of the aisle, he noticed a car stacked on top of three others, teetering slowly as a cool breeze rippled the junk trees. The car, a battered and stripped Ford Pinto, seemed to be waiting for Harry to leave so that it could fall in peace. Harry swore, then shouted furiously, "Earl!"

In a small steel building off the yard's parking lot, Earl Whitmore sat behind the parts counter, eating a ham sandwich and listening to an oldies station on a radio of the same vintage as the music. He wore an oily red plaid shirt, a matching cap, and dirty coveralls of an indiscernible color. His twinkling blue eyes, set deep in his heavy red face, scanned the parking lot for any sign of customer activity, and in his preoccupation he missed the mayonnaise dropping from his sandwich onto the counter. He took a bite and, reclining in Harry's worn leather easy chair, began waving the wounded sandwich to the crackling tune of "Tutti-Frutti". Earl sifted through a parts order form on the desk, his eyes scanning the office for each part he and Harry had amassed the previous afternoon. He looked around the dingy, cluttered room, remembering the spotless, methodically configured office it had been a decade before; the stack of Playboys in the corner and the pile of empty beer bottles behind the counter had also proliferated. The brass bells hanging from the office door clattered as it burst open, followed by an unusually irritable Harry.

"How the hell are you stacking cars these days, Earl? There's a Pinto in Sector C-5 that's just looking to fall and get us sued ---is that mayonnaise on the counter, or body filler? I can't tell. Christ, if you weren't my brother in law, I swear I'd fire you. Get the crane and move that damn thing, I'll take over the desk for awhile."

Earl replied, "Relax, I'll bet I could catch it if it fell. They weren't built very solid, that's why we have about twenty of 'em." Chuckling, he finished the sandwich, wiped the condiment residue from the counter, the chair and the radio with an old rag that he tossed onto the floor, then with a sheepish smile, left to deal with the offending subcompact.

Harry groaned, unenthusiastically dropped himself into the chair, and began leafing through the order form. He was approaching sixty, and feared that he might be getting too old for this business; the physical labor never bothered him so much as the stress. Locating every desired part was more difficult than prying it off, and there was always the chance that it would break in the process. Lately, he had been allowing customers to pick their own parts in the cluttered lot, but it had become exceedingly trying, with small parts being stolen and valuable parts getting damaged. Even worse was the potential for injury or even death in the yard, which would result in a lawsuit that Harry simply couldn't take. Earl's viewpoint was far more optimistic, but then again, Earl was happily married with two wonderful kids, and he regarded the yard as a sort of hobby; he had retired from his business as a mattress salesman after marrying Harry's sister nine years ago, and decided to help Harry run the salvage yard after an ordinance dispute threatened to close it down. Harry had divorced years ago, had no children, and often spent his nights drinking in the yard office. However, if the opportunity to sell the yard and seek easier employment had arisen, he would have stalwartly refused; it was a matter of pride. Harry turned to Earl and said, "Why don't you take over for a while, I'm gonna go check on some things in the yard."

Harry walked through the murky aisle where he had seen the tipsy Ford Pinto; it was no longer atop the pile. He looked around him and saw that Earl had put it on top of an ancient, olive green Plymouth Fury. It was one of the oldest cars in the lot, a 1970 or 1971 model, he couldn't remember. He recalled the way it had looked the day it was brought in, before many of the other cars had even been manufactured.

. It had arrived in mint condition with minor fuel delivery problems, and he had wanted to get it rolling again to use as a driver, but simply had no time. He also remembered that it had arrived at the yard shortly after he and his wife Alice were married, in the days of their early life together, when they had been young and were still in love. Harry still wondered why the marriage had failed; he grimaced as he remembered that stab of pain, still vibrant after the years. The car was now enveloped in rust, and the glass had been cracked almost to shattering; the interior had been torn to pieces by nesting rodents and the wheels were sunk four inches into the mud. He wondered why he hadn't sent it to the crusher years ago; he knew he never would. He regarded the ruined Fury and gutted Pinto with a look of disgust, and walked back to the office.

When Harry returned, he found Earl at the counter, arguing with a grungy looking kid wearing a backwards ball cap, oversized white athletic shoes and pants so baggy that they might have fit Earl; he looked no more than sixteen. He was trying to haggle with Earl over what appeared to be center console. "Aw come on, I'll give you a dollar for that, it's not worth any more. Come on, all you have is a bunch of shit here anyway. What do you care how much it is? I can probably get a better one at Pep Boys."

"Then why don't you go to Pep Boys and get it, you little punk?" Harry offered. The kid sputtered, swore and left, causing the bells on the door to clatter noisily. Harry and Earl heard an obnoxious, raspy exhaust note like a nest of hornets leave the parking lot. Earl smiled, "That's one of those little ricer cars they have now. The kid wanted the console for a '92 Honda Civic, this one is from a Toyota Corolla." "Same difference," Harry grunted, and reached below the counter for a bottle of Wild Turkey, from which he took a long draw. "Harry!" Earl exclaimed, "it's too early for you to start drinking!"

"Too late," he replied.

.....
A quarter moon, obscured by murky gray clouds, floated above the darkened salvage yard. The gates had been locked six hours earlier, fastened together with a violated and rusty padlock that seemed to lack the will to restrict entry. A scruffy black cat slid delicately under the crooked gates and into the gravel parking lot, which was empty, save for discarded beer cans and Harry's truck. It was a 1985 Dodge Ramcharger, painted a weathered

primer gray, with flakes of rust beginning to emerge like seedlings from the lower quarterpanels. The tires were nearly bald, but the four-wheel drive was still capable of propelling it somewhat haphazardly through the maze of its late, mutilated brethren when Harry needed to drag out a car and move it to another corner of the lot. A dim light issued from the office, through Plexiglas windows obscured by inebriation and dust. The soft glow invited moths and other small, flitting things to flail at the window, but the man inside had no desire to entertain any of them.

Harry sprawled in his shabby leather chair, resting his black-stained boots, now dry, upon the parts counter. He stared at the ceiling fan which slowly and groggily revolved above his head, squeaking before completing each revolution and moving the stale air throughout the cluttered room. The office smelled sharply of alcohol; the most prominent source was an empty bottle of Wild Turkey that had resisted shattering, even when Harry had thrown it across the room. Harry drifted in and out of consciousness, due to both inebriation and lack of sleep. He had been spending his nights here more frequently than in previous months, now three or four times a week. He could no longer bear his empty apartment, and it had fallen into such disrepair that the office seemed more inviting. He was having recurring dreams of the fight he and Alice had had the night she left him, and the way he had felt signing the divorce papers, alone one night in the same office where he now sat. The night of the argument was the last time he had set foot inside their house, the one that he had scraped together out of years working behind the parts counter when his father was still alive. It was a clean enough split and the only things Harry had asked for were his truck and a few boxes of clothes. She despised the salvage yard and had pleaded with him to sell the business and retire. Harry had refused to part with his family's legacy, and she decided that he was a no-good son-of-a-bitch. As he stared at the ceiling fan, he thought, "Maybe I am."

The following morning, Earl Whitmore's Ford Taurus pulled into the parking lot, and stopped alongside of Harry's Ramcharger. Earl saw that the light was on, and that Harry was asleep in the chair again. He decided to intervene, although he knew Harry would be in a less than pleasant

disposition. He unlocked the door, carefully opening it so as not to jar the bells, and went into the back room to make coffee. Harry heard the noise and blearily shook himself awake. Immediately the roll of nausea came over him, and he groaned in self-contempt; he turned to Earl and said, "What time is it?"

"Six o'clock sharp," Earl said optimistically. He poured Harry a cup of coffee, and said, "You really ought to do something about this drinking. If you need a place to stay, why don't you come live with us for a while?" Harry regarded him with a glazed expression, and shook his head. "Nah...this is good. I like being alone sometimes, it helps me concentrate on the yard."

Earl was not in the least bit convinced, but he knew better than to argue with Hangover Harry; he picked up a broom from the corner and began sweeping the floor while Harry went out to lock up the junkyard dogs.

Harry kept two large rottweilers in a shed in the back of the office; he whistled and they came trotting in eagerly to receive their kibble; Earl believed that they had come to recognize the liquor on Harry's breath before his voice or appearance. Harry carefully locked them into their kennel, and then went to open the gates.

He started back to the office, but decided instead to locate the crane, and once again displace the stripped Pinto from its perch atop the old Plymouth. He was feeling better now, and as he lined up the crane and hoisted the car into the air, he felt as though a tremendous weight had been lifted from his own shoulders. He tossed the Pinto into a clump of bushes, shut off the crane and went back to the parking lot for his truck.

Earl was eating his breakfast when he saw Harry's Ramcharger tear into the yard; he wondered what Harry could be up to, since they had just rearranged the lot the day before. Realizing that they wouldn't officially open for another hour and a half, Earl set down his sandwich and followed curiously; he found Harry using a portable air tank to fill the dry-rotted tires on the old Plymouth Fury, which was hooked up to the truck by a tow strap.

"What are you doing? I thought we parked that thing years ago?" Harry paid no attention to him, and after fighting with the car's old column-mounted shifter, forced it into neutral and commenced the towing extravaganza. The Ramcharger heaved, its bald tires spitting gravel back at the Plymouth, which withstood the onslaught rather stalwartly. Earl stood

back, fearing that Harry had finally lost his mind. Finally, a decade and a half of mud was exposed to sunlight as the Fury was exhumed from its oily grave. Harry waved his fist out the window with an air of triumph, cackling maniacally; Earl regarded him with both admiration and pathos. He wondered if Harry still had any of that Wild Turkey left behind the counter.

Three hours later and still without his Wild Turkey, Earl sat at the parts counter negotiating the price of a brake caliper with an elderly gentleman; Harry had remained outside, and Earl began to wonder if he'd actually cracked. After the customer paid and left, Earl glanced at the parking lot to be sure it was empty and sauntered outside to check on Harry, leaving the flies to buzz around the moist paper bag that had contained his sandwich. As he stepped out into the yard, Harry stumbled wordlessly past him and into the office, carrying a grimy blue bucket; he reemerged with several old rags and a bottle of car washing solvent, three-quarters empty and five years expired. Earl followed him around the corner of the building, where he began filling the bucket with water from an old brass faucet; the guard dogs barked inquisitively from their kennel.

"What are you doing, Harry? Come back inside and get some coffee." Harry only grunted, his eyes set like two spotlights pouring into the distance; he took the bucket and walked back to where he had dragged the old Plymouth. Earl began to follow, but then heard the bells clatter on the office door and hurried back inside.

Harry toiled over the car, viciously scrubbing the grimy husk and watching the rivulets of dark scum run down the sides and drip off, like rats abandoning a sinking vessel. The rags were filthy but he continued plunging them into the murky bucket and drawing them out again, then smacking them back onto the car; he noticed that the rags were no longer picking up dirt from the sun-ravaged hood, but rust. After twenty minutes, he replenished the bucket, rinsed the rags and began to wash the green algae from the windows. When they were again translucent, he was able to get a good look at the ravaged interior; he pulled open the driver's door, which creaked reluctantly, then cooperated. Immediately he was struck by the rancid stench of fifteen years' worth of rodent colonies; their burrows riddled the back seat and their droppings carpeted the floor. Harry was accustomed to such horrific scenes, and merely waved his hand before his face a few times to clear the air.

Standing back to inspect his work, Harry noticed that the car was

a hardtop, not a sedan as he had previously remembered; he walked around to the front of the car and began cleaning the grille and headlights. The Fury was a 1971 model, and as he inspected further, saw that it had hideaway headlights; the headlight doors were simply retracted back behind the grille. He unhooked the small clips that held the doors to a rotating shaft, which was connected to an electric motor; the doors were now free to swing out and cover the headlights. Harry heard the office door creak open; he stood as Earl walked cautiously over to the car, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I can't remember seeing that car look so clean," Earl remarked. "It's a shame somebody just threw this away--what on Earth are you going to do with it now, Harry?"

"I dunno...maybe fix it up and sell it, who knows--it'll keep me occupied. As for right now, let's lock up for the night and go get something to eat, this coffee's making me jittery. Let's take your car, mine's pretty low on gas."

Earl realized that Harry had no intentions of going back to his apartment that night, and would most likely request to be dropped off at the yard after dinner, where he would spend the night drinking. He knew that it would be better to have Harry over instead, so that he could be with his family; Harry settled in the front seat of the Taurus and braced himself for social interaction.

Earl suggested they visit the nearby Coney Island, a place Harry hadn't been in years; the two of them sat in booth Twenty-three by the window, where they were soon attended by a waitress whose hair was dyed carmine red and whose tired face bore as much sadness as it did makeup. Harry did not remember her, and he was grateful that there had been no opportunity for awkward conversation.

"I'll have the grilled cheese and fries, on whole wheat bread and with American cheese," Earl said. "and a black coffee. Harry?"

Harry stuttered, "I'll have the ham and eggs, with rye toast--"

"I'm sorry sir," she interrupted. "We don't serve breakfast at this hour."

"Oh--well, just give me what he's havin', he has a good taste for food."

She left them, her heels harshly smacking the linoleum floor with every step. Earl began chuckling, and Harry became slightly unnerved. He remembered when one could order breakfast anytime, at any restaurant. If this waitress could pretend she was Lucille Ball, why couldn't she pretend it was before eleven o'clock? He watched her as she mingled with the lowing crowd, then settled into his newspaper again. The front page headline was not very settling: East Side Vandals Strike Again. He wondered about the food in his refrigerator at the apartment, which must have begun to go bad. He was grateful, at least, to be getting out more.

-Joe Varkle





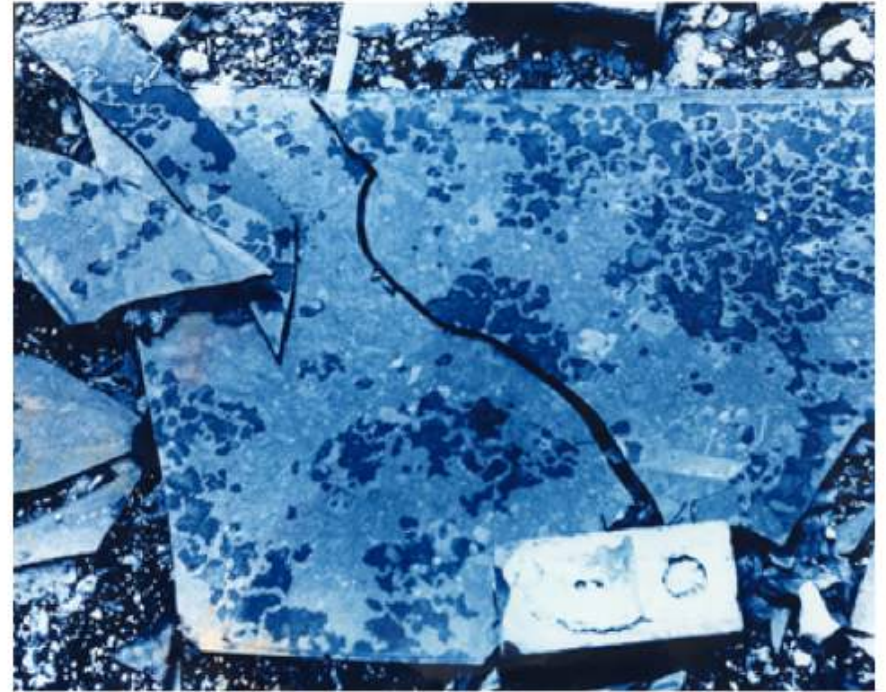
Don't eat your soup on the left side, are you dead? That's for dead people, always eat it on the right; don't shake your legs, don't you know that's bad luck? Don't hold your chopsticks too close to the tip, it means you're going to get married too fast; put your napkin on your lap when you eat, so unladylike how do you expect to get married? Marry a boy that loves you more than you love him, that way you won't get your heart broken, date Asians at least because you are more likely to marry one then but not Japanese, you know what they did to our country, and not Vietnamese maybe Chinese or Korean, but Jay's wife is black and Jenny's husband is Puerto Rican and Jaymi dates a white boy, but that's your brother and sisters, they didn't want to date Koreans, don't you want Asian babies? don't be in a serious relationship, don't date a boy for looks, good looking boys will cheat on you, don't have a boyfriend, just go on a lot of dates, you're too young to be stuck to one boy, you don't know what you want yet; boys like long straight hair, don't cut your hair too short; and stop sleeping with wet hair, you're going to catch a cold; eat the fish eye, it's the best part, it makes you smart; eat more lettuce, the Korean newspaper says that greens are good for you and French fries are bad for you, so don't eat fried food anymore, eat a lot of kimchi, the Korean newspaper says kimchi prevents cancer, never talk about our family troubles, that's only for our family, no one else will understand, don't even tell your husband, he'll use it against you when you argue; your sisters are your best friends, they understands everything that goes on in your family, always take care of your sisters, you don't know how much they've done for you, they helped raise you, talk to them when you're in trouble, why are you eating such small bites? You look like your food doesn't taste good, don't eat like that at someone else's house

you don't want them to think your mother didn't raise you right; don't leave any rice in your bowl, you know kids in North Korea are starving and you're just throwing away food, every grain of rice you leave is someone's tear that's hungry; but how will eating food help people that are hungry? Speak louder, you talk like you don't believe in yourself then no one else will believe you either, and don't talk back to your mother, respect everyone older than you; you talk back because you're not reading the Bible everyday, the bible says to honor your parents, make sure you go to church every Sunday even when you get older; when you get older you will understand everything I tell you, you think I'm being strict now, but you will say the same things to your children.

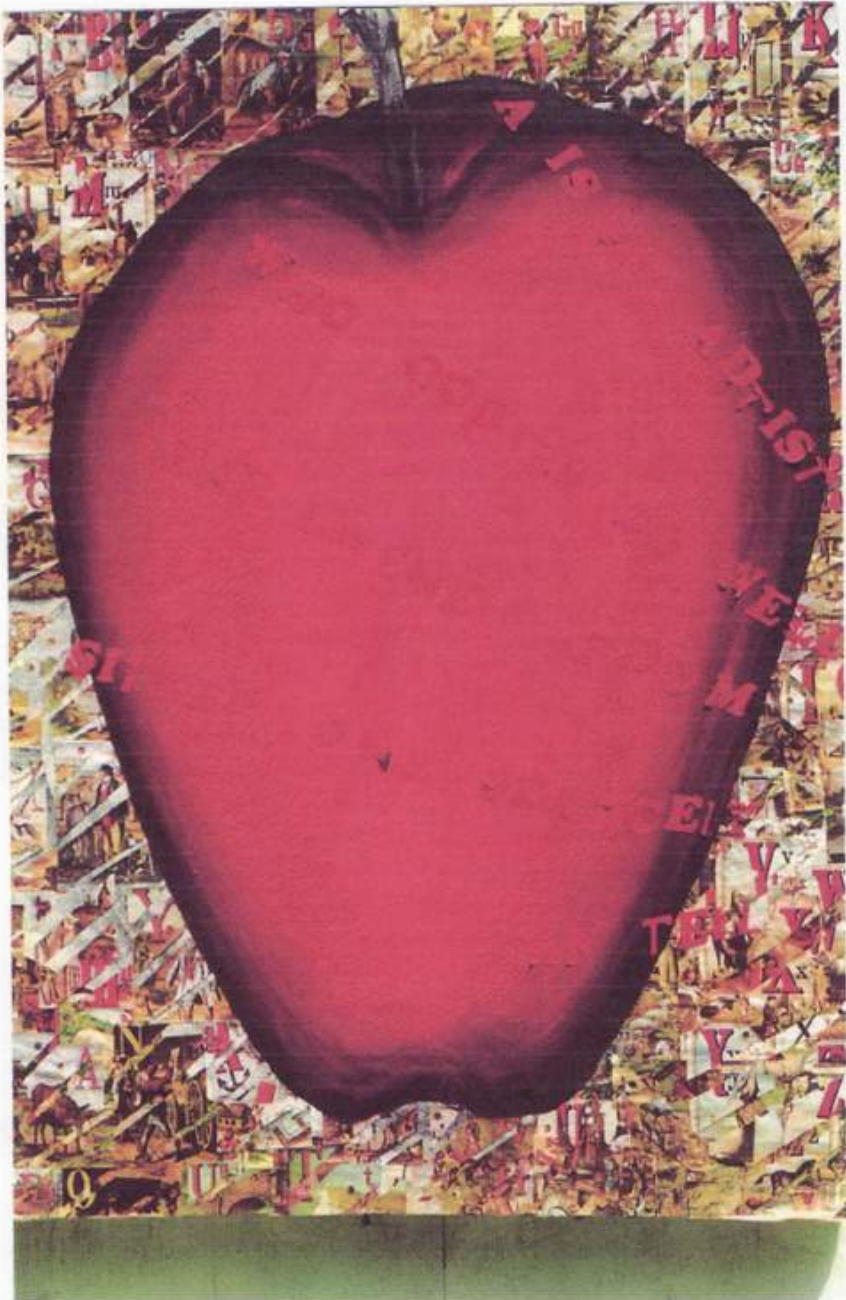
-Julie Kim



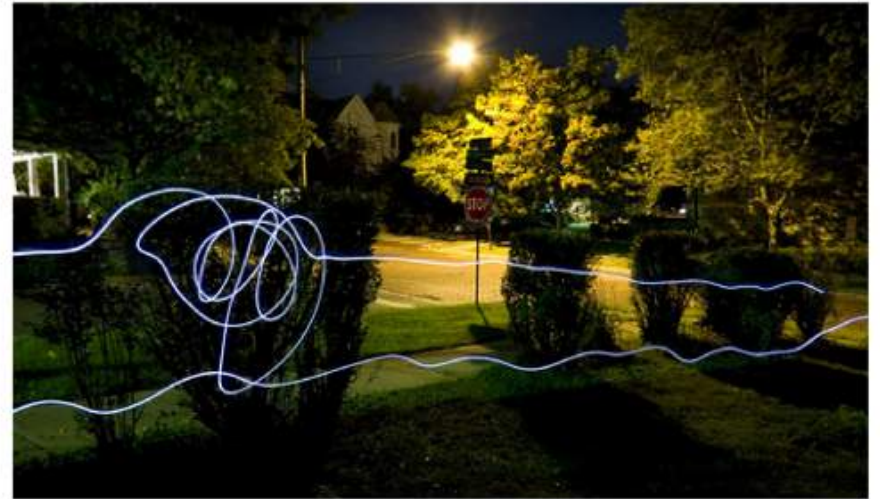
-jocelyn gotlib & ilana goldzer
www.fort-art.net



-sara schneider



-Dana Boutin



- Geoffrey S. George



-Stephanie Williams



-Christopher Peplin

street corner missionary blues



I've been making pocket-size replicas of myself to pass out to the true believers.

- Liza Frolkis
art by Geoffrey S. George

the last time i saw david

Dad is slicing apples,
pressing a blade into each round, scarlet body
like a madman scouring
for core
and says—

You know,
apple seeds have arsenic in them.
A blink
and then a smile.
Eating some once in a while
is good for you.

A delicate poison,
you are,
up to the steaming brim
with strychnine grins.

The toxin detail
was probably a lie,
much like everything else
he ever told me
about life,
how he'd never leave my mother,
and the fated rib I came from—
putrid skin-wrapped sausage
that it was.

These days,
older,
I wonder how many Red Delicious kernels
it would take to erase me, too,
and push the both of us
into memory,
returning to the earth and air
where this and all stories begin,
with something about apples
and sin.

forty

-Caitlin Cowan

prague evening

There was an old beggar changing his clothes in front of a sun-drenched rose patch; he was wearing white long underwear even though it was hot and the air was full of flies and his shoes panted like floppy red-tongued dogs on the hot gravel ground. He smiled at me apologetically as I walked by the blinding flowers. Then he snapped his suspenders, rolled a cigarette and set out for the bridge where the fat spiders feast and the tourists kiss each other next to the blind accordion player who doesn't know his fly has been unzipped for most of his life. I won't tell him either

-Zach Lupetin

41.



out of habit

1

Bit my tongue again today. The third time today, the fifteenth time this week, the fifty third time this month. Keeps coming out of nowhere like the lint in my belly button, like hiccups, like hives, like the extra step that jumps out at me, making me fall on my face, like you. But sometimes the tongue bite is more of an unconscious desire in one crisp throbbing bite.

2

Bit my tongue again today. It was sharp and quick; sprinting all the way through my body, cart wheeling through my baby veins, landing in the black hole in my stomach. The blood tasted of raw meat and hot pain and your sweat and my tears. This time I didn't taste real blood, just a ghost.

3

Sometimes memories make more sense than real life. Float in: a car-ride conversation with my dad on the subject. He advocates for tongue biting. My dad has a way of cutting straight to the point. You have to, he said, eyes narrowed in on the road, just learn to bite your tongue. I can't. Fingers braiding seatbelts. It's too hard. The act of withholding, or the physical act of biting; I couldn't figure out which was harder in my mind. Is my dad suggesting that literally chewing on my own tongue could somehow save me? You just have to do it, he repeated.

42.

on reading anais nin

4

I did it. On came the onslaught of daggerish words, of insults, of criticisms, of irrational chains of thought. Balanced on the edge of my mother's breakdown, I bit it hard. Clenched my jaw and locked my teeth on that fleshy tip. Dug into the pillow of my taste buds. Keep squeezing until I came to that transparent breaking point, just a little bit further and I would have tasted blood. It reminded me of how my mom used to distract me every time I tripped and burned my knee on the pavement, every time they sewed me up like a rag doll, every time they hooked me up to a sharp tube, every time I got a shot. As the shot pierced my arm, my mother would dig her French-manicured nails into the skin on the back of my hand.

This type of pain was a necessary distraction.

-Brittlyn Riley



forty-three

We must not be afraid.

With our fingertips we divest
these flowers of their blank
petals, shaped like Chinese eyes.
They crush softly. I slide
my sticky hands under
your shirt, slot my fingers
into the depressions between
your ribs. Hold you
gently, like the dry amber case
of a cicada. I drink your breath.

I want to tell you,
do not be afraid. Without roots,
you will float

-Rosa Moore

44.

We begin our story with dissonance
 The meter 5/4
 A waltz with two extra beats
 My legs lost in the autonomy;
 I can't keep my feet off of yours.

We speak lightly as linens carry the distance
 Of hushed whispers over pillows
 Through milk drowned in bran flakes, a lament
 As your hands slice notches through buttered toast
 Donning smiles between furtive kisses of the tongue:
 "Not enough milk?" to the heavily laden bowl,
 To the sleepy knowing eyes too terrified to be kissed—
 We shake heads, avert looks,
 Agree:

This is what we do.

Lips wide, stuck by the dictionary's refutes,
 These mouths are mistaken for a smiling likeness on Polaroid
 Formalities a dirty second skin: we rinse, wash, repeat;
 The grating of soaps, the ache of bare shoulders
 Revealing flesh still pink with inexperience
 Our teeth biting raw and newly fledged
 Goslings with the sharp forewarnings of flight
 Recovering in the bitter moment of the bound:

There will be no swan.

Still I sleep with eyes open scared to lose
 With one overstepped word through phone wires
 The you exposed beneath green stems
 Balanced between edifice and consternate sky
 Contemplating the modest permanence
 Of brick and mortar
 To the terrace of the sun,
 Our roots clinging terrified to the cracks between shutters
 Bracing for the static:

With mouths wide enough to swallow oceans,
 We swallow hard with lips sealed.

-Whitney Pow

because i am so easily lost

sitting here with chilly hands
 cupped and absentmindedly tracing
 edges of the page,
 moon rising like horizon fire
 smoldering into fingers of clouds,
 i feel my dandelion eyes going to seed,
 ready for some new season.

faith never comes easy for me, but
 it seems to slip into mysterious places
 peppered in my morning coffee, in strands of
 sweet grass caught between my sheets
 slips of paper stacked like
 hands pressed against me.

it is faith just to be ready for beginning
 i am used to – last lines, breath,
 reaching out at empty space—
 so beginning at all seems disjunct and
 terrifyingly unfamiliar, the sun is
 rising already and i'm still thinking of the moon
 God's electricity at my lips

but faith and i always emerge, somehow
 a line that becomes a circle, like
 intertwining fingers
 faith in this, us
 something wonderful
 coming.

-Emily Mitchell



portrait of new york

she knows her city moves when she sleeps
her bookcase shakes the trains on the
iron grooves make rhythm every ten minutes every
day and night

tonight some 'figure 5 in gold' is
screaming down some block
with the names of the dead painted on its ladder

past the Washington Park Memorial
Arch where the towers used
to be framed

we saw that shot that frame that view
in that movie about love
that was a week after we
saw Christo's gates, the color of
Buddhism, with the wind finally easing
out the creases even though it was the last day, and
there were Buddhists
outside the entrances they were praying
for peaces

-Andrew Klein
Art by Jocelyn Gotlib & Ilana Goldzer



-Alexandra Milidrag
<http://paran0idandr0id.deviantart.com>



-Tabitha Berry



-Geoffrey S. George



-Christopher Peplin



-Alexandra Milidrag



-Jenka Eusebio



-Alexandra Milidrag



-Sara Schneider



-Jenka Eusebio



the next morning i will sip my morning coffee
sugar black in cornflower cup
my back turned towards the grey white rain
of 9 am october sky

is it wrong to feel so old
faded yellow cornfields against bright blue sky
the fawn's legs poking out
i would bring it home on a red leather leash
feed it peppers and salt
whisper all my secrets
keep them safe inside soft velvet ears

oh and some poets had their mermaids
brown and blue and white against the sea shore
chasing silver dreams of sand and full curved breasts
all i want is the outside inside
a mansion of red leaves held together with mud and sun sun sun
white cloud blanket drifting six inches above ground

oh close my secrets in your ears
close them close them close them quick
i will sip my morning coffee
my back turned against grey white rain

-Megan Giddings

baghdad bedposts and tel aviv tables

Father recites to us a poetry of translated words
transfigured over the ocean made drop on drop
of syllables that will find their way by any
small crack or tear in the fabric of our boarded-up world.

This boat is sinking.

Overexposed harsh tones like exploded out
carcasses of cars, spirits of grief wander
hollowed out streets, holed in heart chambers
like bullet-riddled waiting rooms waiting for the sphinx
because we are empty of ourselves
because there is no air left to fill the
void we push our fingers into nightly
trying to keep insides from falling out or else
outsides from falling in.

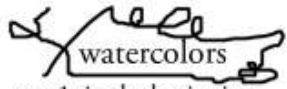
The ocean is no longer wide enough to quench this thirst.

The crash of metal drowns out resilient sounds
envelopes folding and needle through thread
I want to hear the pink of that string
stitch a constellation over our faces in the mirror.

I have been meaning to mend this hole since before it was made.

Tomorrow holds the same old news
so use that block print paper to patch the plaster
where my cousin put a fist through it last winter
it is only ever ceaseless cross border fire exchanged
found dangling from our Baghdad bedposts and
over Tel Aviv tables where we eat perpetual yesterdays'
dried out and tasteless leftovers before I go out at night
a plastic bag packed, guilt and desperation in equal parts
a prayer glows in the front window when I return
dark-clad and careful not to slam the door, I resent it
but my mother has a shrapnel heart, war-torn and heavy
and she is tired of father's school boy poems
recited to every corner and every rug in this place
to every cup of tea.

-Beenish Ahmed



part I: in the beginning,
she saw violet, magenta, and lime green shades of her sadness
(as a child she would watercolor ferociously, each color a resonance of familiarity
and explanation)
emotions would reveal their equations and sums:
the patchwork of anger and apologies, sewn together in patterns repeated infi-
nitely
(I'm sorry, please forgive me, never again)
equality of love and hate
violin strings of compassion

love was like the cracking open of walnuts to expose the fleshy shape inside and
its imprint on the shell,
midnight always felt somehow autumnal, as if leaves changed red, orange,
purple during the night and then back to green in the day
sex was sometimes mango juice dripping down cheeks or hands dipping into the
salty pacific, depending on the lover and the time of day
her period was a rare event that would overwhelm her with the infinite shades of
crimson, cranberry, crabapple red
tears were not clear but revealed the colors and textures of the soul

part II: over-stimulated,

she begins to bang her head on the wall, enjoying the blunt noise
pain without metaphor

Part III: She awakens

with blood trickling down her cheek.
As she wipes her face dry and sucks down the blood (with the belief that it
would then re-enter her bloodstream), she realizes that she had lost more than
sleep.

Sadness becomes a foggy gray;
the world is punctuated, capitalized, barren.
Love and hate are obsessions expressed only in language.
Tears are soft imprints on letters or wetness of eyelashes.
Sex is repetitive and leaves her raw and unimpressed.
Midnight is 12:00 A.M.

-Iris Brilliant

the city explodes

The city explodes
in your camera lens

and I'm caught
a silhouette
in streaks of white light

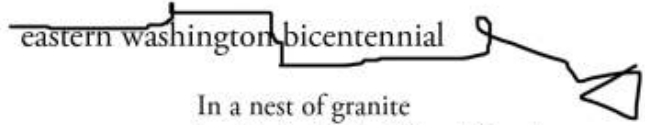
street lamp stars
shine and fall and
rest in my hair:

did you know
this is how I want to be
remembered
as rain drops refract light
into soft explosions?

you just smile.
And
the shutter closes.

-Zach Hoskins





In a nest of granite
beside the Snake River I found
(surrounded by crumpled
beer cans and broken green-and-blue
glass like smashed hardboiled eggs)

the tiny corpse of a bat.

Its furred abdomen was like
a ruined fig, its jaws set
in a painful grimace. The flesh
of its wings had shriveled away,
the leathery bones so much like

human fingers.

From the crest
of that growth of rock on the shore
I could see in panorama
the wheat-clad thighs and breasts
of massive hills; I watched
the glints on the slug-shaped,
dammed river. Two hundred
years since the passage here of Lewis
and Clark, and we still
have not found a way

to keep beautiful things from dying

102

I wake up half-delirious
and certain that the reason you exist
more densely than other people
is the campfires
and ovens and hearths
that are tucked in your elbows
and shoulders and belly.
And that when I scratch
your back, that heat rises
to your surface
along the letters
of my name.

-Audra Puchalski

-Rosa Moore

the man-eater sated

Under God's lamp I lick my lips
Gorged with gore, growing fat.
The throats gurgled gasp-songs
Before yielding the bones, the blood and bones
Now less than dust in my dank and burning
Bellyswamp. I swallowed the hot
Wound-slurry, soaked in slaughter.
I plucked the eyes, picked my teeth
With the teeth. I fixed my fang blades
In blood salted bones.

Go, wake the war-chiefs,
Gar-Dane. Who dares sleep?
Face-mauler, moor-stepper,
I never sleep while the night breathes.

-Mike Walsh



church is

waking up
Sunday morning in Detroit
on Second and Prentiss
with the windows open in
a big room with wooden floors
looking to the girl you're gonna marry
seeing her beautiful face
smelling her beautiful smell
adoring her
on this mattress in this room
in this downtown temple

Revolver,
something bluesy, hip hop
young hymns to being young
scratch themselves out
on molecules of air,
Detroit dirty air settles
in the premature lines on
young record player's face
He bops fantastic and crawls
into our Sunday morning ears
to this sound we wake
and love each other
rubbed bright from the pain of
last night; sanded clean from
puking, from going to bed still
drunk and the sky in the window
has the chiseled clarity of a
new dime

Pure holy bliss,
Church is
all your friends then
waking up and crawling
under a blanket on your
mattress altar, congratulating

you on your coming nuptials,
smoking a joint in bed,
wearing little pajamas, all writers,
all talking happily, all
such rare beauty,
Church is
the good morning splendor
of breakfast at a dive
The Steak Hut
where ghosts arrive and
hung over take their counter seat
like a tribe gathering

Church is
all that playful conversation,
all those easily loving looks
over eggs and pancakes,
the absolute romance of
snow and pigeons outside,
and everywhere
everywhere
the grey daylight
untainted by colored glass

-Lauren Keils



a letter

I remember you when you wore your wildness like jewelry—when masses of unwashed black hair poured over your shoulders like fine drapery and your face was aglow with remnants of last night's make-up. Your short skirts and stiletto shoes gave your after-school profession away, but you, never one to feel shame, would just sashay into the classroom and laugh.

You terrified me in the beginning. I remember sitting next to you during a class discussion about religion, and while the bulk of the class rushed to its defense, citing scriptures they had not read, you waved your manicured hand in protest. When you spoke, your eyes, perfectly framed by smudges of eyeliner, flared open and your entire body shook with the weight of your words. And I listened to you in awe, wishing I could have the unrestrained freedom that spilled out from your pores.

Do you remember that note you gave me in class? Romantic lines from movies swam around it in knotted, cursive lettering. You watched me closely as I read it, and I wondered if you, like the rest of the student body, had seen the word "queer" tattooed on my forehead. I did not look up into your eyes, but rather, hid my redness behind notebook. An hour later, when the bell announced the end of class, I furtively stuffed my books into my bag, hoping that I would be fast enough to avoid you. Sensing my discomfort, you scribbled your phone number on a piece of scrap paper and gingerly slipped it onto my desk.

We met sometime later at a dimly-lit coffee shop on Jefferson Street. I did not know what to say as I approached your table, and so I pulled a pack of Camels from my purse, hoping that the smoke of my cigarette would mask my nervousness. While my quivering hands searched for a lighter, you raised an eyebrow and said, "You too?" and calmly lit a match. I nodded my thanks, and, drawing the resulting cloud of smoke deep into my lungs, sat there in silence.

"So is what they say true?" you finally said, having paused for a moment to light a cigarette.

"Is what true?"

A cigarette dangling from your lips, you looked at me and casually elaborated on the question, "Well, are you a lesbian?"

The heat of my embarrassment rose up into my cheeks, and I did not speak. I am not sure how my peers discovered that which I could not admit to myself, but somehow, that word—"gay"—seemed to trap me, the way flypaper sticks to and traps an insect. And although I knew that you were different and would not look upon me with disappointment like all the others, my lips still trembled uncontrollably.

You laid your cigarette down on the ash tray and laid your hand upon my shoulder. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I was just asking...."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to over-react," I murmured sheepishly.

You stared at me for a moment, and the crease in your brow told me that you were searching for something to say. Eventually, your lips tightened into a mischievous grin, and you took another drag on your cigarette. "But you are queer, right?"

By all accounts, your strange sense of humor and your bluntness should have pushed me further into my shell. But instead, they burrowed inside of me, massaging the tense muscles of my face, my body rolling into a fit of laughter. "Yes," I said between breaths. "Yes, I am."

"Well, there you go," you coolly said, taking time to light another cigarette. "You just need to relax a little."

I looked up at you, and for the first time perhaps, we genuinely smiled at one another. I watched your pupils widen in an attempt to absorb as much light as possible, and wondered if they would ever outstretch the bounds of your irises.

My shyness had vanished with the smoke of our cigarettes, and I suddenly felt very comfortable in your presence. After a little deliberation, I finally asked you why you wanted to see me so badly.

"Oh, well," you nonchalantly replied, "you're not like everyone else in our class. You're a little crazy and strange, and I like that."

I cannot recall the rest of the conversation in such precise detail. Indeed, all I remember is that our ashtray slowly came to be flooded with cigarette butts and cinders as our discussion meandered seamlessly from topic to topic. We left Jefferson Street at two in the morning, and when I went to bed that night, I felt weightless and free.

A week or so later, you took me to your studio apartment, located on the fourth floor of a subsidized complex in the lower West side of Grand Rapids. Hollow-faced street walkers, drug dealers, and pre-op transsexuals drifted through your hallway like ghosts and faded away behind closed doors. In the months to come, we would hear strange, loud noises coming from your neighbors' apartments, and though we often theorized about what they did in the privacy of their rooms, their elusiveness failed to give us any definitive answers.

You couldn't afford heating at the time, so when you led me into your place, you apologized for how cold it was, taking care to wrap an afghan around my shoulders. What your apartment lacked in heat, it made up for in character. A lop-sided coffee-table, propped up by a half-read copy of *Anna Karenina*, was decorated with a neatly arranged assortment of perfumes and lipsticks—little bottles of your womanhood—and a pile of folded dollar bills. Your sofa-bed lay beneath the only window in the apartment, surrounded by stacks of second-hand novels and dog-eared volumes of British poetry.

I walked up to the window, your afghan trailing at my feet like a wedding veil, and peered outside. It was night-time, and so the only thing I could see was the abandoned factory across the street, illuminated by the lights of nearby buildings.

"Do you like it here?" I asked, drawing the afghan closer to my body.

"It's alright," you shrugged, "but it gets a little lonely sometimes. It's pretty easy to feel isolated here, I think."

"Well, you can always bring people over..."

"Actually," you said, pausing for a moment to move over to the window, "you're the first person I've brought over here."

"Really?" I naively responded, "Haven't your parents visited you?"

The playful grin that usually adorned your face completely disappeared. I could not tell if it was resentment or a deep sadness that resonated in your eyes, but, having sensed the intensity of your pain, I pulled you into the fold of the afghan.

"I haven't seen my parents since they kicked me out," you mumbled, your head buried in the bow of my shoulder. "They don't even know I live here."

I stroked your shoulder affectionately and asked you if you ever missed them. Your voice seemed to shiver as you spoke. "Oh, shit, I don't even know. Sometimes, if I'm angry, I feel like they're just the fucks who filled out the adoption

form and shipped me over to this country....”

You took a deep breath and continued, “...and other times, I’m so fucking scared, and I just want to call them and talk to them and be with them...”

Your voice finally broke, and thick sobs wracked your limbs. “Shh, shh,” I whispered into your ear as the warmth of your tears bled through my sweater. I wanted so badly to comfort you, but, knowing that nothing could be said, I simply held you until both of us decided it was too late to do anything but sleep. I did not want you to feel threatened by my presence, and so I tucked you into bed and nestled myself on the floor next to a pile of dirty laundry. The topic of your family never came up again, and even now, I wonder how much it pained you to reveal your vulnerability.

I returned to that apartment nearly every day in the following months, and we would sit there together, conversing and smoking before you’d have to leave for the night club. Clutching a bottle of cheap red wine that one of your co-workers had bought for you, you’d tell me stories about sleazy customers—the kind who would drunkenly follow you around in an attempt to catch your phone number. And although you had demonstrated your dancing techniques and showed me your stage outfits before (nearly all of them variations on the school girl theme), I still could not imagine you parading topless before legions of sexually frustrated 40-somethings, or maybe I did not want to imagine it.

I asked you once if you ever saw people you knew in the club. You nodded and told me that Paul Vanderlaan, the wealthiest man in our graduating class, had snuck into the night-club a week before—hoping to see you, to touch you. Upon noticing his trademark polo shirt drifting through the crowd, you feigned a stomach-ache and ran back to the dressing room where you hid yourself behind a row of feather boas hanging limply from a clothing rack. It wasn’t that you were embarrassed, you later explained, but rather, you didn’t want to give “that smug bastard” the gratification of seeing you at work. A month or so later, I received a call from you at one in the morning. Using your work phone, you had called to ask me what my history teacher looked like. Too tired to inquire about the nature of the call, I mumbled a laundry list of details into the phone, while you snickered on the other end “I knew it was him,” and abruptly hung up the phone.

Every other Friday, you’d be free from the burden of work, and so we would

spend the evening wandering through the streets of downtown Grand Rapids like blood cells pulsating through the twists and turns of capillaries. On occasion, we’d arrive at some seedy night-time destination—a 24-hour diner or a drag queen performance, perhaps. But more often than not, you would grab me by the hand and lead me to some part of the city completely foreign to a suburbanite like myself. My fears of getting hopelessly, desperately lost boiled to the surface on these midnight walks, and I’d feebly suggest that we head back towards more recognizable territory. In response, you would simply narrow your eyes, whose brown color shone more intensely beneath the glow of street lamps, and your hands would tighten their grip around mine. I think I fell in love with you on one of these late-night promenades. An insatiable hunger filled my gut that night as I watched tendrils of your black hair dance in the breeze of passing traffic. The familiarity of Division Street slowly melted into a side street I had never seen before, one lined with lavanderías and shops boasting pink quinceañera dresses. We came across a hole-in-the-wall bar sandwiched between a convenience store and a Mexican eatery, and you turned towards the door, despite my insistence that we were only eighteen and could not pass for twenty-one.

“Oh, you worry too much,” you scoffed, as we entered the bar.

Clouds of smoke and the sound of ranchera music swirled around the single room of the bar, and a cluster of elderly men, the bar’s only patrons that night, looked up as you gravitated towards the bartender. You flirtatiously leaned against the table and asked the bartender for two vodkas on the rocks, punctuating your question with a wink. The deep wrinkles that carved out his face contracted into a sideways smirk. He chuckled as he readied two small glasses to be filled with alcohol and ice, casually mentioning the price in lightly-accented English. You slid a five dollar bill across the table, and we took our seats in the center of the bar.

We sipped our drinks and giggled about nothing as the heat of the alcohol radiated through our bodies. For a moment, you shifted in your seat and looked at the men behind us. You did not understand the language they were speaking, but their bobbing heads and wide grins told you that they were listening to the folk song playing on the jukebox. The man in the far corner seemed to be humming along and swaying to the music, and his enthusiasm for the song enchanted you.

The bottom of our drinks coincided with the end of the song, and we took care to leave a tip on the table before stumbling out of the bar in a stupor. On the sidewalk, you twirled around and hummed the music that had been playing in the bar, your arms flailing about like those of a conductor.

“Dance with me!” you demanded in a high, tipsy voice.

I obliged and slipped my fingers into your palms, still wet from nursing a glass of vodka. We wove up and down the street, colliding into street signs and fire hydrants. Purple bruises would stain our thighs the next morning, but at the time, we could not feel the brunt of our injuries and continued dancing. Dizzy from laughter, I eventually collapsed into your arms. But, in an attempt to lift my spindly legs off the ground, you tumbled over onto the pavement, taking me down with you. Unable to get up, we lay there for a moment, our ribs heaving with delight. After pushing ourselves up off the ground, we walked back to your apartment, our arms locked around each other’s shoulders.

I looked at an aerial picture of Grand Rapids earlier this evening and saw this history, our history mapped onto it—coffee shops we frequented, roads we drove down. There are so many streets and neighborhoods that we never had the chance to explore and claim as our own, but I suppose we managed to slice a good portion out for ourselves nevertheless.

I am painfully aware that we have not seen each other since I left for college a few years ago. We exchanged contact information before I left, but distance has a way of suffocating communication. Indeed, I have often sat down with the express purpose of writing you a letter, but so much time has passed that I never quite know what to tell you. And this is how the surface of my stationery remains perpetually blank.

The woman in your last letter seems so radically different from the girl I knew in high school, and I wonder what you look like now that you have found a pretty boy to settle down with. Perhaps now you comb your hair into a taut bun every morning, perhaps now you have thrown away your red lipstick in favor of a more subdued pink, perhaps now you wear A-line skirts and sensible shoes to your respectable office job.

Perhaps you are tamer now, but I hope your eyes still burn with the lights of the city.

-Jane Cope

a world closed off and secret

A crowded room. Four rows of folding chairs and people in them as if it's a party, but hardly anyone talks, and no one laughs, except the mothers-in-law who avert eyes and try to smother the sound of amusement in the black of their scarves. There are two doors on side-by-side walls that people go into and out of one at a time, the women then the men.

Every movement creates a wave of heat that washes through the small room, so he tries not to move and tries not to breathe. He doesn't want to be faulted for the discomfort of those around him. He doesn't want to be at fault. He thinks he is at fault.

His wife sits beside him. She's all wrapped up in black now, with flowers of red stitches on the sleeves. Her eyes are full of black kohl and last night when she cried it stained her tears so that they fell down her face in dark rivers. He thought it was beautiful, the way that inky sadness poured from her, drawing lines like calligraphy on the glowing parchment of her face. He thought there must be an ocean within her made from the glittering black ink of all the things she could say or feel. Then the words of the Prophet entered his mind like old guests familiar with their surroundings. This time they said that if all the oceans were to turn to ink, there would still not be enough of it to write all the praises of Allah. He thought then, even if the night sky turned liquid and the oceans black, even then there wouldn't be enough to write all the words of her beauty—Astaghfir'Ullah, he shook his head and asked forgiveness for this was just the sort of blasphemy he could no longer avoid.

He had never known life could exist so near to divinity until the glories of his wife were revealed to him, more frequently, he thought, than the message of Allah to his messenger. So he couldn't keep her praises from finding way into his thoughts and if a bomb fell on him now, if a bullet pierced his chest he would die in this sin—the most grievous one to place something above Allah the Most High, to offer someone a seat beside His golden throne in your mind. A believer must always consider the end, to remember that it could be there just around the corner, or at the bottom of a glass, so as not to live life in vain, to let be wasted or worse, ruined. Now he understood why the Muslim world was always at war. When a man walks side by side with his own death, there like a shadow sewn to the heels and dragging, it's not so scary to dive into it if he's walked the straight path. But even if death there as a shadow sewn to the heels and dragging like weight one can veer off course, it's possible to feel your headed straight but end up someplace different entirely.

Now the shrill cry of a memory tore through his mind opening a wound just congealed—last night she screamed. She cried. She collapsed into a pile of dark cloth. He watched from the shadows as she cried into herself silently for hours, a rippling pile of fabric. She was quiet then, but her voice played loud in his mind for hours, echoing and constant. He took it in, he watched her in those hours, in that dark room. He stood and watched until he couldn't tell where her shadow ended and where her body began. So many things converged within him and around him in that instant, it seemed as if everything came rushing together with colliding force. All of those things that couldn't come together in life, the two of them, their separate walled up parts—so he knew then what he had to do, although he paced the halls for the rest of the night, into the room then out, in and out, in and out.

This morning when she awoke, rising from the pool of dark cloth, he was there, standing over her. The nightmare still surrounded her, it clawed at her voice when she spoke, the dark looked like scars down her face. "What? What do you want now? You give me nothing, not the thing I want most, then you stand above me looking pitiful and pleading as if I'm the one that's stolen something from you. But you, you're the thief! You've stolen my whole life from me, forcing me into your dull misery. Now you owe me another life to replace the one you stole. This is the way of the world. A woman is slowly smothered from the day she's born, so she must create life where hers fell to nothing. It's a cruel irony that you give me neither my own life nor the life of a child to live though!"

"I want to go," he said quietly. The words so still and small she had to squint to make sure they were there, glints of light on his lips.

"What?"

"I'm ready now. Come, let us go."

"To where?" She looked at the red numbers of the alarm clock, reflecting in her red eyes that it was not yet dawn.

"To the clinic, where else?" Now he reached a hand toward her. When she didn't take it, he brought himself down to where she was, but only to help her to stand.

"But it's not safe now," she said perplexed, "The curfew, it's still in place, no?"

"No, it was removed a few days back."

"It was? Look at me, alive but dead. I don't know anything of the world I live in, not even when they are trying to stamp out our lives like cigarettes, and when they permit us to do as we please. It's safe then, for us to go?"

"Oh Layan, never will it be completely safe. But they'll either take our lives by fear or by force. Now I think it's best that we go, and pray that life will be better for our child." At this she smiled for he'd never mentioned the subject so directly before, already she felt life begin to blossom within her, upwards from the ovaries, unfolding like petals.

A doctor in the doorway with a clipboard. He's in a white lab coat, he's scratching his beard. There's movement in the chairs now, a chorus of fluctuations and sitting up straight. All eyes are held constant on the doctor, their pupils glow onto him creating something like a spotlight.

This doctor is familiar to her. She knows the graying edges of his beard that look as if the ends have been singed by flames, the folds of flesh beneath his eyes, and those hands, wrinkled and rough. But not a finger of those hands has ever touched her. Not one ever reached for her. Instead, they remained entwined and unmoving hanging down in front of him, and from his protruding lips hung questions unasked—they dangled there from invisible strings and she wished to reach out for them and with an open palm press each of them back into his mouth so she could tell him—tell him it wasn't her fault, it wasn't her who should be there with her legs hanging off the examining table. It wasn't her who had to pretend to sleep every night; pretend she didn't feel the sheets moving in bed. She's not the one who pretends there isn't another life lying beside her. It isn't her who's weak, and old and growing more into death everyday. But she couldn't tell him any of these things—she couldn't tell him what he never asked.

That afternoon when she first met with the doctor, after a waiting period of months, there were so many words boiling up inside her, a thick brew of them, dark and impenetrable. He hadn't asked of her relations with her husband, he never asked what exactly was wrong. If he'd asked of her wedding night she would've told him in even tones of something brief and shrinking back. She'd tell him of how her husband could never fill her, how what came fell outside of her, a small sick dampness on their marital bed. The thought of it stained her insides—the pool of his impotence burned deeper into her than he had ever reached, like something caustic

and sharp. But there was never any true bit of him in her, except a reaching finger like a child's game and more than once during this, so overcome with feeling she'd began to cry and he turned from her then, not knowing what more to do with her body or his own. These acidic thoughts were never far from the edge of her mind, and sometimes they crept onto her tongue, staining it black with resentment.

There was no one to pour these splatters of ink onto; she had to keep them all inside or else they would wrap her in black shame alongside her husband. These aren't things a girl can say—the language of them is one that is thought to be foreign to women, locked and secret. Even to speak of sexual acts is to be named a slut. They were in her though, those words and on her first visit home, the young bride had sat beside her mother's warmth, and in such light she thought it may be ok to tell of those dark nights. So she began, but was stopped by a cold hand, sudden and hard on the stretched canvas of her face. Her mother called her a swine and a whore for wanting so much, ungrateful for being malcontent with a husband who never raised a hand to her, a husband of good standing, a great man with a great home. Her mother then swore by God that she would sew together the girl's lips if she ever littered these bits shame in others' ears. She swore she would, and left the room. Left the girl, her daughter in a dark pile of rippling fabric.

The doctor stood before them. They watched syllables form in his mind and then pour out of his mouth, anxious like actors waiting for their cue to step forth into the theatrics of living—to step out of the wings and have their chances at life. When called up, turn by turn they will play their part, act as though are making a child, so it will seem by the end that it all happened by nature.

In their anticipation they kill their thoughts were they stand. Carve them out, half formed and not yet alive from the middle of their minds, and leave them un nourished and unborn. They stop limbs from moving for fear that any rustling sleeve or shuffling foot would smother out the sound of the doctor's words. As one collective effort, they even force the air around them to cease its retreat into their lungs. Hardly an eye is blinked. Then, a name falls off the edge of the doctor's protruding lips. A few smashed together syllables to say that now it is his turn to draw up life from within in. Now she can have her life and another one inside her too. A few smashed together syllables to silence to the rest of the room, render their thoughts as stillborns—the potential dead in their hands for this time isn't theirs. Dismayed, they fall back then, deeper into chairs and the dark corners of themselves, places unseen and murky.

. No one looks at anyone—they keep their eyes to themselves and their hopes too. There is nothing to look at. But maybe they'll be next, and maybe there will be tomorrow. And if not that, then there will always be next week, or next year. So long as there are two people, a man and a woman, and there is time, hope can exist as a small flame. The money can be gathered up again, the will, the strength too, if only there's time enough. There is nothing to look at. But maybe they'll be next, and maybe there will be tomorrow. And if not that, then there will always be next week, or next year. They are two people, a man and a woman, and there is time.

Now there are footsteps on the tile. The stillness of the room is dragged off with a man who steps through the door the doctor ushers him into. It's on the same wall as the one the doctor steps in and out of, but this door hasn't been opened since they've been there. The room revealed is small and cramped. The doctor tells the man to relax, tells him there's no pressure in this. None at all, but there is, there is, and it hangs down on him like a sandbag of guilt, an ocean's weight of what must be done now. Now. And all he's handed to perform this task is one small clear cup in which to pour the entirety of his grief and guilt and need and want and need and need and guilt for what couldn't be done by any other means.

The elderly woman sitting next to the empty seat left by this man her son-in-law now giggles into the black of her scarf. She tries to stop, but she thinks of him there, doing that childish boy thing with himself in a room with one chair and one picture—a Western woman in red lace with blond hair, but the head has been cut off from this picture. Completely decapitated like the British journalists last year, a severing of the body from the mind, the brutish from the intelligent—a bag on the head, then blood, then no head at all and all of it on tape, all of it for all to see on the nightly news. But this picture isn't meant for so many eyes, the face completely censored—rendered unrecognizable as if the blond of her hair is not fit to be viewed except the ends of it on her shoulders, as if it's a government secret, unsafe for public knowledge, treason. Her body can be seen, the overflowing curves of it, the seamless cream skin of it, but not her head. She's no human anyway, just the idea of one, far off and difficult even to imagine, so it's understandable, almost that this piece of her would be missing. Like a dream or a fantasy with some parts hard to recall or picture in defined lines. Only the essentials in plain view—she's there but she's not. He's there but he's not. He's there alone, with only himself to hold and nothing else. A cold metal chair and part of a picture—he thinks of his wife, but she's not allowed in the room, and hardly now can he call her into his mind, especially with this woman, this white-bodied woman in red

lace already there, adulterous and proud, overflowing from her bra, overflowing from the picture, off of the wall and pouring into his mind, over his body, a silky white sin.

Then suddenly he knows why she has no face—so she can't watch his act, so she won't recognize him after its done and over. Ambiguous and unknown, they're trying to make it all ambiguous and unknown, distant. With no eyes to condemn what isn't ever seen. So no one will know what happened in this room, what happened with this decapitated picture of a woman. The act of his body with her image. It's starting to all make sense now. It's starting to seem easier now. No eyes will ever give away the secret of a child made alone, in phases and steps, forced out of his body and then planted into hers. A strategy of preservation, to live on despite all, like lines on a map and the scheme for war—an armed retreat, fire at will, every man for himself. Now he feels something rise within him, now he brings his hand to it, now he begins the toil, a child's game made into a man's crime, out of sight and shaming. And is it wrong that if this baby is made it will be made with what came from the cut-off-head picture of a woman and not the warm hands, body, breasts, whispers of his wife? Their child made in sin, a sin, a bastard. And the sin of what should be between two, the sin of selfish pleasure. And the whole time the headless woman in red, the mother-in-law-giggles, the cold metal chair, and the rows of them outside, his wife sitting in one praying to God he'll fill the cup like he never filled her, wanting so badly for it to happen, wanting, wanting, and praying, ya Allah, ya Allah. Then the image before him transforms. He sees the red lace now move like blood on the woman's body, it starts to swirl in his mind and suddenly it seems she's wrapped in it, the white ghost of a woman, the headless corpse, a wash of red, a pattern of splashes and drops. Dirty dead blood like a murderer, naked and unashamed. Dirty blood and dirty is what now comes from him in slight drops, white like her body, smooth and white as a sin in a closed off room with a mother-in-law giggling in the next. The smooth white sin will become the skin of his child, and the eyes. The skin and the eyes, and the bones of this child that he must provide, that must be forced into his wife with the end of a needle into an egg. Born from what couldn't be made, but born despite all. Despite all, despite decapitated picture, despite cold metal chair, despite censorship, sanctions, despite call to prayer, call to arms, curfews in the night and bombs in the day and eruptions in streets—

Then, a quiet explosion of smooth white and fast, he tries to catch the explosion in a cup. He moves it to the edge of his body as if it is the warm

body of his wife, as if this time, perhaps he would have been able to pour into her instead of the it, creating something right and good and shared. But just as all of these doubts almost cease to erupt from him, there is a sound—a loud crash, the buckling over of something massive and strong. The ravaging blast of breaking things, and the ones that crumble, wooden beams and plaster walls. A shower of powder that seems heavenly and soft, falls down from the fault lines created in the building.

He is conscious of the eruption of white from walls, the breaking of the building's bones and tearing of its skin. He holds himself close, he holds the cup even closer, as if it is now his firstborn. He covers the top of the cup like a baby's soft head, to keep the building from falling into what just fell from him. He feels guilty now for what is done in private—sins are just the things that can't be talked about, that can't be done for all to see. This too, now, this is a sin for which he'll be punished, but a sin that will grow to do some good in the world, to make his wife expand with life, if he can only open the door, but the handle won't turn, won't move, covered in inability, yanking on impotent doorknob, he shouts and screams, trapped inside the small room, screams echo back from the waiting area, he thinks of his wife, how she must be so shocked to know, so terrified to hear. But then he falls, a strike to the head, then a defeat from within, the walls fall beside him, and there he lies among something like a family, the decapitated woman in blood and lace, his child in a cup, his own life in his hands.

An explosion from above and from within. The falling over of bodies and the tearing apart of hope. Blood pours from all those waiting to see life made. Twenty some deaths, and twenty thousand more dead before birth— all in the ovaries, all over the room, a massacre of what could have been but never was.

-Beenish Ahmed



patagonia

Not too long ago I found myself in a small Patagonian town, working in the Teatro Español selling tea, wine, and crumb cakes in the lobby. The town was nestled comfortably in a thin, green valley that stood out from its desert surroundings like glaze on an earthenware pot. Close by was the ocean, lending to the desert wind a distinct saltiness that was neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

In front of the theater was a small plaza whose air was swept by the constant rustle of weeping willows. It was a place for students, street vendors and gypsies who would tell your future in exchange for a single cigarette.

I was out there one day, looking to buy several pairs of earrings and summer shawls, when I overheard the conversation between two students from the nearby university. They were looking at a young gypsy as she cradled a sleeping baby within the crook of her darkened arms.

"Do you remember last autumn when we watched the... damn what was it... the Aleph... I think it was the alchemist who said it."

"What?"

"In that short space between birth and death, there is nothing but our own dreams keeping us from falling through the cracks of the universe," he recited.

A pause. "Well, tell me what girl fell for that line?"

"You're such an ass sometimes. I swear you're smarter than you act, at least I hope you are."

"Nothing wrong with playing the fool."

Then I remembered. During intermission, there was a power outage. It was autumn, when the Aleph had its last showing. I'm sure it was them, the two young men in wrinkled suits who requested that I set up candles in the windows to give the place a more...dramatic atmosphere because, they reasoned, this is a theater after all. Their idea had piqued the interest of numerous other guests who were still half-dreaming and bewitched by the intensity of the first act. It had received a standing ovation.

Yet I was reluctant. "If it catches fire..."

"It won't catch fire, we promise."

"Oh indulge them," said a woman in a fur coat who was leaning against the bar. Sipping a glass of wine, she closed her eyes, though it felt as if she

were looking straight at me, observing the scene from behind her blue-shadowed eyelids. "The land of dreams seems to be underpopulated nowadays," she added, lighting a cigarette which in the darkness glowed like a firefly whenever she inhaled.

I handed the candles and matches to the students who took them with a peculiar yet fitting reverence, as if they had been entrusted with the most gravest of missions. Gothic even, I thought as the room began to dance with shadows and strange talk. The scripts and gestures of a night at the theater.

-Jenka Eusebio



The RC Review would like to thank:

Lana Kanitz, The RC Executive Board, Everyone who donated things to the Rummage Sales, Everyone who bought that junk from the rummage Sales, East Quad, Cats, Lainie Kokas for the wonderful cover shot, Whitney Pow for the spectacular cover and table of contents, Jane Cope for the collages, Zombies, Caitlin Couture for being a good, hidden grammar editor, Pam Stacey for being a good, seen and be seen Grammar Editor, Kurt Preston, Audra Puchalski for editing poetry, Sara Schneider & Iris Brilliant for double-teaming Art, Orson Welles, Jane Cope for Editing the Prose, the cast of Dynasty, Whitney Pow for editing layout, Zach Hoskins, Cole Merkel, and Joe Varkle for proving that every RC Review meeting isn't a giant slumber party, Everyone who submitted their fantastic art, prose, poems, and photography, if we could afford a bigger magazine you would all be printed, Audra Puchalski for the posters, Megan's Mom for always making us baked goods, Woody Guthrie, Warren Hecht and Ken Mikolowski for their suggestions and the rest of the Residential Creative Writing Program for their continual support, Kolossos Printers, Megan Giddings for being Editor In Chief, and anyone else who helped or inspired this year's RC Review



If you're interested in joining the 2007-2008 RC Review, please contact:
Audra Puchalski: apucha@umich.edu