

A Neutrality of Sandwiches



Ceci n'est pas un sandwich.

Notes:

Daniel Toronto, whose piece is featured on page 126, is an [RC](#) alum.

[Cam](#)ie Finch's "Lost in Translation" (page 124) is actually an audio piece. To hear the audio file, go to sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters and select the RC Review tab.



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Untitled

Caroline Hurd

Peer into this little piece of a fleeting forever,
Intricate, unnoticed, clinging
Stepped on and stepped on and stepped on
And living

We marvel at the mountains yet willingly behead them,
Take lives because it is convenient,
Or we like how their fur brings out the color of our eyes.

We see only what we're looking for
And value only what we can possess.

We have made a gash; let's not let it scar.

Disrespect

Jean-Pierre Seguin

For Sale

2.7 Acres
Vacant

but there are trees



Looking Out

Olivia Kinker

ZERO

Caroline Hurd

We all start in the same spot: zero years old. We are each born with it – that glisteningly fresh oval for which all those surrounding us, all those who pour love in, make space. Then our moments begin to run and we start to fill that blank canvas, painting our own patchwork of memories. What was once a zero becomes a masterpiece as our negative space dwindles and the wrinkles in our skin map out the places we have been and the stories we have written. My once-zero is full of enthusiasm and anxiety and potential.

Full of first tries, second chances and third strikes. Full of homemade Slovenian food in the state that no one seems to care about. Black and white photographs that squeeze precious anecdotes into 4x6 rectangles. Crisp early mornings and blueberry muffins and socks that occasionally match.

My once-zero is a work-in-progress.

I call them once-zeroes because that's really the only certain and uniting factor about them. Our lives travel like a thousand ping pong balls across an irregular surface: unpredictably. Each of our once-zeroes driven by our own hope or desperation or perhaps simply the fact that it may require effort to go in any other direction.

Sometimes we let our spheres of life overlap with others. Temperature, pressure, public schooling... or any other thing that

makes us condense. We touch, and our spheres push together, flattening a little at the impact, taking up a little space in each other's lives. Until they're not; until their presence is not taking away but giving. Until the once-zeroes have overlapped and one can adventure (with caution, with consent, with compassion) into another's once-zero. We become strong in our vulnerability and find that independence and interdependence are not mutually exclusive. We learn big words, like "plenipotentiary" and "soteriophobia" and even bigger words, like "love" and "trust." Our once-zeroes can get a little bit cracked or a little bit stepped on, but heal stronger. We find people who help us enjoy our journey and achieve our goals and we help others do the same. We build something bigger, each of our once-zeroes a dot in a pointillism painting. We call it a community. It's held together by the places where we overlap and distinguished for the diversity found in the places where we don't.

Each dot in the painting is not of one color but a full personality, ever growing. Each seemingly so small until you are overlapped with it and realize that it is sparkling like the sky on a summer night from the shoreline of northern Michigan. Every once-zero is different, intricate, dense with complicated, beautiful imperfections, but not full, never full.

We are a community of once-zeros, each with an original, work-in-progress canvas, bumping and overlapping and inspiring and learning. We are not here to find the crayons to color within the lines. We're here to draw our own.

Comsmological Questions

Darian Razdar

Life.
Here
spent in
a realm of
questions, asking: what
it could possibly mean to be
in some grand universe, totally expansive, though
unfathomably dense? — the workings of heat, pressure,
Time on the dark, carbon ore of a hominid past.
The rough diamond speck of human
civilization —
lowly
yet
All.

How
Does
man fit
into the
cosmological
continuance, a kerosene
lamp — burning with chemical longevity — a flame
which will surely be smothered? Why, here, care at all?
Man seeks in science and art that which
may explain, sustain

the workings
of life:
great,
whole.

A
blind
Homo
sapiens
opens its hands and grasps
a world aching to be piqued — for
theories, beautiful sequences of nautilus
spirals to be wielded as Tang Dynasty brushes
and the cephalopod ink, black,
thick, to calligraph
characters
mystic
and
real.

A
space,
cosmos
aching and
full, and with questions
abounding, laid naked, sprawling.
Packaging that which is fantastically complex

into queries, into visions and hypotheses —
when reposed, lie with evolu-
tionary promise.

However:
active,
with
All.

Tell
me
not: that
the nature
of questions, and Nature,
is not a constructive inter-
play of all works of beauty, that questions posed by The
Persistence of Time are not as divine as those bared
by the Pillars of Creation.
All things comingle;
And realized,
at once,
bare
life.

Abstract

This work was created out of my belief that the reason questions are posed, even in different areas of knowledge—art and science, for instance—are uniform throughout the human experience. Hence, these separate areas are related in that fact that they are used, in beautiful ways, to answer the questions posed by human existence. On the scientific level of this piece, I used the first few integers of the Fibonacci sequence to determine the number of syllables of each line. Thus each stanza progressed according to the Fibonacci sequence, with a meter of 0-1-1-2-3-5-8-13-13-8-5-3-2-1-1-0.

June's Flower Garden

Kathryn Carethers

“June, I just don't know about it.”

She shakes her head and charcoal vanilla hair blocks her face.

“That garden won't survive.”

She picks me up, my cheek against her clavicle.

I know about it - she'll bring life.

The outside is a sea landscape of drought and death.

She says no words, but she speaks remedies of life.

I am afraid she'll leave me as she floats away.

She exists in waves of salt water and aloe.

There is only an etiolated calla lily in my hand and

I cry.

My tears won't bring her life.

Mind the Gap

Cammie Finch

mind the gap
take a seat
two over from the breeze of the sliding doors
if you're sensitive to the cold
best seat in the house for people-watching
bring a novel to stay inconspicuous
Dickens is best
no one messes with the Dickens
five years of trial and error
take notes
packed sardines vacate with the mid-morn rush
the emptiness is overwhelming
yet the smell still lingers
late night musk tingles with the acidity of alcohol
even onions drown in their tears

a man in an overcoat trips over his beard
he sits in the flickering back corner
lighter at the ready
hungry eyes, scanning the second seat
scanning you
Dickens, raise him up
you are occupied

please sir i want some more
the slop from the soup kitchen
dribbled down his shirt front
penny, dime
he's going to ask you
they always do
finger glides over minted coins
sweat boils under your surface
should have left the scarf at home
two more stops
approaching the bright blue dot on the maze
the train sighs for you
an exasperated relief

you are here
smooth the wrinkles away
distress evaporates
like the smoke from his cigarette
the sturdy sentinels stand shoulder to shoulder
brick-like, to protect the platform
your impatience is the key to open sesame
in the silence, he taps your shoulder
muscles contract in a single spasm
like the Dickens, your Dickens
squeezed between his oily palms
His fingerprint stamps the cover
A barcode of human generosity
"Your book, ma'am.
Mighty fine taste, you got there."
no words can sincerely accept his gift
only a smile

nodding is chivalrous
and a good day to you
the doors separate at his signal
he parts without turning back
a trail of two citizens
entangled in a friendly knot, severed by fate
his compliment is the only light
and clings to the walls
like the forest of ads luring you to bad pizza joints
and the occasional job application

great expectations
all aboard
reciprocation now
is the only deed left to be done
the omniscient voice from above:
Gather all personal belongings
and mind the gap...
you rebel
smile angelically and cross the threshold
as Dickens takes a seat,
two from the door so as not to feel the breeze.



Josephine Dykstra

Michael Flynn

FORTINBRAS IS THERE

SEQUEL TO ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD
SIDEQUEL TO HAMLET
A TRAGEDY-COMEDY-HISTORY IN TWO ACTS

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play is notoriously difficult to perform. The only known performance was in October 1970 in London, and the entire cast and crew was killed, maimed or psychologically traumatized. Casual thespians need not audition – only the strong can survive this play.

FORTINBRAS IS THERE may be performed by as few as two and as many as forty actors.

This play contains many elaborate and very specific visual set pieces. Budget and time constraints are understandable, but a significant portion of the experience will be lost unless an attempt is made to recreate those visuals as faithfully as possible.

This play is also very pyrotechnics-heavy, so make sure there are firefighters on hand during any performances or tech rehearsals.

Part of this play's difficulty is the intensity of both the dialogue and facial acting. The lead actors must be able to deliver sophisticated lines and monologues convincingly, while at the same time expressing various nuanced emotions with no dialogue at all.

If one hopes to even come close to recreating the true atmosphere as envisioned by the author, much time is required. If your theatre company is unable to extend the amount of rehearsals past the traditional three-month period, it is recommended that all actors abandon any social activity or semblance of their lives for the duration

of the production. The shortest (and only) performance ran for four-and-a-half hours, not including intermissions, stops and restarts.

Finally, the play contains graphic violence and explicit sexual content, so any actors with a problem with that should ~~go fuck themselves~~ not audition.

My utmost respect to anyone who attempts to perform this monstrosity.

-Author Name Withheld

ACT ONE

LIGHTS UP.

Enter FORTINBRAS.

Exit FORTINBRAS.

BLACKOUT.

ACT TWO

LIGHTS UP.

Enter FORTINBRAS.

Exit FORTINBRAS.

BLACKOUT.

END.

Love Drunk

Cammie Finch

The young man inched back into the cool of the leather chair. When he leaned his pale head against the cushion, the liquid sloshed to the starboard of his brain.

“My head. How do I make it stop?” he groaned.

“Still not feeling too great, huh?” asked the spritely girl sitting on the couch facing him. “Oh, it would’ve just killed me to leave you alone after all that happened last night.”

He recalled going to a party at the club with his buddies. She said she was friends with a few of the guys’ gals. But everyone knew she had invited herself because he was going to be there. Of course, there had been drinking. To him, that’s all that there had been.

The five o’clock church bells chimed with a shattering violence. Five o’clock marked Cocktail Hour. Though today, it felt all wrong. His hands jumped to his ears and tried to muffle the echoing clang. The pounding in his head intensified. It hurt too much to speak, so he didn’t.

There were more pink accents decorating his apartment than he had remembered. A pink shawl draped over the sofa. Magenta pumps lined up ruler-straight beside the door. Even his nose was invaded with a reek of pink. Drink responsibly. Possible side effects: headaches, drowsiness, pink.

The girl picked up the dropped conversation with ease. She was good at filling space. “I hope you don’t mind that I woke you up a tad before cocktails. To get your bearings. Grogginess and gin don’t mix too well.”

“I didn’t think there was some magical time when cocktail

hour is to begin. Isn’t that sort of up to us?” he pointed out.

“Oh, how I love the way you think! Should I make you a drink now?” she said. “You like Manhattans, right?” She jumped up to tend to the liquor cabinet.

“No!” His words boomed, unexpectedly firm. “What kind of genius ever thought that you could cure a hangover with more drink?”

The girl sunk sadly back down onto the sofa. She wanted to give him what he wanted, whatever that might be.

“Was I really that bad last night?” he asked. All he wanted was the cold, hard truth.

“Gosh, we were all pretty wild. It’s hard to say that anyone was the worst. It definitely wasn’t you though.” His apathetic face told her that last night’s incidents were yet to be stored in his mental inventory. The girl continued to set the scene of her epic. “Well, your suit suffered a bit.”

“Oh no, that marvelous one? With the brass cufflinks and silk trim?”

She nodded. “Yes, I’m afraid so. The pants just ripped right down the seat.”

“What a joke I must have been. The fool of the party, I must say.”

“Poo, poo. You were a hoot,” she consoled. “But the girls were so jealous of me that I got to dance with such a handsome man. Now there’s a man to marry if I ever saw one, they told me. What a great sense of humor he has.”

But he was still stuck on the pants. “Have you any idea why my suit is ruined? Pants don’t just rip by themselves!”

“I mean, there was the little scuffle with Dean Maltzby. But we got him calmed down after a little while. Don’t you worry, I don’t think the other tables noticed the commotion.”

Had he received a blow last night? He realized that if Dean had socked him, the black eye should appear about now. He hadn’t a chance to consult the mirror yet. No indeed, for that would require

him to find his feet. And he was in no condition to take on such a task at this hour.

"Dean has a good sixty pounds on me, at least! Good God, what did I do to him?" he asked.

"I wouldn't say you did anything at all. You were very much just minding your own business," she said. "I think Dean may have overreacted a bit. He tends to do that when he thinks someone is messing around with Laurie."

"Are you saying that I was flirting with Laurie?" Had he kissed her? Was Laurie the one with the green eyes? He was pretty sure he found green eyes attractive. Suddenly, he found himself hoping he really had kissed her. He scooted eagerly to the edge of his seat, head still sloshing.

"No, anyone watching would have known that you were obviously fooling around." She was quick to respond. "But you know how Dean can get. Laurie was fine. She only seemed a teensy bit annoyed that you had poured your whisky all over her dress. But she'll get over it."

"Poured whisky all over her dress?" he said.

"Yeah, what a waste of perfectly good Scotch," she said. "You just said something about how plain her white dress looked. And then you just sort of...tossed it."

He envisioned the incident to have looked like an egg toss gone wrong. An abstract splatter of yolk on an immaculate canvas.

"Laurie wasn't expecting it at all! It went all over her lap, her shoes. Some even got in her hair. But I helped her clean up, like a good friend should. Nothing a little bleach can't get out," she said.

Then she leaned forward and whispered, "In my opinion, you did her a favor. It was quite a hideous dress to begin with, if you ask me."

"Good golly. What should I do?" He didn't want Laurie to think he was a prig or anything.

"She'll be fine. She's probably forgotten all about it. I wouldn't worry too much about the dress if I were you."

"Okay. If you say so." He felt his muscles begin to relax. You give in too easily, bud, he cursed himself.

"How are you feeling now? The same?" the girl asked. "How I wish there was something I could do for you."

He knew he should feel lucky. She was the type of girl who knew how to take care of a man. She had been for a steady two years now. But she was like alcohol, with an inexplicable addictive charm (the kind all vices have) that sobered his resistance. The kind of fun you had on Saturday nights, regretted in the morning, and then repeated the next night anyway.

"Be honest. Did I do anything else of note last night?" he asked. "Because I rather you tell me before I read it in the crime report."

"Not at all!" she laughed. "Last time I checked, it's not considered a crime to steal the show if the audience really wants you. We couldn't understand what you were singing. But I don't think the band minded too much. You were obviously more entertaining."

For a second, he felt better. Compliments did wonders to a broken man.

"Though, my dear, I'm sorry, but the threat about stabbing the waiter may have been a bit too much," she quickly added, because she hated to criticize him.

"Stab him...with what?" he asked.

"I believe you said something like, 'Give me one more poisoned peanut and I'll stab you with your own fork, right in the-'"

"Oh my god." He closed his eyes. Brain tingling. "What a night. It's a wonder I didn't get thrown out," he said, jokingly.

"You did! You don't remember? Right out on the street even. It was just like one of those radio crime programs!"

"Come on, you're pulling my leg now. People don't get thrown out for threatening waiters."

She answered quickly, "Oh, that's not why you were thrown out. Everything had been going really well until-"

"I don't consider almost getting arrested 'going really well,'" he said.

"No really, it was turning out to be a very pleasant evening. That is, until you became quite adamant that the gent across the room had stolen his shoes from the Japanese emperor. You marched over to him, and demanded that he give them back. Imagine that! Stealing shoes from the Japanese emperor!" She fell back into the cushions, laughing.

"But I don't know what the Emperor's shoes look like," he said.

"You sure seemed like you knew last night," she said. "The way you grabbed at his leg?"

But he had stopped listening. Were Emperor shoes the sort with the little tassels on the top?

"...then he yanked you by the collar..."

If he couldn't remember what Emperor's shoes looked like, how could he have attacked the man last night?

"...and then he shoved you out the door."

"But I made it out before the police showed up, right?" he said, checking the facts.

"With my help," she reminded him. He'd be lost without me, she thought with a smile.

"There was this nasty little curb that managed to snatch at your foot, and my, did it yank you hard. I don't think I've seen a fish flop as much as you did."

"My hip did hurt when I got out of bed today." He rubbed his side just to make sure the pain was still there. It was.

"But let's get to the taxi ride," she sped ahead. "Wasn't it the greatest?"

He felt the pressure to respond, but he didn't know what to say. Had he ridden in a taxi last night? For all he knew, he could've grown wings and flown back to the apartment.

"It was swell, I guess." His fictive words were just the fuel that the girl's engine needed.

"No, it was the loveliest!" she gushed. "It seems I'm one of those girls who has always dreamed of a fairytale proposal. And now it's

finally come true!"

Proposal? Was she implying that the taxi driver had asked for her hand last night? I must have been ridiculously soused to have missed such an occasion, he thought.

"Well, I think a congratulations must be in order then," he said, slurring his words together. He raised his hand to make a toast, and wished desperately he was cupping a nice frosty glass. Why hadn't he asked her to make a drink again?

"Oh, sweets. I just never really knew that you felt that way about me all this time." She paused in an enchanted stupor to fiddle with her braid.

"You didn't know, you say?" He propped his head up on his hand, the way you might stare blankly out of an airplane window or at a TV sitcom in the wee morning hours.

"No, darling, I didn't." She hid her blushing cheeks with a demure hand. "You know what I think? I think that last night was the best day of my life."

"Sure, if you think so," he responded.

"Oh, I do hope I remember to tell everyone important about our magnificent night!" She began silently counting off her confidantes on her fingers.

He bobbed his head, which may have been in agreement to the girl or may have been because his arm slipped with a sudden shake. He wasn't so sure himself.

"Only a real man would've had the guts to speak his mind." It was about time he felt the spark, she told herself. What had it been? Two, three years now?

But I didn't say anything, he thought.

"And that's why I love you," she professed. "My goodness, I don't think I will ever tire of telling you that."

All this talk of love and taxis and telling secrets was confusing him. His parched brain wanted answers, straight up.

"I think I'll take that drink right about now," he said. Yes,

a drink was definitely in order, he thought. Strictly for medicinal purposes.

"I knew you'd come around! It'll do you good, trust me." She kissed him on the cheek, and pranced to the kitchen to retrieve the man's drink.

She came back with a tumbler filled with ice that clinked noisily against the glass. As she brought it closer, the man heard cymbals crash through tempestuous waters. A lime-shaped boat careened over the edge of the glass.

"Drink up," she smiled. He had already thrown back the glass in one gulp. The liquid's fiery sting singed and prodded as it slithered down his throat.

"Well, this has been fun, but I should really be going." He tried to get up, but the room quaked into a blur. He lost his balance and sunk back into the leather quicksand of the chair. The girl came back into focus.

"But you live here!" she balked, grasping onto anything she could think of to make him stay. He realized he had forgotten his exact coordinates, as anyone would at his level of intoxication.

"And where could you possibly have to go at six in the evening?" She couldn't imagine why anyone would leave at the peak of Cocktail Hour. "You aren't in any condition to leave either. Plus, we love each other, remember? Doesn't the taxi mean anything to you?"

Taxi: yellow, black. He knew what a taxi was.

"You must still be thirsty. I'll be right back." The girl scurried away to fiddle with the trusty liquor cabinet. A last cry to hold his attention. "Don't move. I mean it!"

I guess I can stay a little longer, the man decided. Just one more drink.

He caught a glimpse of the girl, stirring a brown liquid now with a slender silver spoon. She sure knew how to make an irresistible drink. But how much longer was he going to live this way? He knew his tolerance had reached its absolute maximum.



Nature's Lace

Cammie Finch



They Write Novels About Him

Kendall Dumas

Afternoon Lecture

Clare Higgins

His sinewed limbs stretch outwards and
his concave chest rises slowly
as it does when he lies next to his wife
under a lemon ceiling fan in a
well-to-do neighborhood
just over the hill.

A moment of clarity occurs
perfect focus
when he rubs the heel of his hand
against the chalkboard, coating it
in yellow dust. This is the truth,
held tight in his near-palm ready
for the taking: our open mouthed
grins sit poised, students a little
too enthralled by Eliot's sex life.

He climbs mountains,
wants to devour the world whole,
wishes he could suck the golden marrow
from the Colorado blue bungalow sky.
He calls us, lambs, one by one.
He soothes in tongues like rivers.
He glides on air.

His sinewed limbs stretch outwards
as I imagine they did when
he stood on the edge of that
Southern dairy field years ago, sun streaming.
Breeze whistling.

DAYS OF AWE

Ariel Kaplowitz

if i believed, i would say god blessed us with
ten days of unstoppable sunlight.

i would thank god who painted heaven
the color of gasp. i might forget

about Earth. forget our blue beam of light, forget
to thank the sycamores for growing and snails for hatching delicately

with miniature shells. i might forget to praise
the sea for slurping, for being unknown; might forget how dandelions

whisk and shout, how hydrangeas bust up purple when least
expected. i might forget to praise the human body, organs with their

membranes, bowels with their thunder. if i believed, i might not
give credit where credit is due. as great as a god could be, i thank

the wild Earth for all her offerings; i pray to mountains that turn
lavender
in dusk; pray

to leaf-cutter ants, trickling home after day is done.

We All Have Our Vices

Maria Robins-Somerville

I empty coffee pots into flowerbeds
fill my mug with sunlight.

pineapple

Anonymous

The guys that really wind me up
Are the ones that are all
“Can I have a blow job please?”
But oh no, if I ask to be eaten out
“I don’t do that”
Where is the justice?
Because cum is such a delicious taste
“I ate pineapple today”
Yes, that pineapple made all the difference



Esha Biswas

Fire Enlightenment Ray!

Jeffrey Sun

- March 22, 2028: A sect of rogue techno-Buddhists rob a bank in San Jose. They meet no resistance.
- March 23: Every security guard at the bank quits. They cite reasons ranging from a desire to focus on self-discovery to the inherent lack of compassion in the capitalist financial system.
- March 25: Another bank is robbed by the same group. This time police arrive on time, but they do nothing to stop the robbers.
- March 26: Police interviews begin. Review of tapes reveal police who had been present at the robbery asking witnesses question such as, "What is the absence of nothingness?", "If I cast a line into an empty lake, am I fishing?", and "If you made any machine that wasn't a time machine, wouldn't it get left behind?"
- March 28: Video footage reveals the techno-Buddhists shooting security guards with some sort of energy weapon. The situation becomes a national fascination.
- April 2: After three more banks are robbed, a reporter tracks the techno-Buddhists down in Oregon and conducts a video interview. the Buddhists describe their development and use of an "enlightenment ray."
- April 5: The tape of the video interview is discovered along when the reporter is found chopping wood and fetching water in the mountains while her cameraman contemplates the reflection of the daytime moon in a puddle of rainwater.
- April 12: In two weeks, hundreds of people fly to the west coast to try to be hit by the enlightenment ray.

- April 14: An emergency congress of the American Philosophical Association is held to discuss the situation and determine whether it is ethically justifiable to try to stop the techno-Buddhists.
- April 17: Victims/recipients of the enlightenment ray are interviewed on Late Night with James Franco. In response to the audience question, "Why didn't you stop them?", one ex-teller replies, "Because when I was struck by the ray, I was struck by something else: the inherent absurdity of institutions, the blindness of modern man, and the emptiness of struggle against the tide." A security guard is asked, "What will you do now?", and responds, "See the universe, one planet at a time."
- April 19: The emergency APA congress announced an initial postponement of decision by 10 years and requests a grant of fifteen million dollars to determine the nature of free will.
- April 25: After two weeks with no bank robberies tied to the techno-Buddhists, images are leaked to TMZ of members of the sect partying in the penthouse suite of Caesars Palace. When cornered for an interview, a member of the sect is heard shouting, "IT DOESN'T CREATE ENLIGHTENMENT, IT JUST TRANSFERS IT," before taking a bump of coke and slipping into a bedroom with a short prostitute, a prostitute of average height, and a tall prostitute.
- May 3: Season three of 17 and a Meth Dealer premieres and the Buddhists pass out of mind.



Roland

AnneMarie Torresen



Esha Biswas

The Words I Remember

Freida Blostein

Don't you forget what sublime means
Learned once in highschool chemistry how could you forget
People say things melt them, make their hearts
gush and their minds mush and their bodies slip
in one satisfying warm glop between someone else's fingers
straight onto the floor in a puddle, they say they melt
I don't.
I don't have a melting point, heat me up, keep the temperature rising
fry me like an egg on the front sidewalk in august
crank the thermostat until mercury turns your head
spins you round and you're panting, heaving and huffing
go ahead and try, I won't melt, I refuse to melt.
Freeze me? Maybe, but don't get hopes up and keep your panties
frigidly in line, because mine won't be.
Submerge me in a bath of dry ice and leave me, fingers
blackening and teeth clenching still alive and not yet
cold enough to be locked into a perfect crystalline structure
there's only one change of state I'll permit,
only one mattermerge I'll concede to,
I'll sublime.

All my molecules slowly liquidating their assets
reverse mortgaging the house and smothering
children too young to walk with pillows too soft to have no use
all my molecules forgetting the lyrics to their favorite songs

rising up into the atmosphere and subliming the hell
out of this world.

Expanding to the volume of their container
which is not even a question at this point.

Their container is you.

If you want to be.

If you are willing to be a beaker full of me.

Worry little if not, because my new home
can be any size and I will fit it

I am the prodigal snail with its house on its back
but the house is me, and the snail is shriveling, but
I'll sublime.

Gaseous, we always laughed when I ate too much
of something I could never pinpoint exactly enough to avoid
small eruptions and eructations, unbelievable
for all my dainty smiles, a menace. Little did
anyone expect I was just practicing
Little do I regret that they never caught on
My whole living leading up to this point
Carbon Monoxide detectors crying as I pass
them by on my way toward the world
and nirvana trespassers trying to figure out
"how how how?" in gentle anguish and disturbing
the hell out of my disparate many little selves
just at peace now in the globe and of the globe
and contained only by the cloudy wisp of water vapors.
Lovers and Romantizers and Wicked
Wicked Witches saying "i'm melting, i'm melting!"
But I'm not.
I'm subliming.

Junot the Great

Annie McCloskey

Once upon a time, in the second grade (to be specific), Junot was a superhero. I am the night, he would say. He would tie a blueish-black fleece blanket around his neck and stand on “rooftop” tables looking for signals that the people needed his help. *Get down, mijo*, his mother would say. He would not, he would stand proudly, toes inches from that night’s dinner, staring off into the distance that was their living room. Valor glinted in his eyes like a beacon of hope across the masses of pillows and household odds and ends in need of saving. She would almost laugh. She would pluck him off the table, plop him in his worn-in chair and force him to eat his vegetables. *Vegetables*, the enemy of all.

After dinner, Junot would be allowed to watch some television under the supervision of his mother, Mariajose. He was not fond of the usual programming for his age group, he preferred crime shows, though his mother did not think it was “age appropriate” for him to watch such gory and occasionally sexually explicit television. However, any of her attempts to change the channel would be followed with myriad protests from Junot. He would wail and wail about how watching these shows added to his arsenal, so he could better fight monsters. She would look to her idols of Mary and St. Jude for guidance, displayed prominently among flickering candles on the barred window sill. *Those aren’t monsters, mijo, those are people*, she would say with certainty. Junot would look up at her with his wide, dark amber eyes and gently, but sternly, shake his head. *But they are, Mommy.*

Junot was not only a superhero at home, he was also the hero

of the lunchroom.

Junot did not like it when his classmates would sit alone or get picked on, so he table hopped around the lunch room to make sure that every lonely peer became a little less lonely that day. For those who were bullied, Junot would stand in front of the aggressor, head high and chest puffed out like a bird of prey and tell them that they would have to get through Junot that day. The first few times he did this, he received a pudding to the face or a few mean sneers and a punch or two, but Junot was resolute and stood still in front of his lunchroom assailant. Perhaps it was this that scared the bullies away or perhaps they just thought he was insane, who’s to say? However, whatever the reason, the bullies would back off. Eventually, the bullies backed down almost entirely as Junot would never fail to stand up for his friends. Junot was a hero to the people and they were thankful.

He held essentially the same duties on the playground as he did in the lunchroom. He watched over the small ones and made sure no one was alone. When it came to play time, he sat out to continue to fulfill what he viewed as his God-given duties. While he enjoyed the game of kickball as much as the next seven-year-old, he preferred to referee, to make sure that the time-honored traditions and rules of this noble sport were followed. He would stand off to the side to ensure a good view of the bases and would oversee the camaraderie of his peers. Many great friends, if not best friends, are made in the game of kickball. Junot almost seldom noticed that he was on the outside. He would have said that he didn’t mind.

In the classroom, Junot let the teacher reign supreme over his

or her pupils and in these times, he took on the role of vigilante. If there was a student troubled by any topic, he would swoop in and save them. More often than not, he would be roaming the class just as his teacher would to check up on his on all of his classmates, his friends. For the first few weeks, he would get scolded by his teacher and told to find his seat, but when trouble visited upon his classmates, they would cry, *Junot, Junot!* and he could not resist. He would immediately sit up and rush over to those in need and try to decipher whatever problem they were facing.

The teachers, like the bullies, would eventually relent. *Junot has a God-complex*, some of them would say, almost jealous of his esteem with the students. But they knew that this was not true. They knew his father, whose report of death barely stayed on the desk of the police commissioner long enough to be marked as a result of “gang-related violence.” Miguel was merely a janitor guilty of being the “wrong kind of Hispanic” in the wrong place at the wrong time. The community was not safe after dark, but Miguel had no choice but to walk home from work. He did not have a car and there were few bus routes. After the crime, there were no arrests. The uproar in the community existed only in the hearts of the neighbors and of Junot. Some of the teachers remember the way the floors shined after Miguel left work. Miguel was popular among the students as well, as he used his bonuses to buy candy them.

Junot, however, was never off work. After school, when his mother thought he was in the state-funded afterschool care program at the school, he would walk home a group of kids from school that lived near him. He would walk each one to their apartment door individually to make sure that they made it home safely, as their parents, like Junot’s mother, worked doubled shifts and there was no one there to greet them aside from older siblings for the lucky ones. In total, this took about an hour and a half extra of Junot’s day and he was very happy to do it.

After all of his friends were safely delivered home, he made his way to his afternoon caretaker, Daiana Maria, his elderly neighbor. Junot would knock loudly on the door to disturb her. She would have the intention of telling him stories from the homeland whilst scolding him on the habits of young boys, however, with age, Daiana lost her conscientiousness and, aided by her untreated narcolepsy, she would fall asleep rather promptly after his arrival. Junot would count on this, and afterwards, he would begin his favorite afternoon task of wandering the city. His mother would not be home until it was very late, so until then, he was free to explore and daydream about crime fighting and solving, modeling on what he had seen on TV. He spent most of the afternoon wandering and mentally mapping the city of which he saw himself the sole protector. He needed to know his way around if he was going to catch the bad guys. Once the sun started to go down, he would usually find a place to perch and quietly watch the city until it was time for him to go home.

During this time, he observed people doing a whole slew of strange things, but never any crime. He saw the odd outfits put together by people of all types. He saw arguments between couples. He saw reunions. He saw parents going home from work with food in hand. He saw owners being walked by their dogs. He saw stray dogs looking for owners. He saw animals chasing each other, and much more, but never any crime or anyone that he could save.

That is, until one day.

Junot had completed his usual school routine and was perching on a ledge in front of the public library, a safe haven. Junot sat still as a statue. People paraded by without noticing him, as he sat strategically in the shadows. Early on in his superhero days, Junot realized that people do strange things when they think no one is watching. From this, Junot realized that people often did whatever they wanted to do, even without scruples, when they thought they could get away with it.

The night slowed down, as many people were now settled in their homes after work. Junot's daydreams became more vivid during this time, envisioning colorful and fast-paced scenes of turmoil, complete with senseless flashes and bangs. Junot, tenacious, would plunge into the scene from the side of the frame and with one fell swoop, save his friends, his peers, his people. Glory would follow and the colors would intensify. Confused and convoluted motions would follow as adults would shake his hand and hand him trophies and keys to their respective cities. He would pledge an oath to protect all. The adults would clap and their children would cheer – they were all finally safe as Junot would make sure of it.

He sat, dazed and beaming, when a shuffle a few yards away brought him back to consciousness. It took his eyes a moment to focus on the scene before him. Flashes of black and grunts filled the air and Junot soon realized that he was witnessing a struggle. There was a tall man in completely donned in black and a man in a business suit. Junot watched further, tightening his grip on the side of the stone railing as he inched forward to get a better look. The man in all black appeared to be trying to take something from the other one, Junot thought, as he was reaching and the other man was struggling to pull away. Junot's mind was rearing – a real crime, right in front of him.

His eyes were glued to the scene as if it were his usual TV programming, exhibiting a glossy stare at the action merely yards away. The man in all black began to yell and elbowed the businessman clean in the face, who dropped to the ground much more violently than Junot recalled on TV. His cocked grin faded and his eyes focused. The man in all black stood above the businessman before scrambling through his coat in search of whatever plunder he had been after. Junot froze and scooted back a few inches. *Where were the cops?* he thought, *aren't they always ready?* His throat was caught mid-breath, tightened, and began to feel dry. His eyes strained and welled.

The man in all black started to straighten as Junot found himself pouncing forward towards the scene without reservation from

his body. He now stood inches from the man in all black, who turned to look at Junot. He was tall, lanky, and curved like a sickle, as if he had spent much of his life hunching over. His almond eyes were rimmed with red, as was his nose, and his whole mug lined with prickles of hair, not quite a beard.

The man and Junot were very still for a moment. Junot, at merely three and three-quarters feet tall, cowered now in the face of a real monster. The man began to crack a smile.

Whaterya doin' here, kid? he said, words hanging in the dead air.

Junot was still. The man looked at him with confusion and apprehension. His smile began to look nervous. *Whaterya doin' here?*

I-I... I saw... he started, I heard a... Junot's eyes surveyed the businessman. *He's... He's bleeding...* The man's eyes moved to the businessman below them and widened for a moment, before narrowing as his gaze shifted back to Junot.

Yeah, and you'll be too if you don't getouttahere, kiddo.

Junot's chest tightened and his legs locked. *Why did I move?* he thought, *¿Dónde está mi madre?* He looked down at the businessman below him, whose labored breathing caused a rush of tears down Junot's face. He did not dare look above him at the monster. The shadow he saw above him indicated that the man had his arm raised as if to strike him, and in that moment of fear, Junot's body unlocked. His eyes flooded with tears and he fell to the ground below him. He rolled his body into the security of a tiny ball and let his tears soak into his Oshkosh jeans.

•••

Everything became fuzzy for Junot for a while. People had started to mill around him and police sirens faded in and out of his consciousness. He had once again become a statue, frozen and solid on the pavement. He heard murmurs about him and someone saying,

kid, KID, look at me. Nothing would break him from his new physical form until he felt a warm hand on his shoulder and heard *¿Mijo?¿Mijo?* Junot lifted his burning and damp face to see the very face of an archangel, his mother. His sobs intensified and he latched onto her body and buried his face into her shoulder. The mother too crumbled into the body of her child. The anger and fear that she harbored on the walk over to her child was now absolved and washed away in Junot's tears. This went on for about twenty minutes of Junot's day and he was happy to have it that way.

Later on, when his mother's scent and touch had pacified him, a police officer came over to talk to him. Junot was propped up on his mother's lap, unable to be separated again. He told him that he had witnessed a bad guy do a bad thing. He said that apparently Junot had distracted the crook long enough for the other man to dial 911. The operator heard Junot's distress and sent help. In fact, Junot's cries and screams were so loud that the security guard in the library came running towards the sound of his peril. *She stopped him with one of these!* the officer said as he held up a taser for Junot's amusement. He looked at the pulsing blueish blot of electricity at the top of the device for a moment and then buried his head back into his mother's shoulder. You got lucky, kid, and you saved the day, he said, or something like that. Junot wasn't really listening to him anymore. He was listening to his mother's heartbeat.



Kathryn Carethers

Untitled

Anonymous

Hello Mr

CAPSman

Please dont

let schizo

phrenia

be me i

dont want

to be Rx

Rex i dont

want to be

rekt please

dont crown

& gown

me (like

wine &

dine) late

at night

sometimes

the walls go

BUMP

and it gets

SPOOKY

i think my

life be

comes

Slender

i tell my

friends this

and giggles

bury my

paranoia in

a landfill

alongside my

appel du

vide so can

you please

help

me

?

I Will Teach You How to Drown

Kara Mullison

This, my dear, is nothing new.

I don't know if you remember the day when this all started. Perhaps you cannot think of it as so clear-cut when it is so murky now, but darling, you need to realize that it had a clear beginning now that the end is so clear and so close. It was eight years ago, a Saturday in March, and I had locked myself in the upstairs bathroom of your parents' house. I was caught in that fit of fever and silence, standing there without breathing for five minutes or more, attempting self-exorcism while you sipped ice tea and made small talk in the parlor downstairs. The light was soft and yellow as a songbird, midmorning filtering in through a plastic shower curtain. I remember it so well. And I know you don't believe me when I say it, but I never touched that mirror, darling, listen—I don't know how it broke. The blood on my hands was just water, all water, nothing more.

I told you I died that day, or at least I ceased to be a person and became eleven hundred pieces of a person, and that's what made me bleed—not the mirror at all—if you could call it bleeding. The wounds all bloomed colorless, despite what your parents remember. It was water, nothing more. I felt pure, watching it drip out as you clung to me. I felt safe.

Listen, I am learning now that water is something wilder than blood. You held me as we waited for the ambulance, whispering little shards of words that meant nothing to me. I was busy peering into the void where the glass had been. I saw you there in that unreal space; I saw you as something other than yourself.

Everything after that was one great lungful of sterile air, one unsatisfying diagnosis after another, one hand clenched into a fist while the other held on to you. I've come to realize that this was as inevitable as the tide.

...

I remember you so much better than I remember myself, darling, and I do not know if that is a misery or a consolation. You have been gone for three days now, and the rain has not let up for an instant, and the stale darkness of this ungodly hour made me realize how much I did not remember. I do not trust the narrative of myself, pieced together from memory, a flash of color here and a snippet of words there—I anchored it all within your skin, and now without you it all floats away. I am without you for the first time I can remember, though I know that does not mean it is the first time. I am in our bed and this orange pill bottle is balanced on the palm of my hand, and I know that the name on the label must belong to me. I have woken countless times with that name absent from the tip of my tongue, with my own face scattered into pieces of some half-familiar monster, but I have never forgotten you. You have always been here to pull me back.

I am terrified to close my eyes because I know that the nightmare will make its move, and I will not have your hands as tethers, but the sound of the rain is so powerful, a thousand repetitions washing me away...

Oh darling, I always thought you were the only thing to rescue me from the bad dreams, but without you by my side I had a glorious one. Listen:

I was stuck in traffic, six lanes at a total standstill, and there was no room to open the door so I climbed out the driver's side window and walked upon the roofs of cars. There was a space I had known once, a little crack into the celestial plane, where Orion and Andromeda dropped confetti on so many terrestrial gawkers. You were the one who had drawn me the roadmap, on those broad summer nights with the fireflies weaving through my long hair. You always used to tell me I belonged among the constellations.

And there was knowledge in my bones—muscle memory—how to write with ink from nebulae, dragging comet tails as commas, because it felt easier to illuminate in hydrogen fire than to whisper in your ear. I did not know what exactly I was trying to say, but I knew silence was damnation. And somehow the words I needed were there already, older than the stars that composed them. We were an infrared trace across the void, dead a hundred times already with the same apology on our tongues. I went empty-handed back to my car, alone now in the middle of the highway. Darling, do you ever worry that our story is not really our own?

...

When I awoke the rain had stopped and our apartment was flooded to my knees. Our overturned furniture looked like shipwrecks, half-submerged; all our books had been torn apart page from page, dead things bleeding out their ink. I was alone. I waded to the kitchen to put the coffee on.

I stood at the window, drinking my coffee black because it reminded me of you. Outside the city shivered in the rain, lonely streets sprawling out like a handful of nerves, a rush of greys and blues. I blinked and the city was gone, and the window was pitch-dark, and my thoughts strayed to the apocalyptic with something that I could only call relief.

I blink again. Your hand is on my shoulder. The floor is bone-dry, my mug is empty. I don't know if you can feel the way things just went wrong, the way my mind is grasping for reconciliation, forming scar tissue over the inaccuracies. You murmur a question with your mouth pressed into my hair, a soft kiss I can wear like a crown. It's Sunday, I tell myself, and neither of us have been out of the house since Thursday evening. The weather has been bright and dry. I kiss you on the cheek and leave a lipstick smear behind, matte maroon. You step away. There are bruises on the backs of my hands, and the bottle of pills is empty. I wish I had words for the way that I am not myself, though I am yours - the way you are not yourself when you are mine.

•••

The next-to-last moment of clarity came with the threads of my long hair trailing into the trap of your mouth, your pupils blown wide and wild, smothered in sweat like an oil spill. Blasphemy rolls off your tongue like a child blowing soap bubbles. Darling, I know you so well here. All the neat borders and limits come apart.

We find each other in the dark, twin disasters deluding ourselves into thinking we could wind up as one, if we only pressed a little harder. We are a thousand stories with one ending; am I your hell or are you mine? You see a decade and I see millennia, flickering all behind your skin and sweat, so that any word I speak feels like praying in vain for an ignorance like yours. Darling, darling—your hands are so large and I feel so small, like I could disappear into nothing, and it is the sweetest feeling I have ever known. You fold one last kiss into my lips before sleep comes for you. I turn to look in the dim light and find you changed, prophecy and history all at once, a ghost of a ghost. Your mouth is brimming with blood and your white teeth jut up like rocks in the sea. There are two obscene red lines dividing your cheeks, one trailing down from each corner of your lips. Your blue eyes are a viscous mess in the sockets. When I kiss your forehead I know your blood is on my lips even when nothing is there, and I have made a fool of you, because you never seem to taste the death on me.

•••

Monday night, and we are a perfect little picture of domesticity, curled up by the fireplace with our fingers interlocked. You are trying to talk to me about symptoms, treating my head like a house in which demons are constantly coming and going. I think you believe you could banish them if you just knew their names. Darling, I could never articulate this darkness. It has claimed my tongue as well as my bones, turning me into some salt-clad surrogate, and even if I found the words you would not believe. You want to stop the tides but you do not

even know how to swim.

You ask after my pills and I answer with an automatic yes. I do not know if it is a lie; I do not know if the pill bottle is empty or re-empty, but I know there is nothing left. I can picture a pile of capsules dissolving in the drain of the kitchen sink, I can recall the feeling of them piled all within my mouth, but I do not know which is memory and which is fiction. Both images seem shifting, dreamlike. I turn my eyes to the window, watching the raindrops snake down the glass, blotches of delicate gray in this deep gloom. I ask you if it is raining. You shake your head.

•••

I smoke your stale cigarettes in a cold bath, hoping that this sickness would feel like sobriety, but it's like dropping a matchstick into an ocean. There is nothing here but saltwater. I am telling you, dear, I have been dead and you've been mistaking these tides for a pulse each time you put your hands upon my skin. I can hear your voice from the other side of the locked door, and I know you are thinking about your razor on the shelf, imagining blood in the bathwater as if that was the worst of our worries. You would never understand how this crawls under my skin, how it feels to be everything at once, preordained and untethered. I am a mess of things. And we are repetition, darling; if we had it in us to transcend this we would not recognize ourselves. I was never meant to drown alone. We come together, irrevocable, crashing toward the same ending—a sorrow deep enough to dissolve us both, even you, solid as you feel under my small hands. Can you feel that we have been here before? I do not know what I did to deserve the burden of knowledge, when you are so blessedly ignorant. It must have been unimaginable profanity, a sin as wide and deep as the ocean itself; darling, I am sorry, and even as I say that I feel myself losing the capacity for sorrow. I have been dead too long. I am captive among these waves, caught in this decay.

•••

I am standing naked at the bathroom mirror, dripping water and pale

as a corpse. My image in the mirror is not my own. The girl on the other side is purple-bloated with eyes like milk, standing still while I run my fingers over my skin to map out the discrepancies between reflection and reality. She has rounded white teeth and a fat black tongue. She makes me doubt which one of us is real. She is trying to speak but I cannot hear her, and you are shouting but I will not answer. The apparition blinks at me, and all the neat borders and limits come apart as I watch. We are reaching the end, my dear, do you realize that? She is getting closer as I fade away.

You open the door with the spare key, all your trust in me finally tumbling down under the weight of your concern, and it is no use to pretend: I know you saw her, that drowned and desolate monstrosity you've learned to love with all your heart. You saw her if only for an instant. Your gaze snaps from that likeness to the mess I have made of myself, and you--you, my dear, so sweet and blind that it will kill us both--you pull me in close against your chest and keep me there. Your heartbeat thumps in my ears and it sounds like blasphemy and I want to drown in it.

Forgive me for this, I want to say, but my tongue is lost. I want to call us star-crossed but the label will not stick. We do not go down together. You drown within me, ruined by me. This is a ritual. Predestined, recurring, unbalanced.

My dead hands reach for your face, pulling you down so we are forehead to forehead, and I wish you would open your eyes but I know that you won't. I will hold on as long as I can, but that is not long at all, and the end cannot be avoided. We would not be ourselves if we could avoid this ending. We would not be anything at all. I will wield this love like a cudgel and it will transform you, bleeding you out, breaking every bone, crushing the blue orbs of your eyes into an oozing void—all the spaces of you, so long my shelter, oh, my dear. I cannot transcend this. There is nothing here but saltwater, all the salt of the ocean, and I cannot cry a single tear. I will ruin you. I will ruin you.

the golden hour i swung

Hannah Dougherty

i press my raw cheeks against a glass globe
yes, i am pressing my face to the palest blue sky
pumping my legs, the crack of knees,
i ebb.

there is a ribbon attached to the center of my chest
has my heart ever felt this full? has yours?
i am alive. breathlessly,
i flow.

the other end of the ribbon is tied to the finger of the universe
mother earth pulls tight and lets me go
oh mama i am your toy, don't ever put me down,
i ebb.

never forget how this feels
to forget is to wane and i shall not wane
laughing in kiddish happiness,
i flow.

lungs steeped with fall air and forgotten bliss; we press our faces to
this sweet dying light



San Pham

To Not Be Denied The Option

Lang DeLancey

I pledge allegiance,
to the flag
of the united states of america.
which stands and is carried
over burning afghani villages
painted on drones
and thrown
by murder puppets.

I pledge allegiance,
to the flag
which systemizes oppression.
stars and stripes are bars of white
run jails.
and to the republic
for which it kills those dead
because this is how
our democracy is spread.

I pledge allegiance,
to the state
the meiotic nucleus of hate
because it's ok when we do it.
using this republic
for which it falls,

one nation,
one empire,
under a green-backed god.

I pledge allegiance,
to the sweat
and blood of children
in china and tibet.
making the tools utilized by
a thoughtless luxury,
for 4.5 bites of rice and bread.
and to the millions
who we let starve;
out of sight
out of mind.

I pledge allegiance
to the theft
of our only mother earth.
the land, the sky,
la pachamama idash muzzu-kummik-quaе.
giving the planet a
#2 shave and a
I-94 chastity belt
around her
broken waist
must feel sexy to a capitalist.

I pledge allegiance
to a penniless freedom
of bacuktin and proudon.
a community fueled
by fire of sun,
sweat on our backs,
and red, white, and blue, all crispy black.

because maybe I'd be ok
with factory farming
if I could have
a capitalist-pig roast
in a backyard that belongs to all of us.

Samson

Clare Higgins

The room is naked
our voices flat
against the empty
struggling to make headway
as we try to sound important
in our basement full of no one
but night.

The staff have come and gone.
The open hallways spool out
a gift untaken
by our shy silhouettes in the dark.
We have not come here
to make ruins.

I have come here
with little more than hope
and averted eyes, tugging
at my belt loops, cheeks
full of ready blood.
He has come naked,
baring innocence,
his face stilled.
His nods quiet.

I wonder whether
he's given up trying to impress.
Whether I should be pleased
or disappointed.
Whether we should kiss softly
in this lone sphere of air
forgetting the future
breaking down columns,
destroying without mercy.

RESOURCES

Ariel Kaplowitz

Mama says cool
that anger. She says
anger makes you
sick. Mama doesn't
hold anger. Mama
spoons up life with a ladle.
Takes the good days
with the bad, mama
breathes love, mama makes
things grow where she
touches, mama is light! Mama
is quiet. She takes the
good days with the bad, she
lets daddy sit still on
the couch while her feet
ache, she pounds skillet
after skillet on the stovetop,
she shoulders up the burden,
gets tired, cries. Mama
might could use a little
anger. Mama might could
buy herself some teeth.

Frostfort

Lang DeLancey

two men stand by the sea
one dressed in autumn
the other all in
white. he turns
and says do you
ever wonder how it is
to have died
as the waves anoint them kings

Still Water

Maria Robins-Somerville

is too clear

bleached pools
and moss-pungent lakes
leave me
wrinkled

In defiance
“there is nothing old about me”
not yet

I take to the ocean
a lush seaweed tangle
of unpredictable burden

I only know how
to feel the kind of small

I don't want

Not the shrinking-waist
concise point

no neat box on
earth-sized marble

rolling wave off salted tongue

proteohuman

Freida Blostein

so much of you is not you
& I dare to say this in tones of science
not bitter endearment,
but really I mean the same thing.
I am telling you, a good portion
of your whole innards is bacteria
that swarm and swerve and steer
the bowel filled moments of you
but really I am asking, how much of you
do I have to love? All of the shit,
or if, I can only bring myself to love
 $\frac{1}{2}$ of the space you occupy,
is that enough?
this is what I am saying
but when I open my mouth, statistics
drool out in one long slobber of biological
fear.



Jacob Myers

Destiny's Child

Cammie Finch

I saw her first through the fog that engulfed the courthouse in one swift embrace. I wondered if she would recognize me, even though I knew she wouldn't. My car's headlights were my shield, just as her teardrop eyes were safety locked, protecting her from the truth. I guess I wouldn't want to know me either, all things considered.

Her hands were small and strong. She was hunched over, as though she was carrying an enormous load upon her back. I suppose, in a way, she was. My eye focused on the wrinkle carved over her left eyebrow. I couldn't help but think that I had put that age-mark there by accident, like a sculptor whose hand slips and leaves a line that was never meant to exist. Her brow trembled. Don't cry now, I encouraged silently from the warmth of my sedan. I can't handle crying. Not now. She pushed an empty stroller, the ghost of her child playing peekaboo under its hood. The stroller was red, pierced with yellow stars and tagged with rainbows here and there. The woman didn't seem to know the where of her destination. She didn't seem to have a choice in the matter. She was pulled by necessity, by the tug of guilt that she was the one still alive. If she stopped, she'd think and remember the hole I had ripped in her family tree. Her footprints dug deeper in the tread of yesterday's walk-to-forget. Smudges of dirt flicked up on to the backs of her legs.

I circled around the block, so she wouldn't think I was following her. "There's a parking spot," you pointed out. But I ignored you and drove past the meter. I needed to see her one last time before it was my time

to serve. In a moment of guilt-ridden masochism, I needed to see the mother's tar-streaked tears, staining her lily-blossom cheeks. The little girl's rattling laughter pounded in my head, stronger than it had the night that I silenced her.

We had parked outside of a quaint little house on a dark and quiet street. "Lovelock Court. That sounds like a nice one," you said. While you and I had been dancing swirly tangoes on each other's skin, car leather sticking to our necks, she was stocking up on taffeta make-believe and glass-slipped innocence. Coming out of our dizzy haze, I blindly flexed the pedal, and made contact with the runaway princess, whose frog prince waited in front of the car. She was a fly on my windshield, not making a dent as she collapsed on the road.

And yet, I've never felt more weighed down.

When had the world around me become so polarized? I had grown accustomed to the in-betweens of this half-caff, capri length world. Suddenly, decisions needed to be made. Either we do or we don't. We are or we aren't. We live or we die. Yet, what was a life in prison but the slowest death known to man. The mother understood this much, I knew. She died a bit every day without her babe, while her treadmarked memory lived on in her head.

Would you visit me? I wondered. We had always said, that when the

time was right, our child was going to be beautiful. Nights staring up at the ceiling imagining the chestnut hair, the brown eyes with my long slender nose and a bit of your freckles across the cheeks. She would have been a flautist. He would have been a doctor (a radiologist because he would get squeamish at the sight of blood). But our dreams were cracked like the pavement the mother walks on, day after day. "It's hard to fuck between metal bars," I wanted to say even though I hate swearing in front of you. I knew you would only understand if I was explicit.

But, she, the mother, and I, we were more alike than she would ever know. Both shackled in an endless reverie of the path not taken. You squeezed my hand and returned me to the present. "It wasn't your fault. You know that." I looked once at the court's four Grecian columns, looming ahead. My vision blurred and combined them into one fat cement wall, blocking my view. I turned to see my victim's victimized mother, taking the lonely path she never saw coming. "But I blindsided her," I said. "I didn't give her the chance to choose a different way." It's not your fault, I thought, hoping that in some magical way, my thoughts could transmit through glass windows and highly polluted urban smog. *She was looking for her prince. You can't stop a love like that.* I took the key out of the ignition, wiped a black fleck of mascara from the corner of my eye, and prepared my retreat into destiny's cold, metal womb.



Kara Mullison

SOS

Roland Davidson

he thinks she's his SO
really he's her so&so

dear reader

Roland Davidson

I believe that the greatest literary device is repetition
I believe that you would much prefer irony

Hindsight In 1 Eye

Freida Blostein

The words I paint with my mouth should make more sense than
sentences whole,
Like, every portrait painted with sloppy oils closer to truth than
photograph stilled,
Like, the cake that is ugly and tattered melts in my toothgaps like
the sound of your name.

Like, reality is too crisp nowadays, if I'd ever held days before the
now I'd sneak back to them.
But I've lost my tenses and gained my tension and all the torque of
sexuality flounced.
All the arithmetic of the futures in neat lines in my checkbook,
and I want to cry for the money and cry for the dollars and cents,
and sense, for blurriness lost and softness bastardized with digital
cameras.

Like, know you this? I cannot see without artifice. Blinded and
happier for it and blurred into calm. Like, you never say it but I
wonder if you wonder when I close my eyes in those moments we
twined together?

I want you as my reality and close my eyes to thus see.



Kara Mullison

Serpents

Kara Mullison

Mary awoke to the sound of her infant crying across the room. She pulled herself out of her bed automatically, bare feet padding across cold floorboards, and picked the little girl up. The child's sobs quieted into unhappy whimpers as soon as she was in her mother's arms. Mary glanced at her husband and her older son, both fast asleep in their beds, before stepping out into the hallway.

She walked to the window at the end of the hall and then stopped, watching her breath condense on the glass. She cradled her baby tight against her breast. Dawn had not quite broken, but the dark blue of night was already softening at the horizon, and soon they would have a view of the sunrise. She and her daughter had watched it just like this many times in the past few months, and she had been there many times before when her son had been that small. It was familiar.

But that day her mind was far away from the domestic repetitions that usually held her thoughts. She was thinking of the graveyard across town, of the fresh plot of dirt in the far west corner, of the body buried in that plot. They said that Josephine had been well preserved in the snow, although she had been dead for months before she was found. Josephine Sieber. She had died with her maiden name. The thoughts churned in Mary's head as the sun crept up over the barren fields outside.

The baby began to fuss and she soothed it mindlessly, feeling that perhaps there were three of them at that window, watching the sun's ascent: Mary, the baby, and whatever was left of Josephine.

...

She had been twelve years old, and Josephine had been ten. It had been such a warm day for that early in the year, Mary remembered. Her mother had sent her out early that day to ask Mrs. Amundson a favor—the fields out by the churchyard weren't the quickest way to the Amundson farm, really, but the day was so nice and the detour so slight that no one could blame her for it. She walked through the grass, reveling in the sunshine on her shoulders. The church stood tall behind her, the white in bright contrast against the cloudless blue sky.

Josephine and Mary had grown up just a mile apart, and they had seen each other often in passing without exchanging a word. Mary might never have spoken to Josephine at all if she had not chosen to walk through that field that morning. There Josephine had been: the girl was lying perfectly still, flat on her back with her arms spread wide, fair hair fanned over her face, eyes closed. There were at least a dozen snakes crawling over her—curled in the folds of her skirt, sunning themselves on her stomach, nuzzling through her hair. One thin black serpent had coiled itself loosely around her neck, tasting the air on the white flesh of Josephine's throat.

Mary froze, her heart racing. She was certain for an instant that the girl was dead. Josephine looked so small, sprawled out and pale, abandoned to the elements. Then Mary realized that the girl was speaking, whispering out a stream of words that could not be deciphered, and her thoughts went straight from corpses to ghosts, demons, monsters...

But Josephine opened her eyes then, a late reaction to the sound of Mary's footsteps. Mary shrieked, and the snakes scattered as quick as they could, disappearing into the grass. Josephine sat up, brushing the hair out of her face, looking up at Mary with a guilty expression.

Mary thought about leaving then, as soon as she knew that the girl was not dying or dead. She had heard of stranger things than

a couple of snakes. She could fulfill her mother's errand, enjoy the weather, put the encounter out of her mind, and go home. But the image of the black snake on Josephine's throat took over her brain. She stood there for a moment, full to bursting with questions—Why? How?

As it turned out, Josephine was willing to explain it all, as soon as Mary found the courage to ask.

...

The baby had been fussy all morning, refusing to be put down all through breakfast, and Mary began to wonder if it was her own preoccupation that was upsetting her child. Josephine had been buried almost a week ago. Mary wished that she could put the thoughts to rest in such a straightforward way.

She left the dirty dishes to soak and hugged her daughter close, trying to imagine what Josephine's life had been like as an adult. The woman had lived alone on the edge of town, spoken about by many and seen by few. Mary had caught sight of her once about two years ago. There was something very childlike about her even then, although the innocence had left her eyes, replaced instead by distraction and pain.

She could almost imagine the way Josephine must have looked on that night in November, gazing out into that remote patch of forest and knowing it was her last night on earth. The men who found her in March reported multiple snakebites, little constellations of wounds on her ankles and wrists. The pastor put it into the books as an accident, but Mary knew better.

The baby gave a half-hearted cry and Mary cradled her closer, thinking of a story she had been told once: an Egyptian queen holding a snake to her breast and waiting for it to bite.

...

By the time the full heat of summer found them, Mary had learned how to speak to the snakes, just as Josephine had promised. Mary knew even as it was happening that the memory of that first

success would never leave her brain. They were sitting in the burnt-golden grass, the sun searing overhead, and Josephine was wide-eyed with encouragement. Mary took a deep breath and began reciting from memory, that strange language she had never heard before or since—Josephine claimed that no one taught her the words, that she had simply known them. Mary had no trouble believing that. She had practiced each syllable, going over it again and again, even though it never stopped feeling foreign on her tongue.

The first one to come was a grass snake, smooth and bright green, and it was halfway up Mary's arm before she even realized it was there. She shivered at the feeling of scales against skin, but the weight of it as it settled around her neck was not a bad sensation. Josephine flashed a triumphant smile and Mary closed her eyes, trying to concentrate on the words as more serpents darted out of the grass. There had been four in total—it was the strangest feeling of power and powerlessness, opening herself up to the wild animals and trusting that they would not hurt her. The whole time, Josephine's smile was burned into her mind's eye.

That night Mary's mother had read from Genesis after dinner, and Mary had dozed off with those words in her ears: Eve and the serpent, the serpent and the fall from grace.

The two girls were inseparable the rest of the summer, sneaking away whenever they could to lay in the field by the church. Josephine could improvise on a whim—wrapping timber rattlers around her head, summoning fat bull snakes thicker than her wrists, covering herself in a squirming mass of hundreds of them at once. There was a sort of magic in the younger girl, Mary knew, that never existed in her own bones. Poor Josephine had paid dearly for it.

•••

It always astounded her how little of the landscape had changed in the fifteen years since that summer, especially when the people had all changed so much. Mary walked up the road that led to the church, gazing out across the familiar field, and for a moment—just

an instant—she imagined that Josephine could be there, ten years old and rail-thin, with a garter snake winding lazily over her shoulder. The thought made her heart lurch. She reached out her hand toward her young son so he wouldn't wander off the path.

For years Mary had done her best not to think about what had happened in that field, though she passed it every week on her way to Sunday service. It seemed impossible to reconcile herself as an adult with the person she had been then. The thoughts always led her to bitterness: she had been driven by fear, but now she had everything she had been afraid of losing, and it didn't seem like much.

Mary stopped, tugging her son away from the remains of a snake that had been smashed on the road, trying to comfort her daughter before they joined the crowd going into the church. Her husband did not wait for her, didn't even glance around to see where she was. Mary stared after him for a moment, wondering once again why he had to be so stony-faced and silent toward her. But there were no words for her thoughts either, no way of speaking about the things she had seen that didn't leave her sounding mad. She did her best to quiet her children and then led them inside, taking a seat beside her husband. All her neighbors looked more like strangers than ever. She arranged her skirts and set her daughter carefully in her lap.

•••

It was purely bad luck that Mr. O'Hearn had crossed through the field that day. They had learned how to hide from the church groundskeeper when he hauled equipment to and from the shed, and beyond that the tall grass had been shelter enough from the occasional traveler or vagabond passing through. Josephine was whispering to twenty serpents at least, watching them tangle together on her bare arms, wracked with giggles at the sensation. Mary had been recounting a story about snake charmers that her father had told her, but at some point her words had trailed off and she had been content to simply observe. Josephine and Mary had long grown used to that comfortable sort of silence.

Mr. O'Hearn broke that silence when he saw Josephine and the serpents—he shouted for God's help and she sent the snakes scattering while Mary sat dumbstruck with terror. The man's boots came down and crushed the head of a black snake as it rushed past him. Josephine cried out with a savagery that Mary could never have imagined as the body of the creature jerked and thrashed in the dirt. And then the man had them both roughly by the arm, dragging them toward the church while Josephine howled.

The two girls stayed in the church until sundown while the pastor called a group of men together to sort the whole thing out. Mary sobbed as they questioned her, unable to get two words out, terrified of the consequences of her time with Josephine. Even when her mother had read out from Genesis it had never occurred to her that there was anything dark about the younger girl. Josephine was not a witch or a demon or even a sinner—she was just a child, blonde and petite, who looked sad even when she was smiling. How could the men not realize that?

But Mary had failed to explain. They asked whether Josephine had tricked her into being there, whether Mary had been scared of the girl, and she had agreed to it all. She had been paralyzed by that fear of being branded abnormal. So Josephine was left to fend for herself. The rumors exploded through town that Josephine was a witch. Josephine's father died a few years after, and she left home to live in a little shack on the outskirts of town. She lived a quiet life, but the townspeople never stopped whispering about her—up until Josephine's death, at which point most people were willing to bury the whole sordid affair in silence.

•••

The air in the church was cold and dusty, a dead thing winding its way into her living lungs with each inhalation; the pastor's words were similarly inert. As soon as they started a psalm, Mary stood up and shuffled out of the pew. She did not care who saw or what they thought—she needed to get out. Her husband did not look up as she

walked around to the back of the church and exited with the eerie strains of the psalm following her into the cold.

Her eyes swept the ground as she walked off the path and into the field. All the thoughts went crashing through her head: the corpse-like young Josephine, Eve in the garden, Josephine in the snow, her own daughter wearing a rattlesnake as a crown.

Mary stopped and stood still, murmuring a few broken syllables and realizing with a sinking heart that there was no way that the eldritch words were still in her memory. She took a deep breath and focused instead on the way it had felt to speak them. The sun in her eyes (even though her hat blocked the watery sunlight now), the sun-roasted grass beneath her feet (now dead and brittle from winter), and Josephine with all her secret miracles, so proud of Mary for a mere act of imitation (where now she stood alone like a madwoman)... All moments of time that no longer really felt as though they belonged to her, jumbled up with myths and legends and scripture.

Mary emptied her mind of everything but ten-year-old Josephine's radiant smile, and when she opened her eyes there were three serpents on the ground before her. They flicked their tongues out almost nervously, hesitating when she reached out for them with trembling fingers. When they let her pick them up, she let out a cry of triumph. The larger one coiled itself around her shoulders, while the other two hung suspended in her hands. This was what she should have done fifteen years ago, she realized as she picked the snakes up. She should have stood with Josephine instead of turning away in fear. But there was no room for regret in her heart—she was bursting with pride and gratitude for even that glimpse of what life might have been like.

It was like Josephine was smiling at her one last time.

dress to please

San Pham

you were six
and you came home crying
because you couldn't wear dresses anymore.

snot now woven into her sweater,
your mother demanded, why

who thought they had the right

in a dress, you couldn't play with the other kids.
you weren't allowed to have friends, in a dress.
it's inappropriate, a girl told you
boys will see up your skirt.

it didn't make sense to you,
not understanding why someone would care
about your pink underwear anyway.

it didn't make sense to your mother,
who was then forced to see her daughter already
bound by the closed buttons and zippers of society.

don't let others tell you what to do, she told you
be strong, stand up for yourself, be brave

so the next day,
your mother sent you to camp in your favorite,
flower explosion of a frock
you can't play with us in a dress, the girl said again.

you stood up as tall as a six year old can,
envisioned nala when she goes against scar,
and said

don't tell me what to do.

but you wore shorts underneath.



untitled

Esha Biswas

(s)he (dis)appeared out of (no)where one day like
a run in()her tights like
a hole in her()favorite woolen sweater like
split ends at the end()of her braid and her wits like
a chip in cherry red()toe nail polish like
a rip in the seams()of her sundress like
a dent in the walls()of her insides and
before she could()help herself
she grew attached to
the hollow absence
(that filled) the vacant empty
and found peace (with silence)

Gift

Jean-Pierre Seguin

Dad
introduced me
to
running
before
I knew
depression

run
bike
ski
swim
movement
exhilarating
oxygen bring
life
fight gray
emotionless
malaise

don't know if he
knew I might
have it
but
grateful
he showed
me
discipline
of moving
towards
happy
from
blah

My Windowless room, I often recall, Silence

Magdalena Wilson

12/1/11 Sidestep noxious daffodils so you smile like something's funny. feet master the grounds shape so we clobber your previous delusion of clout, as it were. (right left right left one two one two) and that's all we ever knew. a self-imposed pseudo-tapping to some nonexistent tune about yellow-headed girls and smoky Septembers; so methodical tendencies become obsolete having familiarized ourselves with the convoluted crafts of escapism, romanticism, whogivesafuckism. 12/31/11 Contoured vertebrae can fill with dirt and pale blue flannel drunkhigh, uglypretty, sadmad something so damn beautiful-- sprawled under the streetlights within a makeshift bed of grass and asphalt silo-shaped orbs don't dare to match the comfort radiating from our body (over under over under) drunk last New Year's cylindrical cacophony swirls around, amidst the caffeine/alcohol-induced state of enchantment, a trombone murmur: "I love..." later; windowless room I would recall the bustling horizon. and how we would collect beautiful things of the sorts and force them into Mason Jars with harmonious silence.



Kendall Dumas

I See With My Hands, I Feel With My Eyes

Julia Byers

It's in the way my mother says, "Come along, Rory, I have the whipped cream," like she thinks she's talking to a child; the way she takes my arm by slipping her trembling, cold fingers around my elbow, slowly and hesitantly, as if she is afraid she will break me.

It's in the way people whisper to each other as we pass them in the dairy aisle; the usual creak, creak, creaking of the shopping cart wheels diminishing as they pause to speak, like they think I am as deaf as I am blind.

It's in everything. The stark contrast between what visits to the supermarket were like before, and what they are like now.

I hate it here. Ever since the fire, I've hated it so badly, so completely that I feel it in my gut; a burning sensation that's more like heartburn than flames, but hurts all the same.

This place used to be my haven. Now it is just another space for people to stare.

Cold slices across my arms as Mom opens a refrigerator door and hoists a gallon of milk into the cart. She forces a smile into her voice.

"The next ingredient on the list is—"

I shake my head. "Two avocados. I know."

The burning is all around me. It's in the shoppers' gazes and the refrigerated supermarket air against my skin. It's in the hot tears at the corners of my eyes as I force them away.

Fabric rustles as Mom looks over at me, her sweater brushing against the side of the shopping cart. She has on the red wool one that snags, today. She should be more careful.

Her tone is quiet and level despite the anxiety that throbs beneath it. “How did you know the next ingredient was avocados?” It grinds at her, wears at her—the anxiety. She knows the stares wear at me. “I’ve made avocado pudding a million times before.” I roll my eyes. Her breath catches in her throat, as it does every time I do something I learned back when I could see. I turn to the yogurt section to block my face from her constant watching. Blood pounds behind my eyes. My cheeks warm. I refuse to cry. I think about what the dairy aisle looks like—sew together three hundred different memories until I can picture it in my mind, every last detail. The process makes the urge to cry evaporate like steam from a pot. I picture the bright, sterile lights that are cool on my skin; the rows and rows of glass doors with brushed steel handles that showcase milks and cheeses and bagel spreads; the scarred linoleum floor worn rough from ground-up dirt and the black rubber streaks of tennis shoes; all the little nicks and fractures the supermarket has earned over its years burdened with heavy shopping carts and squealing children. Every time I come here, it becomes harder to remember. I turn back, and Mom is right beside me, her gaze a wildfire across my forehead. I can tell where she is looking because as she breathes, warm air brushes across my chin, which means that her head is tilted at just the right angle for her stare to land on my forehead. She always looks at the space just above my blank brown eyes, like the crinkled, scarred skin there helps her forget the blindness that has wiped my identity away. She does not realize how much it hurts. Her sweater lets out a breath as she folds her arms. Someone else must be looking at us, and she must be trembling—she only folds her arms when the nerves become too much. I focus my eyes right on her face and the sweater sighs as her arms drop back to her sides. “Sorry,” she says.

“Two avocados.” I smile. “Let’s go.” Mom alternates between leading me through the supermarket—one unsure, careful hand at my elbow—and reminding me again and again to stand still, be careful, keep your fingers wrapped around the cart handle at all times, Rory. She doesn’t have to tell me when we reach the produce section. The air is heavy with the sharp tang of lemons and oranges. The softer, earthier scents of carrots, potatoes, and lettuce clog my nostrils. I breathe in the humidity and exhale the dry, cold air of the dairy section. I hear Mom lift a pair of avocados, hesitate, then place them in the cart’s basket. I lay a hand on her arm. “Wait.” Her skin is leathery and warm. She flinches beneath my touch. “You have to see if they’re ripe.” “Right,” she says. “Of course.” She hesitates again and the breath hitches in her throat. I sigh. “Do you know how?” “Of course.” Her tone is uncertain. “Here.” I run my hand down her arm until I reach her fingers, then direct them to the basket. I wrap her fingers around an avocado and squeeze. “See how it’s soft?” “Yes.” Her hand is stiff beneath mine. I move away, give her space. “That means it’s ripe. If it’s hard, it isn’t ready yet. And if it’s any softer than that, it’s already gone bad. Test the other one, now.” I try to keep my tone gentle, but the whispers have started around us again. Mom gives the other avocado a squeeze. “This one is hard.” Her voice is quiet; nearly a whisper. The red sweater rustles against the shopping cart. She must have crossed her arms again. I swing past her, grab hold of the side of the produce bin, and dig in. I test avocado after avocado until I find one that is perfectly ripe, then turn back to Mom. I grip her hand, pull it away from her body, and lower the fresh fruit into it. I wrap her fingers around the bumpy skin. “This one is perfect,” I say.

She takes a breath before replying, “I’m sorry for choosing an unripe avocado.”

“It’s okay, Mom.” I imagine her eyes darting from my forehead to my chin, avoiding my own at all costs. I can’t tell if I’m having trouble breathing because the air has grown thicker or because my throat has sealed shut. “It’s a learning process.” I smile. “You’ll get the hang of it.” She takes her hand from my own and places the avocado in the basket. Her voice is thick. “What else do you need for your pudding?” “Just vanilla extract. We have sugar at the apartment, right? You’ve bought some?”

“Yes. And vanilla extract. So we have everything.” She touches my face—runs her thumb down my jaw, like she’s wiping away a smudge or a tear. My eyes burn. The numbness washes over me, washes away. I cannot breathe.

“Are you ready to check out?” I ask.

I know she smiles, although I cannot see it.

“Yes. Let’s go.”

I’m not sure, as we walk to the register, who leads who. Mom’s hand is at my elbow, but my fingers are also squeezed tight around her shoulder, and we stumble forward one step at a time. The cashier stares while she checks us out, and her eyes burn holes in my cheeks, slit open the scars, remind me that although I cannot see her or anyone else anymore, I still know them.

They believe I am crippled, but I am strong. It’s in everything. The stark contrast between how people used to treat me, and how they treat me now, and the fact that I still come to the supermarket anyway.

The first step out the sliding glass doors, the sun is warm on my cheeks. Tantalizing. Like a drop of watermelon juice on your tongue. I lift my face to the sky, close my eyes, and let the warmth wash soft across my scarred and mended skin. I let go of the shopping cart and spread my arms. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Mom says. “It is.” This time she doesn’t remind me to hold on.



Kara Mullison

3/4

Lang DeLancey

show me how giant
a small body can be
show me through hair, skin, and the
twitches of your shoulder
show me the meaninglessness of years
through words, touch, skin,
hair, and the twitches of your shoulder.

stray from the backwoods only
in physical place,
always brief in time
so your hips can remain wild
while your body is bound
to concrete cities
show me those jungles of new england
through eyes, skin, hair, breath,
and the twitches of your shoulder.

show me how to dance
in kalamazoo halls
tangled knees over sweeping feet
grinning two steps behind
through looks, drags, and the twitches of
your shoulder.

show me your age
how long you've walked

and how mad you've been
show me your seasons
through words, skin, looks, steps,
and
the twitches of your shoulder

show me life through the metal
on your chest.
on your face.
and through the twitches of your shoulder.

show me how to speak
how to bend space into meaning
through air, breath, steps,
and tongues I can't understand
and the twitches of your shoulder.
we can live in the mountain woods
where no one will hear us
find us
as you teach me how to be
through words, air, breath, hands,
eyes, drags, hair, skin, steps

and the twitches of your shoulder

so the mountains can envy us
as we them.

Ivy League

Clare Higgins

We drew our paths, stealing dreams from Gods,
riding on the backs of time encrusted scriptures
that lured us to the ivory tower
peeling off our layers of youth,
stealing our nicknames and
squeezing Kool-Aid from our sidewalk days

We strapped on the headgear for our academic transfusion,
shut our eyes and felt our mothers pulled away
Got scrubbed of loose tongues and casual hips
in exchange for spectacles we'd never need
and an appreciation for the finer things

When we returned home
it felt colder
and kitchen spices tasted foreign
because the tower had changed us
The moon lurked in disapproval
of our metamorphosis, hurting
along her insides, moaning as she
tossed her children
into the wind

LSD

Jeffrey Sun

1. Take the whole strip
You'll come back down
thinking you're Bugs Bunny
They'll take you away
but we'll think it's funny
2. Epiphany (i)
In my mind are a pair of innocuous-looking
lavender curtains
Their banality is their strength, for behind them
lurks evil
3. Careful in there
you are an untrained surgeon operating on your own mind
the unrefined marble and the unrefined sculptor
the painter, the subject, the paint, and the canvas
the planned, the planner, and the plan
4. Epiphany (ii)
Everyone's just a liver, man
except for me
I'm a spleen

untitled

Esha Biswas

Dream looked down at Wish
and said
“If only you could see the view from up here,
you’d never want to leave.”

Wish gazed longingly up into Dream’s eyes
and said
“Ah, but I used to be just like you
until the day I lost a little hope.”

On Stargazing

Kara Mullison

I know not how to speak of galaxies.
Our language has no shackles adequate
For things as fierce and fathomless as these:
Our best translations too indelicate.
Between a word and any prompting thought,
Betwixt a feeling and its given name,
A nothingness exists which we cannot
Through any effort conquer or reclaim.
I want to speak of stars, but there’s no word
That could be wielded by this stumbling tongue
To demonstrate that splendid and absurd
Celestial sight, thus doomed to stay unsung.
Yet when I look on you, I think you know
The perfect things my words were meant to show.

Pontiac, MI

Magdalena Wilson

I don't know a damn thing about the ghetto and neither do you, 1993.

Tentatively (as you are to me), I speak to you in a cloudburst of ennui that can leave us parched in perpetual motion (or perpetual hollowness) with the suffocating sterileness, as the pavement would tongue the air, birch trees like barcodes. In your innocene, you would say "good enough" and my skin could hitch back together, inwards instead of out, and we'd hear that piercing lull, knowing it would unfold into something we're both proud of. I tell you how I'm finding my way into the backseats of boys' cars now, puckered down through the bare bones of new houses and manners and mornings. I'm finding fingers in my hair and forgetting the smells of my own clothes. But he says he loves me, and I always digress when people love me. Soon, we'll lock our eyes where the sun would have taken root outside your window, if only to be bare branches stroking the cold pane of glass instead.

He dies on the first floor of the public library, sometime after work on a Wednesday evening, 1998.

In this picture, you're between the yellow-green lights of your frame, and you're standing (with your child) drunk on your own desire, but you say nothing. It is late, and you are glued to some televised fable about the similarities between lovers and liars. You finger at your collar with the button on the middle of your throat that my mother sewed in steady place, so she wouldn't be tempted to slit it. But you don't know about that; the sting of your own mortality. In another picture, we see the man with the eyes frozen by your hands and the lips like a broken harmonica. We whisper your name in an obsolete language, over and over, hoping with all hope that I'm reading your eyes right or they aren't lying to me. I do believe in God and Mary and those sacrosanct saints and your hot-pink ghosts rapturing our body and soul into Times Square. In the smoke and half-lit fog I can see you as you were; pale and silvermoon and yet, so much brighter (exclamation mark here).

"Let it all run down from blood stained clouds."

- Daughter, or Digested

San Pham

lipstick, 630 raisin rage,
applied with caution the hour before

it bleeds from me,
soft, chapped lips outlining teeth

the red trickles down her body
it stains her skin along the way

whose heart did you eat you say
to her fogged up reflection

whose heart did you tear up
and let your tongue lick up the remains
amongst the floors of bathroom stalls
or into her pillow at night

consuming each vital inside
until just the shell remains

the final scrap of her depleted organ,
remains chapped

she wipes her hand across,
rubbing any evidence off

she then reapplies more rage,
my shield and my weapon.



Alyssa Erebor

Before the Storm

Maria Robins-Somerville

There is always
the endless expanse
of collarbone

the rattle
of wooden chest.

Before the storm

There are always
the dry toes in the thrashing sea,

love notes tacked to broken mirrors
and salt grip on hair

tightrope walk and landings

Before the sick iv drip

Before the storm sounds of

Forgetting to close
the cereal box

to drop
the seat

Before,

There is always the milky expanse of collarbone

and weeds that tumble from the sky, answered prayers

There is always the endless expanse of chest
and collarbone

The rough wash of lye and weakness

the grime-sticky faces and chubby legs

Before the storm there is

no calm.

Letter From an Unborn Cherub Brother

Theo Czajkowski

You never got a trial with
That team in Germany,
Crossed over the dry,
Willow-fringed river
And ran out onto the pitch,
Then didn't.
Dad was torn up.
He had just lost his job
And had lemons in his throat.

When your father finally died,
He slid downstream like Ophelia.
He was begging Gerald Ford
For work at dinner when his brains
Slipped out of a nostril and they took him
To the hospital, the scene he made red
And steaming. When we left the center
He was gone and we made a Michigan
Left northward.

One day your sisters and brothers
Plunged into the lake and didn't come up.
After years of lonely retracing
Mom turned up at the funeral to cast
The ashes into the stream in their
Whitish box-pattern. Before her suitors
She dissolved, and we began to rest.

Clover Crown

Kara Stevens

As children
We were fairy queens,
(one of us born without wings)
Dancing through the mist
And gold vines,
Crafting crowns
Of clover flowers.

Twenty years from now,
(speculative fiction)
As I'm sitting by the sea
Weaving daisy chains,
I will sing to you
Happy birthday,
Happy birthday

and I miss you.

Even the Bees

Lauren Stachew

I meet with my Baba Anya every Sunday morning to do her laundry and keep her company. Her favorite thing is to sit at the window and watch the barn cats roam in the farmyard next to her cottage. They slither as they navigate the mounds of parched soil in the field, patrolling the grounds for ill-fated rodents and grasshoppers. As we watch together, I hear my Baba Anya breathing – the oxygen tank perched next to her hisses and pops each time she inhales.

The deep creases in her cheeks spill outwards as she moves her lips in broken English. She tells me, “Galina, when I was your age, I was pregnant with your father – my first child. I wanted so badly for girls. Every morning I woke just as the sun was rising and I prayed and I prayed...” Her rambling was interrupted as she coughed, hacking into her sleeve. I left to retrieve her a glass of water and when I returned she was asleep.

•••

Sundays are my only days with Baba Anya. Every other day of the week, I deliver the newspapers in town and waitress at the café next to Mother Paula’s, one of the town’s twelve mediums. She wears lime green tennis shoes and carries a mahogany cane. I’ve never been inside her practice, but there is always someone entering or leaving, and they often like to wander into the café. I look at them, searching for something odd or outlandish, but they always seem to be completely ordinary. They order coffee, they smile, and they thank me. It’s a politeness that makes me feel strange, as if there’s something they know that I don’t.

I live with my parents in the brick house next to Irina the seamstress. Besides the days when she picks through our laundry hanging on the clothesline between our houses to sew up the odd hole, tear, or snag, she doesn’t bother us. My mother teaches at a folk school in the rural area, and Papa works long hours at the mill, so when I am home, it’s just me. It used to be me and Mathilde. Mathilde was our old ragdoll cat. Up until her last day, she commanded the household with sapphire eyes mounted onto her obsidian slab of a body. As a crippled fourteen-year old, she succumbed to kidney failure and started peeing all over the floors. We all drove to the city vet and carried her in alive and carried her out dead. When we got back home, I sat down in the grass with Mathilde, her paws wrapped tightly around my fingers, and I couldn’t stop looking at her.

I remember this memory well. I remember it because of a story Baba Anya always tells. She often spurts out the same reel of stories, carefully rewound before each time we meet. She will stare at the same spot on my face behind her huge eyeglasses and blink her chalky, grey eyes a dozen times.

After giving birth to my father, she spent the next twenty-five years raising him and her two other sons. Her prayers must have just been delayed, because once her boys married and had kids of their own, she found herself with five granddaughters. On the rare occasion when the five of us are together, she herds us around like chickens, gobbling up our tiny bodies into her sweaty arms.

Baba Anya often falls asleep mid-story, but after some time passes, and the cats wander back into the barn to nap on the haystacks, she wakes up. She pokes at her eyeglasses with her pale, chubby fingers, mumbling something in Ukrainian to herself, and turns her eyes to look at me.

“My mamochka,” she says, “had three sons just like me.” I start to cross my eyes slightly as I stare at the drops of water dolloped on the nose of the cat, sitting on Baba Anya’s lap. Her brother drowned in a frozen pond, so her mother tried for another child and had my

Baba Anya. She keeps a photograph of him on the nightstand in her bedroom. He is three years old, dressed in a Sunday shirt, holding onto his left arm, and staring directly into the camera's lens. "His eyes were so blue," she says to me.

She tells me this particular story all the time. We sit on the sofa and she'll say, "If you're trying to bring something back, but you can't, just think about it and think about it and don't let go, then... stop thinking about it. Then, it will come to you." She claims this is how her brother came back. "My mamochka prayed and prayed for her Ivan, then she stopped. A year later, I was born and my mamochka cried, "My little Ivanko, you came back!" even though I was a different child." She lifted her gaze from me and squinted down at the cat.

So, on the day of Mathilde's death, I tried Baba Anya's theory. After we dug the grave and buried Mathilde inside her shoebox coffin, we walked away. I sat down on the sofa and closed my eyes. The image of Mathilde as a skeleton appeared in my mind, but I didn't like that image, so I shut my eyes tighter, recalling how Mathilde would crouch under the kitchen table and I'd crouch too, poking erasers at her until she hissed at me. I thought about when I tapped my fingers on her back, she'd hunch up real tight and yell at me. I kept thinking about Mathilde, and then I stopped. I couldn't hold the image of her steady against the knowledge of her death, and tiny bones swarmed in. Her skeleton began to stretch and lose shape, until it disappeared completely.

Trouble is, she never came back. No stray cats turned up at our door. Not even a dog. I tried it again, countless times. I'd sit on the sofa and reconstruct my memories of Mathilde into well-stitched quilts and tuck myself into them. It never worked. Baba Anya said that's how it worked. I tried to remember what else she said about it, but all I could picture were those water droplets on the cat's nose.

...

At noon, I go to the kitchen to make tea and sandwiches. Baba Anya sits up straight on the sofa and tilts her head upward, lost in a

deep thought. As I lay out the cups and plates on the table, she shouts to me, "Galina! Make mine with peanut butter today. I have never had peanut butter. I want to try something new." I say, "But Baba, you had peanut butter last week", which is true. She had it the week before that, too. I remember because I saw a large, glass container sitting on the counter with a big label that said "peanut butter."

"Galina!" she hollered, "Don't be a fool. I would remember something like that. Last week I had turkey and lettuce."

"But Baba I remember th-"

"No, no, no!" I heard Baba Anya stomp her foot on the ground. "Don't play games like this with me, Galina." Her voice rang with a clarity that numbed my fingers wrapped tightly around the jar of peanut butter. "I'm not old and crazy. I'm not."

"That's right, Baba. I'm sorry." I hand Baba Anya her peanut butter sandwich and smile apologetically, looking at her eyes, teary and clouded in confusion. "I must have just forgotten." I feel a soreness well up inside of my throat and try to swallow it with the first bite of my sandwich. I tell Papa about this when I go home, and he says she is only teasing me.

...

The day after my visit with Baba Anya I woke early to deliver the newspapers so I could mop the floors of the café before opening. A light radiated through the dull navy curtains inside the windows of Mother Paula's study. I reached into my pocket for the key to the café and heard a slow, listless breathing above me. Mother Paula is sitting on the windowsill of the attic window, her legs hanging off the edge, tapping her lime green tennis shoes against the side of the house. She stares at me – the darkness under her eyes yawning – dilating into her cheeks and mouth, and she blinks and cocks her head back into the attic.

I dropped the keys back into my pocket and approached the front steps of Mother Paula's house. The flower boxes lining the front porch were once white, scarlet, and vibrant blue. Now the white

is dusty, the scarlet oxidized, and the blue a film of staleness. The floorboards buckle slightly underneath my feet, exhaling an unearthly moan into the empty parlor of the house. There's a tarot card lying on an old wood table, its face is a skeleton, ambling through a field of severed heads with a smile and a sickle. I lift the card from the table, and underneath lay a piece of torn paper with the words ending of a cycle, loss, conclusion, and sadness hastily written in pencil. The same breathing slowly descends the staircase around the corner. The bell tower in the town square chimes. I quietly leave. I have to mop the floors.

Around noon, a man emerges from Mother Paula's and enters the café. He smiles and orders coffee. I leave to the kitchen to brew a fresh pot and when I return he is gone. A note is left on the counter where he was sitting. I pick it up and read it. Acceptance.

...

I didn't go to Baba Anya's cottage again after that Sunday because she died. Yevgeny, the man who lives on the farm next to her cottage, brings her a carton of eggs every Tuesday, and when he walked into the living room, he found her lying on the sofa, buried underneath all of the barn cats. They had crawled into the house from the torn screen in the window. He couldn't coax them off of her for at least twenty minutes, and even once he did they all sat around him, watching.

We couldn't afford much of a funeral so we had a small service in our backyard. I stared at a bumblebee nestled deep in the crocuses, wiggling its pudgy body around the pollen. I crossed my eyes again and I saw Mother Paula's face staring at me from her attic window. This time, her face was the skeleton from the tarot card, and in her arms was Mathilde. She kicked her tennis shoes against the side of the house rhythmically, following the beat of the shovel patting against the soil.

Papa walked up beside me and lay his hand on my shoulder. "Your Baba Anya's body has left this world, Galina, but she still

remains here with us," he said. "She is a part of you, a part of me, and now a part of this earth. We do not forget ourselves. We do not forget the ground we walk. Even the bees do not forget."

He smoothed out the last clumps of soil and sat down on the grass next to my mother. The bee was still tending to the crocuses. It had migrated to the few flowers close to the ground, thoroughly inspecting its hollow, violet centers. I repeated Papa's words to myself in my head. I would like to think that I will remember everything, all of my memories with Mathilde and Baba Anya, but I can't. I will forget, and certain memories will come back to me, but not everything, just like Baba Anya. All of the earth works in a cycle. Every last molecule grows, lives, decays, and then it starts over again, and repeats. But not all that is recycled is returned.

...

On the last day with my Baba Anya, as we ate our peanut butter sandwiches for the first time, she looked out the window and rested her hand on her chin.

"Galina," she said, "Did I ever tell you about the first time I saw telephone wires?"

I looked up from my plate, surprised, and smiled at her cloudy, somber eyes. "No, Baba. I don't think you ever have."

"I was sixty-four," she continued, "and I looked out into the distance at the wires stretching over the whole earth. "The land, I had said to myself, it is covered with webs."

The Talk

Kathleen Janeschek

Then we fell back, chests
heaving, small stumps we call breasts
and legs quivering—after
we ran and ran all day, running
to and running from—now,
we rested, lying
in a sea of green grass or black
night on the bed we shared
and we talked. We talked of
ourselves and our bodies, each of us
pointing to the bits and parts we
would cut, little pieces
of fat, sweet baby fat,
waiting and primed for the cut, to
be sold. We would sell
to the butcher of human waste.
In his shop, hanging on heavy chains
like clothes on hangers,
pierced by meat hooks were
little girl calves and little
girl ribs (count them—all
twenty-four) and little girl
tits and little girl buttocks,

ordered and lined like the
clothes in our closets but
still dripping wet. We were delighted,
even excited,
at the thought of
the knife that would slice,
tear and rip apart our flesh, cutting
away all the excess, so we
could emerge from gauze cocoons,
women at last.

O, how our little bodies
spoke so sweet
so smooth so bare
so slick
of their little deaths.

untitled

Hannah Dougherty

the giant rolls of hay. on the field, scattered like that. dropped. left to be picked up by someone else. they were beads that had fallen from an elbowed bureau. my sister's beads. she's going to be an artist, you know.

there's a bad taste in my mouth from little sleep and a table four hundred miles east. i probably forgot to brush the night off my teeth...that is usually the case.

warm folds of heat spill out of the old vents.

when you're happy, your cheeks are my favorite thing.

everything is gray. not literarily. the curtains are not blue because the author is depressed. everything is gray because everything is fucking gray. we're driving on the highway in late november and everything is gray.

the sky and the trees and the asphalt and the dashboard, they all melt together in grayness.

don't read into it.

words and people and eggs and vaults and walnuts, they want to be cracked into, but do they need to be?

sometimes,

all the time,

things just are.

live and let live.

let me wear glasses with no glass and let me love the word confection. let it sit heavy on my tongue, and let everything be gray.

aren't you tired?

(tires rolling and tired eyes rolling)

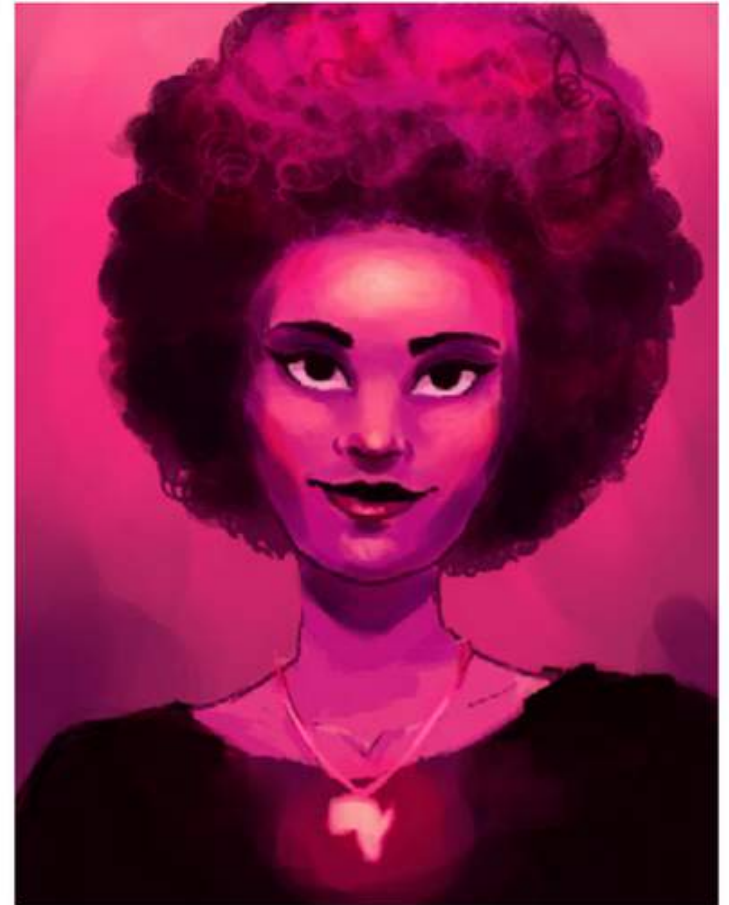
don't answer.

we all are.

what are you thinking about?

Hannah Dougherty

the ceiling was a box of the most decadent chocolates
embellished in gold and green,
a trinity,
i could pluck one from the sky
(like a midsummer bloom)
let it disappear on my tongue.
raindrops of light dripping from the boxes,
 suspended
drip,
clack
drop,
click
(the floor is fashioned so we can't make a sound)
eighty people plunked in neat lines
(what are the odds?)
eighty people in a world of billions
(what are you thinking about?)
how incredible it is,
 how lucky,
 serendipitous,
to sit in impenetrable silence with these very strangers
beneath a chocolate sky



Alyssa Erebor

AMPHORA

Ariel Kaplowitz

in the lavender bathroom with the skylight
my mother papered the walls in poetry.

we lived there for years before she began. it must
have been whimsy: my mother found

a poem that purpled her soul, that cracked the gauze,
that brought out the ocean, breathing. that gave her cause

to lift her elegant fingers, tape poetry at eye-level
across from the toilet seat. it wasn't just that room –

all around our yellow house, under light switches, around
doorknobs – my mother slipped poetry into

every forgotten space. i admit, there is such wonder in
shifting the food processor to discover a line

from “in Just – spring” – but the bathroom was the
holiest. when you are emptying,

a vessel to be filled –fill yourself with words. don't
call this crude. it is wisdom as only

a mother is wise. she pulled poetry from the inaccessible
towering bookshelves, smacked it by the

sink. within our grasp like a common fly. poetry became as natural
as anything, as drinking water.

poetry was tangible as a red apple, a kiss.
a reprieve in the midst of day. bathrooms

are how poetry should be read. bathrooms are how poetry
should be written – not to be stowed, stuck

stiff on highest shelves, but to be unwrapped,
lovingly, on white paper,

taped on the lilac bathroom wall,
open as a friendly hand, offering.

Lost in Translation

Cammie Finch

(This is a lyrical mashup of the word 'lost' in over 43 languages. Although this was written with a specific rhythm in mind, I encourage you to play around with your own stress variations and pronunciations. The human language is a beautiful thing. Even when we can't understand, we bond over the sounds, the fluidity of the line, and the freedom of a nonsense construction.)

galduta pèdi pražuvęs
stračany nestao verloor
perditus perdu perditaj
gamāvalē kalah zhytur

waliopotea - eksinud nasta
hāra dā förlorat elveszett lupa
lost tabt efu misst khō gayā rasa
padecido aldagdsan weg nawad-an sa

batbng nawala kadonnut thua
pierdut kaybolmus kaledukonda
elahlekile poteryanny laga badiyay
sufrido milù zagubiony poob gumāe

elloēstee you and me
we find ourselves now in this world,
here together :
lost.



The Love Club

Alyssa Erebor

Eulogy at Muncho Lake

Daniel Toronto

I'm not one to usually give a speech like this so I'm sorry if I sort of go on. It's difficult for me to know what to say. D__ left home when I was six years old, and I never saw him again. You all, the people of Muncho Lake here, are more of a family to him than I am. I guess that's how D__ wanted it.

Let me tell you one of the few fond memories I have of D__—not that he was mean to me or anything; I just hardly have memories of him at all. He once drove me out to a bluff that overlooked the plains. I don't think he had his license then, but that didn't seem to be an issue for him. Mom and Dad were away for some reason and he just took the car. He must have woken me up because we watched the sunrise, and I'm sure at five or six years old that that was too early for me. There wasn't a single cloud that morning. I remember how long it took for the sun to become visible, and the sky: gray turning to kind of a pale yellow and then to orange and then pale again as the orange sort of made its way into blue. Before I knew it, the sun was pretty bright for me to be looking at anymore. He told me to stop staring because he had something else for us to do. While I'd been in a dozy sort of trance watching the sun come up, he'd made a little setup. He'd shoved two lengths of rebar into the ground and attached rubber tubing to them to form a giant slingshot. There wasn't much to shoot at. So we just flung big old rocks off toward the rest of the world. I remember how impossible it was for those rocks to have flown as far as they did, like we might even hit the know-it-alls that lived out on the East Coast. Occasionally a vulture drifted by, and we tried to hit those, too. Don't know how long we were out there. Don't even remember coming home. Anyway, that was D__ in a nutshell: just enjoying what he could

do in the world.

I've liked talking to all of you and learning about my brother. A fella named Lon told me my brother once trapped a wolverine by accident. That seems pretty neat. I guess it's stuff like that that drew him up here. Lon showed me the fur. And I'm glad for you to have it, Lon. The same goes for any of you that might want something from D__'s trailer. You just go ahead and take it. I packed away a few things in a suitcase. In fact, I think I found my Grandpa Osier's old pocket watch. I remember Dad once tore up the house looking for that thing. Didn't even occur to him that D__ could of took it. 'Course, it took Dad a few years before he even missed it, so I guess D__ deserved it. Anyway, like I say, this Nebraska boy doesn't have much use for most of what he left up there.

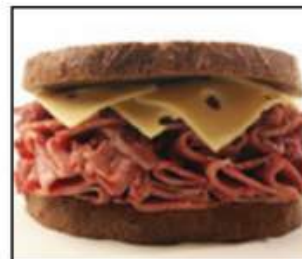
I appreciate the couple over there—I'm sorry I don't remember your names. You told me about when D__ helped dig a trench when you got plumbing a few years back. Digger D__ you called him. I guess he didn't take one red cent for the job except you made him dinner. Digging seems like something D__ might have enjoyed ... or at least, it pieces well with the rest of what I know of him.

And Bub—at least, that's what everyone calls you—I liked that story about D__ walking drunk down the middle of the Alaskan Highway. I suppose it wasn't a smart thing for him to do, but darn it if doesn't just make me like him more.

Netta, Lamont, thanks for tracking me down and then going so far as to put me up for a few days. I've never been to a place where there isn't a hotel within a hundred miles. I guess you two were closest to him, though it sounds like he kept quite a bit to himself up in his trailer. Still, you knew him as well as anyone, and I appreciate all the stories you told me about him. He taught your son how to back away from bears without running. I sure as hell don't know how to do that. But the most meaningful thing you told me about D__ is that he always used to say he had a brother back near Lincoln. I suppose Mom and Dad might be miffed that he didn't make mention of them, but they're long gone. I hope you don't think less of me that I didn't cry when you

called to tell me he froze. I suppose it's sad, but, to be honest, it made me happy in a strange way. Please don't think less of me, but that's the first I'd heard of my brother in forty years. I'm glad he still thought of me through all that time. I never forgot about him, though he was mostly just a character in my mind. That he froze to death, well, it just seems fitting. From what I know of D__, it seems like that's the way he would have wanted to go. Or something like that, anyway. I wish he didn't die so young, but there's nothing to be done about that. We've got the kind pastor here that's going to say a few words about where D__'s gone off to next, and I thank you for that, Pastor. Wherever he is, I imagine he can make an even bigger slingshot that shoots further off into them plains.

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