Congratulations. What you hold in your hands is a one-way ticket into the depths of the Residential College’s subconscious, where stories are sucked from succulents, poetry merges with shampoo commercials, and art reaches back in time. We hope you enjoy the journey. There will be no going back.

We live in strange times and they’re only getting stranger.

If you find the exit, let me know.

Kathleen Janeschek
Editor-in-Chief
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Splash Cerulean
Claire Denson
Splash Cerulean like one of those Neutrogena commercials from 2012 that smell like pomegranates by the shore. But how many takes did it take did the water go in her mouth when she smiled when she splashed did she choke there's no way she got all that soap off. Give me a real splash. Give me childhood, the lifeguard yelling and my brother giggling and my mother ignoring us for her magazine. Give me Sapphire Waves and falling under and maybe, okay just maybe I took a shit when I thought I was dying but I was five or twelve give me a water balloon smash to the face and crystal tears and some of that blood-red fun.

Wave / Emily Herard

Relationship Advice
Claire Denson
Death arrives in the shape of chicken nuggets. I still feel the taste in my mouth: decay, soil, rancid exhale dunked in expired ketchup.

I eat them all, washed down with somebody else's strawberry oreo milkshake.

But now I’m hiding. Wartime. Up to the attic, out through the window, flattening on the roof, becoming tile. I know they will come, plier me out, but there’s nowhere left to run. Eyes closed.

Open. Smile, the soldier says, then kicks in my teeth.

pomegranates
Haley Winkle

let’s find solace in scooping pomegranate seeds like teeth from gums. let’s marvel over the deep red, iridescent shining at us when we break apart the rind. let’s eat the seeds together with our bare fingers and taste their bursting sweet, find the cerise stains on our fingertips and paint how we feel on white paper towels. let’s look at how the garnet paints the rest of the white as it begins to wilt in the open air between us. let’s find little beads of its juice on our glasses later on, not nearly big enough to obstruct our sight, but enough to make us remember the tart, ruby as our ready tongues to match.
I wanna be as cool as
That kid who doesn’t care about the rain,
Doesn’t run for shelter,
Just smirks and says:
You take showers, don’t you?
Because it’s the same for him.
Because he showers clothed.
Because he’s just that cool—
Peel off that denim jacket,
It’s just more denim.
Impervious.
Who cares.
Big deal.
And while you are scurrying hysterical
Like some ancient fool,
He is rooted with crossed arms.
Come back in a week and
Find him rusted,
Birds nesting in his hair,
Truly one with the universe.
God. So fucking cool.

so why did i spend three hours coming up with metaphors for love?

Nadia Mota

when it looks more like a stray cat with a dead and bloodied mouse hanging from its teeth than a box of chocolates. love doesn’t look like goddamn cherry cordials. sometimes i’ll see what appears to be a slowly moving shooting star but it’s only an airplane full of people angry about their lack of leg room. when i point it out to you, you tell me “oh, no, that’s just an airplane” and i argue with you about it even though i know you’re right. well fuck me for thinking the cashew cluster was an orange cream.

"Don’t treat it like your grandma- pull the rope!"
The rough, impatient shout of my grandfather echoes across the just frozen ground, as my nine year old shaking hands scramble to pull the yellow twine rope. An entire herd of buffalo is racing by in front of me, and I can feel the thunder of their hooves shake the metal catwalk beneath my feet. The thundering travels up to resonate in my chest-or maybe that’s just my heart pounding. A thin wooden corral fence-wall separates me from them, and as I yank the rope- “What are you doing?” my older brother shouts- that pulls the gate to latch them inside, some herd mentality has them coming back my way. The leader, a large alpha bull, crashes into the half closed gate yanking the rope out of my hand. It burns as it leaves.

“What are you doing?!” My grandfather grabs the rope and watches the herd pouring back through the gate. “When they come running up like that you got to close the gate! Like that.” He jerks violently on the rope, trapping a single calf and it’s mom in the first pen- perfect for our goal of helping ween the calves from their mothers.

He turns to me. “That’s how you got to do it. Like that.” He jerks the rope sharply again. “And never wrap it around your hand like that,” he wraps the yellow twine around his whole hand, the way I had inadvertently been winding the rope in my franticness. “Because they crash back through the gate, like that, like they just did and they’ll take your hand with it!”

I look down at my hands and see, the one that the rope had been wrapped around has a large rope burn line across the top of it. A few flecks of blood line its path.

“Okay?” my grandfather asks gruffly, checking the lock on the gate.

“Yes,” I say meekly, subdued by the thought of losing my hand.

“Ok. Now don’t treat it like your grandma and pull the rope hard and quick like that!” he demonstrates again and then stomps off along the catwalk to look the calves over.

For some families a right of passage involves giving you your first beer or getting to be quarterback at the holiday family football game or carving the turkey. For my family, it’s getting to participate in Buffalo
Round Up twice a year, starting at the age of nine. Before that, you’re too young; and I had been waiting and waiting for my turn. Basically, ever since my older brother got to do it four years before me.

Now I’m standing in the cold frosty morning air, as large snowflakes begin to flutter down and my hand is bleeding a little but I’m too proud to ask for a Band Aid. I’d already messed up this morning and the whole thing is less exciting and much more cold than I thought it’d be. But I’m determined not to complain and be a whiny little girl, so I crouch down behind the fence again, put my hand back on the rope, and wait for another round of buffalo.

***

Buffalo Round Up is an all day event and objectively, the food is my favorite part. A Buffalo Round Up lunch includes sloppy joes and chips. After standing in the cold for hours, the heat coming from those burgers is the best thing I’ve ever felt and the salt on the Lay’s potato chips is addictive, even though it dries out and cracks my frozen lips. Then grandma brings out this huge sheet of brownies and they have a fudge frosting on top that almost makes losing feeling in my toes worth it. As I sit down and start to regain warmth in the tip of my nose (mostly from the steam on the warm apple cider I’m drinking), I’m in danger of slipping into a tired food coma. But the day’s not over: we have the second herd to round up.

***

As I sit, my toes re-thawing and my hands tired from gripping a rope anxiously all day, my grandfather tells the story of how on my first day of helping with buffalo I perfectly wrangle five calves into a pen to my mother and everyone who already saw it. I try not to look too pleased with myself, but mostly I’m too tired and sleepy to feel smug. I feel warm, inside and out. My grandfather, who always pays his grandkids when they help on the farm, puts some money in my hand, carefully noting it down on his folder of people and earnings.

“Now there’s a little extra in there. You did good work today- five calves in one go. Incredible! So there’s a little extra in there but I don’t want you expecting it the next time. Don’t go counting on it, now. And your aunt will mail you the Certificate, saying you’re a certified buffalo handler now. You can put that on your resume.” He says looking at me over his glasses, looking especially stern to me as he doesn’t wear glasses normally.

I nod vigorously. “Yes. Thank you, grandpa.”

“Ok now.” He ruffles my hair and pats the side of my head as he walks by. He mumbles, “five calves...”
Duffle
Alexander Wagner

On Friday nights at mom's house, pudgy fists shove wads of unfolded clothing between the riptide of royal blue on which his initials grow, gold and brilliant and probably a reference to something. Three radiant letters claim these folds of fabric for him, a gift he knows too well, something to have which is his, despite the twisted storm of cat hair weaving its way into the Velcro, ingrained into the black bottom, and he spends a lot of time with his bag because he prides himself on the speed of his packing, he knows he is the only contender in this race which, for some reason, he runs.

He doesn’t think about the strangeness of it all. He thinks, instead, of the printed email from his father, bent into quarters and charred with sharpie lines, glowing orange in the lamplight.

A bulletin list of events and essentials for the weekend at dad's house smile up at him, press up against the white glass, beg - by a shaky, haphazard stroke of blackness - to be extinguished. It wants him to remember to bring water-socks, the ugly twisted brambles of neoprene and rubber the only barrier between the soft soles of his feet and gravel, zebra mussels, the unknown.

It tells him that the seasons are changing, as they do, and he ought to keep track of their sporadic spin, but he wants to be too young for something. Italicized Times New Roman peeks out from behind boldfaced prison bars, winking dad’s desires into his conscious mind, where they, perhaps, should always be.

*Bathing suit(s)* is meticulously eclipsed as thin, baggy drapes that used to belong to the person he wants to be are crumbled into something which, to him, is easier, snaked along the side, fabric scraping against fabric looking for somewhere it wants to be, before the zipper hums shut.
Gift of Time
Wisteria Deng

Not an Eden rose or a ribbon laced,
the last gift you gave—
an hourglass.

This is how you mark
time: listen
to the sound of sands sifting
through a clenched fist, a held breath,
a squeezed eye.

You flipped a universe on my hand and it ran...
Inside, drizzling rain smothers the dry land.
Still it ran—droplets kept falling.
Failing to light a damp damp candle,
at dawn, your globe is strangled in time,
powerless to deliver a morning.

Beneath the falling sea, another ocean
has torn off the ridge, raging
at the flowing time.
The rain devours a sea like you
flooded me. We watched,
two adjacent worlds forming an empty gaze,
the last drop of blood hit
your hungry glass.

Ode to the Creek
Kathleen Janeschek

Once,
after my friends’
homes were sold,
I pulled,
from you,
—blue and alien—
a crayfish
struggling in
the warm air,
the heat-beat
of my hands. I could’ve
killed him. I could’ve
boiled him alive,
cracked his shell,
sucked out his
little lean meat
like marrow
from bone. I could’ve
slipped it between
my teeth, slid
it along my gums,
gulped it down
my gullet with
the tilt of my neck—
eyes up tracing
the slope of a hawk’s
head as she turns
towards me. But—

Instead, I dangled him
over the mouth of your
waters, watched the glint
of his hard body twist
in the last light
until my toes turned
blue, and then,

I let him fall.
Drunken Journal Excerpt / Heather Colley

Someone all I went as he was
for lack of you I thought was you
fucked and you'll
I was

Can I have a
Can I have a
dancing with infidelity
Jessica Jung

i.

i thought the highest number
on a scale from 1-10
was 10
until you got new glasses
and angels started to cry.

23, already having lived
3 lives—
each one a little less
depressing than the last;
a box that keeps one more cigarette each day.

homeless
(emotionally)
but no longer physically
because you’ve already conquered that life.

sexual tension
that reminds you of those weird
middle school dances
only made weirder by those
~pictures~
you and i exchanged.

but like any love story,
there’s a caveat:
the girlfriend.
a minor bump—
in the road, not her—
holy shit
wouldn’t that have been a great twist?

ii.

stupidity is assuming
that maybe you would
-crack a smile in my bed,
post 17-hour shift
after what felt like weeks of curiosity.

only 2 to be exact,
the perfect high—
14 days,
a game not quite as long or severe
as the one that dismantled you
almost 2 years back.

my navy duvet
never stood a chance
the second you stepped foot
in my lobby
to make real
those photos we sent.

the angels—
they wept
even after the glasses came off
and the hair tie fell,
but especially when
your body pierced mine.

what happened
to that minor bump—
the girlfriend?
tell me what it’s like
to be independent
but mentally and physically
trapped.

23, already having crafted
3 versions of yourself—
one for her
one for me
and one for the 34,000 others
who remember your name.

tell me how it feels
to live multiple lies
so that i’m made to be
the antagonist
every time.

now, let me tell you about
the weeping cloud
you’ve so cleverly hung
above my head—
the days and nights
i was forced to watch myself
crumble under minor actions
that prompted my heart’s most
heavily weighted reactions.

tell me why you came back
to the room with the navy duvet
but most importantly,
tell me,
how is the girlfriend?

Spaceman / Hannah Brauer >
pantoum: in the courtyard of the frick
Haley Winkle

in the public commons of the mansion,
visiting voyeurs take their rest upon
flat marble benches between
long columns and indoor greenery

visiting voyeurs take their rest upon
having studied so many frames, and admire
long columns and indoor greenery
their looking glass back to reality.

having studied so many frames, they admire
dust particles floating in the skylight.
their looking glass back to reality
before returning to the galleries.

dust particles floating in the skylight
mirror this elderly building
before returning to the galleries,
dust settles on nearby statues

mirror this elderly building
iron gates and marble floors.
dust settles on nearby statues
surface of the oblong pond.

iron gates and marble floors
in the public commons of the mansion,
surface of the oblong pond
flat marble benches between.

ode to my mother’s love of Prince
Nadia Mota

she talks in audio cassette
plastic and film, that
winding tape language
that volume turned down
low to not wake the
parents kind of soft-speak
all silhouette and suede.

once i saw my mother
gripped by the holy
spirit on a sunday
while the choir sang.
she couldn’t stop crying

while the choir sang.
she said she felt warm
with some eternal light
or spectral glow or
music playing on a
sunday morning.

she couldn’t stop crying
when she heard he was
gone. sometimes we mourn
not the loss of something
but the ending of it.

her mother said she
would wear out the
records from playing
them so much and
she did. black vinyl
all scratched and sedated.

she began to sing with
her own candle flame voice
after his flickered out.
Hell-o Hell-o
All thanks for coming out 2nite
I firstly just want to say
It is now safe to put youR hoods on
It is just us here
ill even put mine on
See look
Extra pointy
You could
cut a nigger with the tip
hahahahaha hahahahahah
just kidding i’m no racist
but i do think that white people are the superior race
and that there should be a gentle genocid
a nice and easy ethnic cleansing
i promise it won’t hurt oKKK
HAIL HITLER
oh crap i didn’t mean to say that
what i meant to say was
KALE FRITTERS
we must keep our bodies up so that we may pass on
our golden genes to our golden haired blue eyed babies
keep your sperm count high
don’t touch things that’s hot like laptops stoves or JEWS
or uhhh stews that what i meant to say
i don’t know my tongue keeps
FUCK THE GAYS
slipping
The streets were alive with purple. A rare color, a rich color, usually reserved for the most solemn and holy ceremonies. But today it was strung triumphant and festive through the city, through the country, for today was the coronation. Only on a day like today could the color of the gods be displayed proudly to welcome and bless the new king.

The general hoped he wasn’t going to be late. He didn’t want to disappoint the soon-to-be ruler. He weaved purposefully through the streets, his progress slowing as the crowd congealed in the roads leading to the heart of the city. Finally, he could see the wall stretching dark and imposing into the sky, seeming to absorb the sound of revelry as he drew near it. The posted sentinels, recognizing him, plucked him from the throng and let him pass through the arched gate.

The castle was dark and silent, a welcome change from the rowdy crowd outside. The general noticed mourning colors for the late king still hung in corners where an idle servant had forgotten to take them down and frowned at the sloppiness. He’d have to ensure they were removed promptly. On this day, the last thing anyone wanted was to be reminded of the assassination. This was supposed to be a celebration. At least the main corridors through which the coronation procession would pass were acceptable, with not a hint of black or gray to be seen. However, as the general progressed deeper into the castle his irritation began to wane. The rest of his preparations seemed to be running smoothly.

The corridors stood empty, for he had ordered the bare minimum of staff to remain at their posts for the celebration and dismissed the rest to the festivities. The fewer people involved, the less chance there would be for things to go wrong. Still, it was strange to see these hallways so bare and silent. The general couldn’t even begin to count the number of times he had had to chase down the rebellious little prince to get him to his lessons. Or the times he’d been called down to stop the prince harassing the cooks with his toy sword for sweetmeats. Or the times the prince had ‘lost’ one of his pets and half the castle was sent off looking for the puppy or the cat... The general sighed. All of that would soon be no more than a memory. The prince had fooled around like that, but after today the prince would be no more. There would be a king instead.

As he rounded the corner the general saw the loyal men he’d
hand-picked for today, one on either side of the door to the throne room. The prince exchanged a nod of acknowledgment with them as they stood aside to let him pass."

The high vaulted ceiling echoed his footsteps as he entered and saw the prince sitting in the center of a swarm of attendants. Cast in pale and purple by the soft light, he looked the very image of a king, or even a god. He exchanged a smile and turned his gaze on the prince's face, noticed the prince's smile as the general hurriedly smoothed the frown that had unconsciously slipped onto his face away. "How go the preparations?" asked the prince."

"Very well, sire. The ceremony waits at your leisure."

The prince nodded and opened the door to let the princess in. She appeared surprisingly serious and dry-eyed, though her face stood out drawn pale against her hair, which curled jagged and dyed behind her ears, just like the prince's. She had cropped her glorious locks short, as if imitating her brother would give her the same

"The prince snapped, blinking and hand-picked for today, one on either side of the door to the throne room. The prince exchanged a nod of acknowledgment with them as they stood aside to let him pass."

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strength he had shown in the face of their father's death. He might even have been flattered, somewhere underneath his haughty exasperation at her for making such a scene.

The princess smiled at the general briefly before her face fell into the same anxious expression she always wore when talking to her brother. With a short bow, the general stepped out and shut the door behind him.

"What is it?" the prince asked again, not bothering to hide his impatience at the delay, but regretted it halfway through the sentence and moderated his tone to be softer. The last thing he needed was to upset her, because she'd just shut herself in her room like an invalid again, and he wanted her to appear at the coronation. Everything had to be perfect, or as perfect as he could get it. He hoped she wouldn't be as pitifully weepy as she had been during their father's funeral, but he wasn't counting on it.

"I just wanted to speak to you, before…"

"About?" The prince didn't turn to look at her, attention on arranging the array of jewelry on his wrists. "I don't know. It's just… things will be different soon, won't they?"

"That's true."

His sister quieted then and the prince was glad of it. She had time for wishful thinking, about their dear departed parents, of the minutes that had always separated her from her brother - more so than gender or circumstances could have provided. But he had no time for nostalgia, not when the future of the country lay ahead, shining and as malleable as gold, and he would be holding the tools to shape it.

"I thought you might want to know," his sister said, quickly stepping up to him, hands twisting behind her back, "I just wanted to…"

"It's fine," the prince cut her off, turning his back angrily, "just go and get yourself ready. Now." He straightened his back with a last glance in the mirror and took a deep breath. "Are you ready?"

"Not yet."

"Not ready," the prince asked, "they will have to wait forever."

The prince turned and actually looked at his sister for the first time since she had come in. "Why not?" he asked, frustration slipping into his voice again. Still in mourning clothes, hair unadorned and face unpainted?

She knew she couldn't appear in the ceremony looking like that. "You know we don't have to wait for you."

Metal gleamed at the edge of his vision again, and his confusion was eliminated by raw survival instinct. For lack of a weapon, the prince gasped as pain stabbed through him and almost brought him to his knees. From behind him he heard his sister let out a yelp of panic. The door swung open as the general darted let out a yelp of panic. The door swung open as the general darted in.

The prince fell to his knees, hands to his face. His second strike found the mark. The rings on his fingers caught her across the cheek and drew blood. Then he stumbled under the shock and the weight of the huge crown gown, opening his mouth to cry for help again. The prince fell to the floor, curling his body against the stone and drew blood. Then he stopped, looking closer at the dark stain pooling on the ground. It… wasn't red, but a darker hue, almost invisible against the rich hues of the room.
Kings do bleed purple, he thought despite himself, eyes widening. The princess's eyes snapped to him as if challenging him to voice it. He met her gaze for a moment, though his eyes flickered down to the red cut on her lip. Then he picked up the prince's body and wrapped a cloak around it, hiding its face and the purple seeping from its chest. It didn't matter now. King's blood or not, you would have led our country to ruin, little prince.

"The parade won't wait forever," the princess repeated. The general bowed again and mopped up the mess on the floor, then slipped from the room to dispose of the bloody cloth and the prince's body. Or rather, the princess' body. After the coronation - at which nobody would question her absence, for she had been so distressed by her father's death and quite unfit to appear in public - they could discover her body, almost unrecognizable in death from the wounds inflicted by the tell-tale enemy dagger lying nearby... The tragic event would mar the coronation, of course, but it would also cement the country's resolve to eliminate the cowardly insurgents who had assassinated the previous king and the princess at all costs.

It would only be necessary to pretend to be her brother until their treacherous neighbor was crushed. And if she chose to reveal herself then? Nobody would be able to question her leadership after she had achieved the victory her father had been working towards - and if they did, well, their opinion didn't matter, or at least would be as easily silenced as her brother.

The general returned to the room empty-handed, prompt and without any signs of blood on his ceremonial uniform. The princess smiled at him, but did not miss the worried tenseness in his face nor the half-second flicker of his eyes to her chest.

"Worrying about this?" she said, touching the bloodstain over her heart. The general saw her fingers come away purple and nodded, knowing it was useless to lie to her.

"Yes, a bit. I can't help..."

He trailed off when the princess clicked her tongue as if amused by a child's antics. Her hand flitted to the general's face, tracing his jaw with a fond familiarity before she pulled him into a kiss.

"Don't worry," she said, drawing back with a wry smirk. "It's only a myth."

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On a November road trip through an endless cornfield

Sofia Spencer

the grey sky is the only sky and I feel like the grey sky because I am tired of waiting for the rain to come or the sun to shine and it doesn't even matter which because if there is a downpour or a drizzle or nothing at all I will still be disappearing beneath the weight of the clouds pressing down from above like the burden only Atlas is supposed to bear but he must have taken a trip instead of me or maybe the cornstalks are supposed to support the sky but the farmers cut them down before they could help hold up the heavens with their subsistence and lack of resistance and maybe there are cornstalks growing inside of me too like the scarecrows in all of those horror movies I watched driving through Nebraska which is where the Children of the Corn created a world full of hollowed out husks dripping with gasoline that burst into the red explosions of a monster they called their Leader and maybe it's not such a bad thing if this metaphorical town were to explode or implode with fire or ash because then this sky would be all the colors I never dreamed I could be.
“It’s time for me to go, I think,” said Jack.
“Three in the morning, that’ll do it.”
A brief pause as we stood in the dark, gazing at the front lawn.
Not uncomfortable.
“I sort of like smoking cigarettes on the porch with you.”
“Me too. Usually I’m a solitary smoker.”
“Me too. Goodnight.”

***

People say I Love You in reverse. They say it when they don’t mean it, throw it around when it’s easy, because if they really mean it, it carries way too much weight. You tell someone I Love You when you really do, and you have knowingly dived into an ocean that will drown you. There is no turning back from that, once you admit it as the truth.

I’m a victim of it too. Sometimes I go home from college, home to New York, and I see my old high school boyfriend. He was the love of my life for about a year and a half. Lost my virginity to him and everything. We see each other because we miss each other, not because we love each other. We broke up because we stopped loving each other after a year and a half.

And every single time we sleep together over Thanksgiving and Christmas, we say I Love You. When we’re laying there naked in the dark, we say it. Not because we mean it, but because it feels as though we could be in love, if everything weren’t so tortured all the time. And it’s all too easy, just to let it roll off our tongues, and feed it right back, like a reflexive cat hitting at a string on the ground. Hardly a second thought. It feels good to be loved, even when it’s entirely bogus.

So people throw it around as a cop-out, when it’s passion and sweat masquerading as the real thing, when it’s going absolutely nowhere, and the end is around the corner, probably next Monday. You know when people don’t say I Love You? when they’re terrified that it may be true.

Instead, they say things like, I sort of like smoking cigarettes on the porch with you.

Which is why, when he turned his back and walked away, his pack long empty of cigarettes, I sat on the porch swing for another five minutes or so minutes, considering solemnly to myself that I was probably in very deep trouble.
States of Dakota
Ellie Katz
Driving west to where two diverge—north and south, you and me.
Driving west toward the last of
the buffalo—to Harney Peak.
From up there on that mountain,
in that stone tower
I could see all of it:
Montana, the Badlands, the ending
from where we began.
I could see the painted horses, still wild, and
the Missouri River. I swam in
that river before I ever
swam in you.
It pulled me the same, though.
North and south with its currents,
warm and cold with its depths.
I can remember now the way that
brown water wove fibers through my fingers
and behind my knees.
That was before your hands ever
felt those places.
And it saw my thighs
before you ever did.
Remember the first time you saw
my thighs? Shining like jewels,
shaped by mountains and touched
by rivers.
Remember the first time you pressed
your palms to them? They gave like sand,
trusting the flood
you’d promised.
I became the buffalo and you
became the divide.
I, the peak,
you, the river;
but a little farther upstream
now from where I once
swam—
a little cooler
on my skin
than I recall.

bare
Kennedi Killips
drunken Shakespeare monologues recited in the early hours of the day
before the dawn sky flushed pink, eating from takeout boxes on the cold
tile of my kitchen floor in nothing but our
underwear and honesty. we coaxed ourselves into believing some things
weren’t meant to work and this was one. as you left, you said, “I hope
you won’t hate me forever.” I didn’t speak to you
again for two months until I heard the chiming sound of pebbles hitting
my window, like the night we first kissed two years before. you stood
there on my front step; you said, “I’m so
fucking nervous, you’re all I can think about.” neither of us believed in
god, but for the briefest moment, I did; we laid in my front yard passing
a bottle of pink moscato, listening to the cicadas
cry. you told me that you missed me, and I swear, for the first time, I
saw tears in your eyes. two months a stranger, too much, too bare.

Bedroom Floor Confessional
Kennedi Killips
Rolled up in silky paper torn from
a Bible my aunt gave me, I empty
the smoke from my lungs while
my feet swung idly in the damp
July night. The obsidian sky was
dappled with freckle-like stars
and a moon that grinned like
my gap-toothed cousin. My chest
felt ironclad with each breath. A boy,
only two days past seventeen, sat
on the windowsill with me. His eyes
met mine and later that night he
cried out to God, but it wasn’t in
prayer or anger for once.
I can't get her face to stop moving. She's barking at me, lips now full now plush, and her words are stacking against me like a flood I am buffering, now rolling now beating higher and higher, but I am a dam and not a drop of her spittle, her poison leaks through. Then she smiles and her lips are slivers slithering up her cheeks, curling cues for the curve my mouth makes, my face a machine automated by her and I want her to stop I want to tell her I want to stop, but already her face is getting sucked into her mouth, the widening gyre, now cavernous now carnivorous and I follow. The wet slime scrapes my sides, the deep bark the deep red pulsing, vibrating, shuttling me along, and her insides become my outsides become my world and as I hand in my resignation to reality, she stops laughing.

Her mouth shrinks to the size of a button, stitched into her chin her cheeks, threads across her face twisted tightly into a knot and I want to reach out and tug it tighter, tighten it 'til she is squeezed 'til she can't breathe 'til she releases me 'til she unties the strings woven into my skin. But my movements belong to her and she does not give one not a single one back to me.

Now it's her eyes. They begin to bulge out of her head and I want to tell her to pop them back in, but I am lost in their watery glisten, I am lulled with the lullaby of the waves of her oceans, rocked back and forth, the swishing sounds of a lifeless sea drowning out all other noise and I swear there's a salty tang on my tongue. I see myself in her sea. I see my own seas reflected back at me and suddenly I am falling between them, mine and hers, drifting down the dividing line of oceans, waves tossing me, unwanted undesired, to the other side, the other sea, and back again, but I do not mind. I go with the current, I float between rolling, rumbling oceans as down the quiet creek in the shadow of the forest of the house I grew up in. But, wait, in the house I grew up in—was there a creek? The speckles of sunlight on its sandy banks seem so real to me that if I looked down I would seem them there, but I know my mind is playing tricks on me—it must be—and I can't tell if this is one of them. For there's no creek here, in this house and anything that isn't here, that isn't right before me, I can't guarantee. I might have made it up—all of it, everything outside these walls, which is madness, I know, to think I constructed a whole lifetime of memories, but, yes, I must have, at least a few. I don't know what's real. I don't know what's here. But the oceans, the sea, the storm are here, they are real, I can taste them, and I am tossed roughly now, certainly I never knew a creek for I can swim no longer, I am at the mercy of the water, my enemy, the wet cold matter of this reality, but before I slip under, she blinks.

She bares her teeth in a flash and with her sharp incisors she cuts through my strings, freeing me, her beast and her slave and walks away—just like that, the tie between me and her is severed and I float free. I'm alone. I don't know if I want to be. My body belongs to me

Excerpt from Waking Windows
Kathleen Janeschek

Mike Parsons / Police Officers. Tiger Stadium. Detroit. 1970
belongs to my mind again—or, for the first time? I can’t remember. But that’s alright—first time or last time, what matters is that I can move my body at my will, my movements are mine mine mine. And when you find yourself back inside yourself, the first thing you do is look outside yourself at the world you stand in.

The room vibrates. Orange ooze bleeds and fills the floor. Frequencies bounce off bodies, radio waves to a station I’m not tuned in to, and their signal turns gibberish in my mind, the sound of a pack of hyenas licking the bones of a wildebeest, just primal noises, guttural husks of words. I imagine I sound the same so I keep my mouth closed and I watch them from my vantage at the edge, barely outside of myself. I sit uneasily within my borders, anxious and ready for flight. I know that I shouldn’t stand still and without looking down I know my feet are already melting into the carpet, growing, pulsing, pumping, flesh coiling around flesh, tumors sprouting and squeezing and spreading all over its body, popping like pimples and squeezing an orange gelatin, slopping its insides on its outsides, and I don’t know what is more terrifying—this monster or that I am not a part of it.

When I open my eyes I see new appendages feeling blind like vines, gripping the air for fresh bodies, fresh meat and I know they won’t find me, I’ve unstepped my feet from the floor—leaving behind puddles of skin and toenails—and I can’t stand to listen to wet clucks choked and throttled in throats and I can’t stand to listen to the monster breathing into another room, but the monster is still here, waiting for me. I enter the room or backwards, no matter how many times I cross, it is the same step I left the room and again I walk and walk back and try again but I know that I shouldn’t stay still and without looking down I know my feet are already melting into the carpet, growing, pulsing, pumping, flesh coiling around flesh, tumors sprouting and squeezing and spreading all over its body, popping like pimples and squeezing an orange gelatin, slopping its insides on its outsides, and I don’t know if I am a part of it.

I close my eyes to get away from it but it follows me into my mind and I can feel it groaning the darkness, prodding the black back for small I can get before I cease and as soon as I think about no longer existing, I realize that’s what I want. I want to shrink until I’m just a black dot on an infinite black plane and then shrink just a little bit more until the only way to escape is to keep on getting smaller and smaller and smaller I never cease to exist and I realize that on no matter how long I wait I’ll never just stop, the beast is sniffing about rooting around my head looking for me and I feel the heat of its skin breath loins and I know there’s no way out. Not like this.

Frequencies are poured into my head from the outside, radio waves to a station I’m not tuned in to, and their signal turns gibberish in my mind, the sound of a pack of hyenas licking the bones of a wildebeest, just primal noises, guttural husks of words. I imagine I sound the same so I keep my mouth closed and I watch them from my vantage at the edge, barely outside of myself. I sit uneasily within my borders, anxious and ready for flight. I know that I shouldn’t stand still and without looking down I know my feet are already melting into the carpet, growing, pulsing, pumping, flesh coiling around flesh, tumors sprouting and squeezing and spreading all over its body, popping like pimples and squeezing an orange gelatin, slopping its insides on its outsides, and I don’t know what is more terrifying—this monster or that I am not a part of it.

I close my eyes to get away from it but it follows me into my mind and I can feel it groaning the darkness, prodding the black back
first impressions and wonder if those are more or less important when dealing with all of eternity, but I’ve already made mine so I let him lead me through shifting rooms and twisting corridors and that monster is dilated across walls, spreading through the floorboards but he is unbothered by it so I imitate him and unfettered we ascend together, rising above the unholy fray, and then I walk into a bathroom and closing the door behind me, he disappears.

Already the party is fading from my head. Out of sight, out of mind, out of memory. I’m not too keen on trusting my senses right now, but I’m even less keen on trusting the things I can’t perceive and besides the low beat below my feet, there’s no evidence of the party, the people, the beast in here. I’m alone. I have become the world. Or, rather, the world has become me. I find my reflection in the room and I study the world: study the muscles twitching, the skin rippling, the waves of motion rolling, study the pores the sweat the dirt mixing portraits on my skin, study my pupils widening, those two black holes snaring light like blackholes and the little man in my left eye standing with his back to the sinking darkness. He waves. I wave back. I lean in closer to my reflection, watching him carefully, trying to figure out what he’s doing, but after a moment I realize that little man must be me, which is strange because I’ve never thought of myself as a man before. I’d look down to check what goods I’m packing, but I don’t want to take my eye off him—off me. With a final wave the little man recedes into the black as if he had been a little light beam all along. Back to headquarters, I suppose. I wonder if he ever wants to leave my body, to strike out on his own, but then couldn’t I ask myself that question? Suddenly the weight of my skin suffocates me. The burden of a body snuck up on me; stealthy and silent, it had grown bit by bit, inch by inch, encasing me within its walls, but I, inside of this hubris, had remained the same size, and dragging it around all these years had made me tired. Now I am seized by the desire to shed my skin, my bones, my muscles, to walk out of this corpse and leave it to rot, to be free. I had forgotten how weary I was, but the little man reminded me.

Maybe everyone has a little man inside of them.
Dear Juliet,
It's funny because you claimed that you fell in love within about 24 hours of meeting Romeo- and Friar Lawrence, who is a religious figure, didn't see a single thing wrong with that. Why is that funny? Because nowadays they call that settling. And when it's got to do with a religious figure, they call it corruption of the Church. I've got a slight inclination that 2008 New York City is a little different from prehistoric Verona but I don't think myself wise enough to make that conclusion just yet. Will let you know once I've sorted it out.
-Jane

Dear Juliet,
Did it ever bother you that Romeo left some other girl to be with you? A lover that he thought he loved more than anyone he ever could? As in, were you really certain that, had everything not gone entirely mad- he wouldn't have just turned around and pulled the rug out from under your affair too? You know what people nowadays call a new affair that stands on the back of a deceptive old one? A Bad Decision. I'm really just wondering if you were comfortable with the possibility of being the love of someone's life for only, say, a year. Or a month.
I suppose it's a moot point now but I'm just curious. Curiosity killed the cat and didn't much help you either.
-Jane

Dear Juliet,
I know the answer to this question but I will ask it anyway because it is a worthwhile one and this is all one great big learning experience, no matter how mad it is. Did you ever hear of feminism? No, because the word was coined sometime in the seventeenth century, way after your time in the sun. Anyway, even though it is a moot point because you're dead, if I'd been around Verona at the same time as you, I would've advised you to adopt something quite like it, even if I didn't know the word yet. As in, Is there any particular reason you are sacrificing your entire being for just one man who might not even be exactly what you need? Did you even know what you needed or were you just an adventurous rebel in pursuit of something that wasn't painfully and miserably boring?
-Jane

Dear Juliet,
People in 2008 New York City do not believe in fate as I imagine that you did. Only some wonky belief in premonition and supernatural guidance and the three witches in the attic pulling on your heartstrings could've driven a girl of reasonable intelligence like you to that insanity. You went wrong where you tried to control your own fate. If you believe in destiny then you have to let it be. That's the whole damn point, but you and Romeo went screaming across balconies and out into the countryside and getting the damn clergy involved, and that is where you erred. You thought you could play God from the window of your metaphorical apartment complex but God played you in the end. He has a funny way of doing that.
-Jane

Dear Juliet,
Did you think that you were alone in your stoic madness or did you know Romeo was there too? Would it have made you even madder if you'd known that you were floating in the hemisphere going crazy all by yourself, or were you already too far off the deep end that that knowledge would've just been dust on the windshield? Maybe I'm mad too. I'm writing to a dead girl. But maybe it's not madness if no one knows. After all the postman can't deliver these anywhere because you almost certainly have no apartment address.
-Jane
The window cracks open and the sunset floods in. Washing their faces in the golds, pinks, reds of the world.

Time is unknown. They are only aware of their breath in the silky air and the way the light flickers through the cherry blossom tree outside.

Quelle heure est-il?

Anne Else

The window cracks open and the sunset floods in. Washing their faces in the golds, pinks, reds of the world.

Time is unknown. They are only aware of their breath in the silky air and the way the light flickers through the cherry blossom tree outside.

Chasing a Meringue Sky

Rachel Hurwitz

The sky is an orange and mango sorbet and if I had a spoon in my back pocket I’d be able to taste the heat of that sun. We chase the sunset down on tires stripped of their treads from too many rides on warm pavement. If we follow it, the darkness can’t take us captive. Feeling the warmth on our faces, lifting us towards its light. Keep chasing. But eventually the sky will fade to the color of meringue and old clam shells when our hearts can no longer carry us as far as the ground spinning away beneath us.
The legend in our world was that the oldest and most powerful dragon of all spat ice. Its descendants became hot-tempered and weakened themselves into fire-breathing monsters. Of course, their fiery breath destroyed its fair share of humans, but none of their passionate anger could match the cold, calculated fury of the first dragon. The legend said that the great dragon lived on in the frozen heart of ice – one of the poles, modern scientists said now. Hardly anyone believed in the great dragon anymore, and those most skeptical souls were too afraid of falling off the edge of the earth to make the trip to prove the dragon's non-existence.

It seemed obvious to me that a dragon so cold would be infinitely worse than a hot dragon, but all everyone remembered were the great fires the hot dragons in the legends had started and all the destruction those fires had caused. While I was as glad as anyone that fire dragons no longer existed, I was sure there was a dragon far more dangerous in a corner of the planet.

My cousin, who was a scientist, and who was nearly fifteen years older than me, had a model of the earth in his little workspace. It was standard-sized – four feet by two feet by two feet – and showed all the oceans and ice caps and land. In the deep oceans, there were volcanoes that my cousin said some people said will turn into islands someday. I wasn't a baby – I knew that was just fairy tales. The north and south poles were on the long ends of the box. They were massive. It would take an explorer months to search for the dragon. The scientist who had discovered the poles had been trying to find the edge of the earth, but hadn't even come close enough to see it. He'd popped up on the opposite side of the planet six months after departing, with no idea how he'd ended up there and nothing but stories of enormous chunks of ice to show for his bravery. He hadn't believed in the great dragon.

"What happens if you fall off the edge?" I asked my cousin once.

"No one knows," he said. "Some people think there's a wall of ice around the edge, so no one can fall off. Some people think there's land beyond the poles. Some people think there's an invisible wall that keeps you from taking a single step off the earth. Other people think that you'll fall right into space and keep on falling forever until you grow old and die."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just don't know."

"Nothing good," I said, feeling clever.

"No, nothing good," he chuckled. "Unless of course that's where you find the end of the rainbow."

"Everyone knows rainbows are just rain and sun mixing."

"There's probably some poor soul out there who doesn't know that. Maybe they've fallen off the earth following it."

I giggled a little, even though I knew it wasn't really something to laugh at if it were true.

Then his supervisor came in and told everyone on the entire floor to shut up and get to work. I could see all the other scientists at all the other desks shrivel down and hunch over their stacks of paper. One man turned around and shot an annoyed glance at my cousin.

"Sorry, little cousin," my cousin shrugged.

I shrugged back. "I have to get back home anyway." I didn't really. It was just something I knew people said to make each other feel better.

In fact, I didn't really even want to go back home. My parents were both home, and that was never good. They were the very definition of fire and ice. Supposedly they were now making bombs out of fire and ice, and I believed it. When my parents clashed, the explosion affected everyone for miles around. My father was fire – he was a lawyer and his temper swayed the jury with his passion. My mother was ice – she was a lawyer and her calculated moves manipulated the jury to exactly where she wanted them. My father was frightening when he was angry, but he'd learned to douse himself in a cold bucket of water and only steamed a little. My mother inflicted the fear of death on me. You never knew when she was angry, but she'd strike out in a perfectly calculated way to wound her opponent where it's most damaging. My father would scald you, but my mother would destroy you.

When I reached home (it was only a five-minute walk from my cousin's work), I could see the reverberations of the earthquake that originated inside. Neighbors were hurriedly putting away their grass-cutters and gardening tools and disappearing like animals in the presence of a hunter. The very flowers in our front yard were trembling like they were afraid of the consequences. A lone rabbit, which under different circumstances might have stopped to sniff the air in our safe yard, barreled right through quick as possible. I could hear my parents’ muffled voices
I braced myself for my entry. I threw open the front door with a bang, to alert them to my presence. All noise stopped for the briefest of seconds, and then continued as loud as before. It was so deafening I could hardly hear what they were saying. I didn’t dare go into the room with them, and instead snuck up the stairs (oh why did they have to creak?) to my bedroom.


The build-up was coming. I sat on my bed, clutching the sides of my mattress, staring at my chest of drawers across from me. Its wooden frame was cracked, not from the explosions, but from water that I’d spilled. It was somehow comforting to know that something as refreshing and wonderful as water was more powerful than fire and ice put together. An image of the churning river not three miles from my house appeared in my head, and I swallowed it quickly. Water wasn’t always so safe.

Wham! A slammed door shook the whole house. I jumped, my nerves twisted up. The entire house was now hushed. I crept out of my room, silent as a snail. I couldn’t tell yet whether I’d find peace, or the remnants of tattered belongings ravaged by storm. I’d heard once of storms of wind and water so catastrophic that entire nations lay destroyed, but that could be another story told to scare children. The mean-spirited kind of story, not the kind meant to make children behave.

The wooden stairs were quiet as I descended, unusual for these stairs.

I turned to see our parlor. The fire was crackling and giving off a rosy glow. The old rocking chair was all intact. The scratches in the floor were the same as the ones that had been there yesterday, from an old cat. My father stood in the doorway to our kitchen. He looked worn down around the edges.

“Where’s Mother?”
My father sighed, seeming not entirely happy to see his daughter.

“Don’t be here when she gets back.”
I nodded.

“Did you come from your cousin’s?”

“Yes.”

My father shook his head. “You got him in trouble again, didn’t you?”

I stood still. He didn’t really want an answer.

“Then you can’t go back now. Go to the river?”

The image of the thrashing river popped into my head again. I grimaced.

“All right, then, don’t go to the river.”
He paused.

“Where can you go?”

“I’ll go.”

Without waiting for my father’s reply, I bounded out of the house and down the street. Our home hadn’t shattered around me, which my cousin had told me many times was just a matter of time, but my mother would be livid when she returned, and she knew how to hurt each of us most. I pitied the poor neighbors who didn’t yet know better. My father said it was the only way she knew how to operate. He said she was afraid, afraid that if she didn’t control everything and everyone, they would control her. But she never seemed scared to me.

Once I was off of our street, I slowed down to a walk. I had hours until it would be safe to come back.

I thought about bugging my cousin again, even though my father and I agreed that it was too soon. Maybe all his work would be done, and he could take me to get a treat. I knew that wasn’t likely. I’d distracted him enough that morning. I didn’t feel bad, though. I knew he liked being distracted so he didn’t have to do all the hard work of distracting himself.
But even that was better than slogging through the mush they gave him to do. ‘I didn’t become a scientist to do this,’ he’d told me, not a month after going to work. He’d talked about his endless paperwork and that he only got to even step foot in the laboratory a few times per month, and even then, it was just to repeat experiments that had already been done a hundred times before.

I empathized with him. He’d spent seven years at the university far away to study science—the exciting kind where discoveries were made every day—and now he had the letdown of doing science that was barely even science. The wild things that went on at university, that I’d like to go to, I knew that I had no chance of going. Maybe someone could pay for it for me, and maybe someone could take me there, but no one but me could pass those tests. I’d only taken one other test before, and it was the worst I’d ever had. The father said it was trivial. My mother said it wasn’t, but I simply didn’t have the brain power.

My tutor still doesn’t think I’m smart, but he knows I’m trying. He’s wrong. I’m not trying. I’ve got five whole years left until I’m old enough to quit learning. My cousin finished his tutoring and went off to university at sixteen and there are far better things to do than slave over ancient literature like he does. I can tell him to be patient with me, because how far is it to snap at a dull person?

As I stood stock-still in the entryway, I felt the pressure in the house become too much. I felt all the windows in the house explode. The shattered window in our parlor shot glass outwards, propelled it yards away from our house onto the lawn, I swayed and the wind whipped through the open window-frame. I waited—didn’t even voice my concern. The wind blew the flowers drifter peacefully in the wind. I suddenly was boiling mad at them. How dare they not warn me? I escaped out in the front door. I sat on the front lawn, not caring about the shards of glass that must have been among the grass blades. I watched the flowers drift peacefully in the wind and I suddenly was boiling mad at them. How dare they not warn me? I came up the path again. How dare the animals and the neighbors and the clouds and the gravel in the road send loud signals during any ordinary earthquake and fail to warn me now. Everything had finally shattered and they hadn’t warned me.
The Wife of The Night Shift Worker
Claire Denson

spends her days in thought
a relationship almost epistolary
with short notes sent into the void
of a text opened only in dark
hours when he’s already gone.
He leaves the hour she sleeps,
drives in silence through the night.
They miss each other most
and only meet in dreams
but never share the same one.

A Winter Ice-cream
Wisteria Deng

First time we met, you were eating a cone
in an icy morning. Last day of Jan,
the end of a start. We watched egrets fly,
wings flapping, the sound of Mozart, a clan

of coherence, union, a divine plan.
Little joyous accidents, things gone wrong:
winter ice-cream, melted snowman,
your laugh lighting up my frozen cheeks, a song

going so smoothly that we worried
it would end. Still we rejoiced,
two melting cones, forcing our way through the throng.
Knowing well that cold does not last. Fears voiced:

the constant expectation of a blow,
wrong season, future that happened long ago.

the apology takes the last bus home
Nadia Mota

but misses its stop; now stumbles with its shoes dangling from stiff
fingers, nervous because it doesn’t recognize the street signs anymore.
the apology doesn’t recognize itself anymore. the apology has a quarter-
life crisis and cuts all its hair off in wild, scissor-wielding desperation. the
apology doesn’t acknowledge what happened, just knows something is
wrong. the apology is a threadbare blanket. the apology is coffee gone
cold. the apology makes a home in the back of your throat, becomes part
of you. now all of your sorrys slip out like second nature; so subdued, i
couldn’t hear it when it called for me.

< Detroit / Emily Herard
Learning How to Not Want to Kill Yourself
Kathleen Janeschek

When I speak, I listen to the words I thought I belonged to as they spill from the slash across my throat, slouch across the tiled floor, and rise, again, in the far corner; that dead air, emptied of human breath. There, for the first time, I see the light of my own eyes flutter, feeble, dense, nearly vacant—I see the words as you have seen them, I see their wicked workings on the wall, I watch the paint chip at itself, the flakes floating down to the floor, the pile you will sweep away someday. The words—they stir. Like the little sparrow loitering on the road to your suburban home, the moment before the wheel comes down on top of her, she lifts—a flutter, a flee—herself from certain destruction and carries herself into the wide and open world.

The Forest Calls Your Name
Kathleen Janeschek

There's a way the trees come fully into bloom without you noticing. You arrive here one day with the date of departure already fixed in your head and the leaves are green but barely, little half-leaves of what is to come. You know your time here is temporary and therefore valuable, but you won't know what the trees mean or how they will transform until the moment of their transformation is passed and the leaves have long been unfurled. You see them, but not really, not clearly, until one day you leave and when you come back, suddenly, there they are—fresh leafy madness obscuring the forests, the sky, the world, the voyage home, a beauty, a bounty of green, a harvest bound to happen. You wonder how long they've been like that, how long you've failed to notice—when was the last time you looked up from the ground, when was the last time you raised your eyes to the sky?

And now, when you look at them, in the prime of their lives, you cannot help but see the shadows of their deaths. When their leaves were only half-open, the thought of death never crossed your mind, but now you can see it lurking in the lift of their leaves, you can trace their future from their outline. Somehow, it is easier to envision their branches bare, their bark grey, their wood dead, than it was before. Death has entered the picture, the view. Life always carries its shadow.

When you leave, it is only the full bloom of the trees you will remember, and the only shadow you'll think back upon is the shade they cast. Your memory will be bright and perfect; your mind will structure paradise. You will forget everything but the green.
My favorite picture of us is one that is blurred, my finger on the shutter twitching from fear of missing or ruining the moment. It is the reflection of us looking into the seven-foot window of a library that we never entered. Lampposts behind us, shining just bright enough to see our reflections, but not light enough to drown them out. He is six inches taller than me. His colorless reflected eyes are staring straight ahead, though I know a moment ago they had glanced down at my beanie-covered head, looking into the library. Wishing it was open so that he and I could find a story book that would become ours and dive into its pages together, not returning until another ethereal, perfect night like this one, which I know will not come.

We look like ghosts. Drifting into and out of existence without the other because we are coming and going at different times. We will continue missing each other in the coming months until I miss him so much that I take another’s body into my own and I will miss that moment for the rest of my life. At least I have the photograph. I have the reflection. The shadow hanging there in my room.
Dreams drain away, like liquid down a funnel
This is the first time I learn how to float
A blinding light at the end of a tunnel
Go to it, like a moth to a bulb

The second time, I'm taught how to float
By my mother’s loving arms, swaddled in warmth
"Son, someday you'll outgrow this coat"
Jump among leaves of red and orange

Mom's hand through my hair. She makes such a fuss
Dad flipping pancakes to touch the ceiling
Happy tears in their eyes as I run to the bus
Today at school I learned about feelings

Dad slips a jacket on while mom fixes his tie
Witness them kiss and scrunch up my face
Today at school I got a black eye
This is the first time I feel like running away

Bessy Hofster has a familiar face
She sits in front of me in Biology class
I feel like I know her from some faraway place
"Why do you always eat alone at lunch?" she asks

We sit together in an empty theatre
She admits she has a thing for broken things
Whenever she leaves I feel like I disappear
I kiss her mid-sentence, while she's crying over a broken wing

She has a room with paintings on the walls
And a dad with two fists and a temper
"Sometimes I wish I could fly away from it all"
This is the first time I tell her I love her

Years later, in a suit that my dad left behind
I find myself playing catch with a beautiful boy
You have my father's eyes and name
You tackle me playfully, and I lift you up like a toy
It won't all be easy, if we're at all the same

Your sister is born with Bessy’s bright eyes
Like the light at the bottom of a pool
I've fallen into those one-thousand times
Where the water is pleasant and cool

The light at the back of an X-ray
Bessy grabs my arm and acts strong
An ugly shape in my ribcage
I ask the doctor how long

The poison they pump in me is strong
I cough blood at the next county fair
We couldn't keep it secret for long
That night, Bessy shaves off my hair

I shatter a mirror. "How is this fair?"
"Shh," she tells me. "I know, I know"
She wraps up my knuckles and kisses them there
"We've had lots of highs, and one, big low"

"This is him," she whispers, as if I don't know
You stand from a baby grand and bow to a crowd
I clap so hard it hurts me so
I have never been more grateful, nor more proud

You stand up straight beside my hospital bed
I wish it weren't this way
You fake a smile, then cry instead
"I wish that you could stay"

I really wish it weren't this way
Bessy kisses me lightly on the side of my cheek
"I'm sure we'll see each other again someday"
I want to answer, but I'm tired and weak

We hold hands tightly. Nobody speaks
Dreams drain away, like liquid down a funnel
My breath is too heavy. I ask it to leave
A blinding light at the end of a tunnel
*Black Girl Curls*

Raven Eaddy

I run my fingers through my hair
*Correction*
I shove four fingers into the mass of hair on top of my head I try to move my fingers up through my hair but both me and my hair know that my fingers are going absolutely nowhere. That the only destination is on my scalp tangled in black nappiness. My hair and I play this game every day maybe even every other hour.

My hair is blowing in the wind.
*Correction*
The single hair that has flown away from my neatly packed fro is blowing in the wind. The rest of me is wind resistant and stands strong like that third pig's brick house. My hair is commanded by nobody, not even me.

I wash my hair everyday
*Correction*
I wash my hair everyday only when you ask me how often I wash my hair. When in reality my hair is a fortress of castor oil cocoa butter and shea that can't just be washed away everyday.

I comb my tresses from scalp down and out.
*Correction*
Combs tremble in my fingers knowing that their fate is already sealed. They know that in my attempt to detangle, their bodies will break in half. They've heard stories, lore amongst combs.
My grandparents put name tags on all the rooms in their home. Some were generic, such as ‘The Guest Room.’ Some were descriptive: ‘The Tree Room’ overlooked the backyard and its windows were perpetually covered with branches. Others? They were more for my grandpa’s personal amusement: all bathrooms received the label ‘The European Room.’ Whenever I stayed at their house as a child, I was put in the Spotlight Room.

I loved how cozy it was. All that fit was a full-sized bed, a nightstand, and an antique bookshelf that stood tall on the opposite end of the bed. The Spotlight Room got its name by having a window directly facing the street lamp. Every night I’d go to bed with the room aglow, the lamp shining against the glass of the bookshelf. In the morning, the sun poured through the window, perfectly illuminating Volumes I-X of Lithuanian encyclopedias by none other than my great-grandfather, Jonas Balys. I always felt a sense of pride waking up to the shining books published long before I was born. I knew I was a descendant of a writer. But it would be years before I truly appreciated all Jonas did for his country.

I was on the phone with my dad when I mentioned I planned to research my great-grandfather.

“Just Google his name - there’s a room in Chicago dedicated to him.”

I was awestruck at his casual tone - but what astounded me more was all I discovered in the first few results.

The Chicago Tribune called him “the premier Lithuanian folklore scholar of the United States.” The Washington Post called him “the head librarian of the Library of Congress’s Slavic and Central European division.” My dad called him Jonas. I never met him. Or if I did, I was too young to remember.

With a little more browsing I learned that he wasn’t just a scholar - he was a savior of Lithuanian culture. But I didn’t know exactly how or why. I called my dad back.

“Hello?” His voice echoed over the speaker. I’d caught him during his commute home from work.

“This draft is due tomorrow and I don’t want to overwhelm Nana with urgency. I’m just confused about when Lithuania was free and who was trying to control it.”

According to the Chicago Tribune, the Soviet Union and Germany battled for control of “the tiny country on the Baltic Sea” during World War II. According to my dad, Jonas and his family fled to Hamburg, Germany, to avoid persecution.

Suddenly, I’m ten years old and my Nana is reading me her life story. Much of it is going over my head, but her description of hiding in bomb shelters overnight rings in my ears days afterward.

When I googled “Hamburg, Germany WW2” the first match was “Bombings of Hamburg.” I instantly imagined the nights of terror my Nana must have faced as a child, and all my great-grandfather went through to find safety for his family. I was still left wondering how and where the folklore came into play.

“If they left Lithuania and were safe,” I continued the conversation with my dad, “Why was it Jonas’s job to document Lithuanian stories?”

He paused. “When the Soviets gained control, everything was going to revolve around them. Jonas knew that. They didn’t care about Lithuanian traditions or culture. They just wanted to standardize Sovietization to wherever they had power. Jonas knew that if he didn’t start recording information, Lithuania as he knew it would be gone.”

I was silent on the other end, imagining the almighty task taken on generations before me. I felt a sense of familiarity. Jonas knew it was up to him. I couldn’t help but relate his passion to my own dreams. The tenacity that carried me from middle school to high school to the best public university in the country. Despite this parallel, my hard work for test grades and successfully-run school events couldn’t possibly compare to what he had accomplished.

“... How did he do it?”

My dad described Jonas’s work in the United States as well as the free time he spent diving into the pasts of local Lithuanian immigrants.

“Picture this,” my dad started, “he’d try to locate any Lithuanian in the Chicago area and beyond and interview them. He’d say, ‘Tell me your story’ and record it.”

The Washington Post described Jonas’s Library of Congress career, where his “major focus was the collection, recording, classification and publishing of Lithuanian folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, riddles and legends.”
Jonas “wrote more than 600 articles and 35 books.” I was lucky enough to stumble upon one during my research. It was published on July 11, 2001, and in it, my great-grandfather describes the connection between Lithuanian and Celtic folklore, despite their geographical differences. I’ve read Shakespeare and many other works by authors who died long ago. But reading the work of my deceased relative was different. I felt uneasy. Poring over my deceased culture-saving ancestor’s words, I felt the legacy of writing. Even though I never met my great-grandfather, he began to feel familiar as I perused his work. I pictured myself at age 3, toddling around the house, and Jonas at 92, crafting the perfect description of the origins of Lithuanian and Celtic campfire stories.

Jonas’s son-in-law, my grandpa, whom we called “Paw,” battled skin cancer for 15 years before passing during my freshman year of high school. Over Memorial Day weekend of that year, my family took the nine-hour drive to Charlottesville, Virginia, to see him for what would be our last memory together.

Paw had grown up poor. He’d describe his childhood days collecting soda bottle caps and cans to return to the supermarket for money. When his family bought chocolate milk on special occasions, he’d dilute it with whole milk to make it last days longer.

For as long as my siblings and I could remember, Paw wasn’t much for presents. He would rather take us to historic monuments, show us new trivia board-games, or play old jazz records. He gave the gift of knowledge.

But on this gorgeous spring day, as light flooded through the family room sun window, Paw was sitting in his usual chair when he called me to come forward. He had a gift bag in his hand - the first and last present I’d ever receive from him. I unwrapped the paper in front of my four siblings and parents to hold up the navy cotton shirt. “University of Vienna” read the white letters across the chest.

“Your great-grandfather was an extraordinary scholar,” my grandpa began. “And out of the five of you”-- he motioned to my siblings and me -- “we see you as the most likely to continue this role of success in academia.”

My siblings laughed. It was as if I was being summoned by the Greek gods for a mission. I took the gift as a compliment, but I did not understand its full depth. I was only fifteen.

As I continued research on website #7 of results from the Google search, “Jonas Balys,” a certain line made my heart skip a beat:

“He received a doctorate in cultural anthropology from the University of Vienna in 1933.”

Paw’s gift finally made sense. I realized the high bar he had set for me - and solely me - before passing. Jonas Balys saved an entire culture from “Sovietization.” And here I am at Michigan pursuing a business degree.

I’m not sure how my path will measure up to my great-grandfather’s. Jonas Balys brought a culture’s story to life. One aspiration of mine is to bring Jonas’ story to life.

***

When I was twelve, my mom informed me that my great-grandfather had died at 102 years old.

“This is a good sign for you,” she said, gently brushing my hair off my face. “He died of natural causes. That means you have the chance to live a long, happy life.” She dragged out “longggg” in a way that made me smile. We were in the Spotlight Room. Sitting on the edge of the bed, I admired the titles printed on the spines of Jonas’s books.

With the summer rays beaming on them, the books seemed to sparkle.
I have a little plant that sits on the windowsill in my college dorm room. We are the only living things in the room. I was the only living thing until my plant moved in in October. It’s a tiny little thing, just the right size for its clay pot that’s less than two inches in diameter. It’s the type of plant they call a succulent, with fleshy pink-tinged green leaves stretching towards the sky. Ugh – the word “fleshy” sounds gruesome, but I swear my plant is rather cute.

As soon as I set my plant in its place of honor on the windowsill for the first time, hoping that it would get enough light, I googled how to care for a succulent. I’d heard that you could kill it if you watered it too much, and of course also if you watered it too little. The last thing I wanted was to be responsible for a plant death.

The website that came up first, “World of Succulents,” told me that each type of succulent needed to be cared for differently. It linked to an index of all the types of succulents, an index containing at least two hundred different species.¹ I groaned. My succulent was going to be dead within the hour.

My plant did not die within the hour. I checked it worriedly, but it seemed just as alive as ever.

My plant and I eyed each other. Well, I eyed it – my plant has no eyes to speak of. It couldn’t speak of its eyes even if it had them – plants don’t have mouths either. Or noses or ears. Although apparently this doesn’t mean that they don’t have any of the five senses.

An experiment by Heidi Appel, chemical ecologist at the University of Missouri, revealed that plants apparently can hear. Appel played a recording of caterpillars chomping on a leaf in the presence of a plant, which caused the plant to produce defense chemicals, even though its leaves hadn’t been touched at all. There was no other way that the plant could have “known” a caterpillar was there other than through sound.²

I wondered if my plant was deciding whether it liked me. I wasn’t really deciding whether I liked it – what could it do to make me dislike it? I can think of plenty of reasons why my plant might have decided it didn’t like me, though. It’s indoors, for one – on the inside looking out. Maybe it can tell that the air in here is stale indoor air. Maybe it’s choking on the dust that must be accumulating in the room. Maybe it’s doing the plant equivalent of pressing its nose to the window, wishing with all its nonexistent heart to be outside in the fresh air where a plant is supposed to be.

Maybe my plant thinks nothing of me at all. Time seems to move so much more quickly for plants – it takes them so much longer to react. To humans, they move agonizingly slowly. Maybe humans are just a blur to plants, not even worth thinking about. Plants thinking – ha! If I were a botanist I would be terrifying my peers right now.

Plant neurobiology, the study of plant signaling and behavior, itself makes most plant scientists very nervous. Terms like “intelligence,” “learning,” and “thinking” should only be used in respect to humans, or at the very least, animals, they argue. Animals are creatures; they act. Plants are living objects; they react.³

My plant does not have a brain. That’s one thing all the scientists in the world seem to agree on. The term “plant neurobiology” is misleading – no scientist in the world is suggesting that plants actually have neurons. There are just no better terms out there – all the terms used to describe intelligence are anthropocentric, or at least animal-centric. But the fact that my plant is brainless hardly means it can’t exhibit intelligent behavior.⁴

It’s hard for humans to comprehend how something without a brain can be intelligent. Perhaps it’s hard for plants to comprehend how something without leaves can be intelligent. Maybe my plant is baffled that I can exist without roots. Who knows? What helps many scientists wrap their heads around the concept of an intelligent brainless plant is, funnily enough, to compare a plant to a brain. While a brain commands the body, nothing appears to command the brain, much as nothing appears to command a plant. The brain has no central location of control, but the human brain is clearly the source of humans’ great intelligence. Likewise, a plant functions in intelligent ways without an organ controlling it.⁵

While saying a plant can think seems to be going too far, a plant certainly makes sophisticated decisions. Is saying a plant “decides” something really much different from saying a plant thinks? Most scientists used to think that plants couldn’t make decisions or anticipate events, only chemically react to their present situation. They were wrong – plants anticipate the future in a variety of ways. In an experiment where some roots of a pea plant were put in soil rich with nutrients and other roots in soil with fewer but increasing nutrients, the pea plant allocated more resources towards expanding the roots in the soil with increasing nutrients,
because it could sense that over time the “investment” would pay off.  

There’s even a type of weed that does arithmetic. The Arabidopsis plant produces starch during the day and stores it for night. It divides the amount of starch it has by how long until sunrise to maximize the amount of starch it can consume without running out. Scientists found that the plants are at least 95 percent accurate in their calculations. And these plants do all this without a brain or a central nervous system.

One day, a few weeks after getting my plant, I made my daily observation of the plant and panicked. Its bottom leaves were all shriveled up. They were dying or already dead. I had no idea whether it was serious. Was my plant about to die? Was it something I did? The newer upper leaves seemed to be doing fine. The bottom leaves must not have been getting enough sun. Maybe if I rotated the plant from now on, so the leaves would take turns facing the window, it would solve my problem. Or maybe my plant needed water. Or maybe my plant was sick and there was nothing I could do about it. I didn’t know what I would do if it died and I had its blood on my hands. Metaphorically, of course.

I learned later that cutting off nutrients to parts of the plant that aren’t thriving is another way plants anticipate the future. Plants produce a chemical called auxin in the organs that are succeeding, which in turn triggers the allocation of more resources towards those organs, in the hope of more success.

Plants also have a condition known as “shade avoidance syndrome.” Plants in shade or anticipating shade grow their stalks to avoid being shadowed by another plant. They can distinguish between shade from another plant, which means competition, and shade from an inanimate object, which often means there’s nothing that can be done to avoid it, by the color of the shade. My curtain sometimes shades my plant, but that doesn’t cause the plant to grow quickly in order to beat it to the light, because it knows better.

Now I turn my plant every so often, so all of its lower leaves get a chance to soak up the sun. It takes the plant more time to reorient towards the sun than I thought it would — I seem to remember other plants twisting towards the sun in a matter of hours. It takes my succulent days, which seems odd, because plants can predict the trajectory of the sun and swivel their leaves during the night in anticipation of the sunrise. They can do this even after several days without “seeing” the sun. I wonder if I’m confusing my plant by spinning it around like that. I imagine plants aren’t moved in circles very often in the wild.

I walk by a thousand other plants in the wild every day, and I hardly ever think of them as anything other than things, but my new little plant seems different. I guess it’s the difference between the squirrels that you see run across the street and your pet dog. Not that I would know — I’ve never had a pet. This plant is the closest thing I’ve ever had to one. And it’s hardly a pet. I haven’t named it, I don’t talk to it, and I can’t even tell if it can recognize me. Maybe if I were a plant, it would. Plants can recognize their “kin,” meaning plants of the same species. Plants placed in proximity to their family don’t compete, but share resources. When stressed, plants expel chemicals that neighboring plants can perceive, much as animals emit distress signals.

It’s also known that plants constantly produce electrical signals, which may or may not be a form of communication.

Trees seem to be the most cooperative plants of all. In forests, trees form vast networks for sharing warnings and resources. Tall trees nurture saplings until they’re tall enough to reach sunlight. Evergreens with superfluous sugar share with deciduous trees and vice versa. If a disease is affecting trees in one area of the forest, the information is rapidly spread to the rest of the forest. These networks boost overall forest health, benefiting all plants in the network.

But my plant has no network at all. It’s far from its family, which
is native to the desert. It has no neighbors to warn it of herbivores. All it has is me, and we don’t know how to communicate with each other. Does my plant feel its lack of friends? Is it lonely?

Plant scientists would emphatically say no. But the world has been emphatically saying no for centuries to all sorts of notions that have proven to be true, many of them involving plants.

An article published in the Kansas City Advocate nearly one hundred years ago on March 19, 1926, begins, “An intoxicated carrot has convinced Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the British plant psychologist, that plants have intelligence.” Despite the article’s rather skeptical tone, Sir Jagadish is not wrong. While few recent experiments have been done involving injecting plants with alcohol as Sir Jagadish did, it’s been shown to be possible to “knock plants out” using animal anesthesia, putting them into an unresponsive state.

The scientific community used to think that only humans could learn, but recently, a study of the mimosa pudica, a plant that closes up its leaves when disturbed, showed that plants are able to habituate – to learn to ignore irrelevant signals by repetitive exposure to them. When mimosa plants were dropped repeatedly from a safe height, at first their leaves closed up, but after a few drops, they stopped. The plants had figured out that it was safe to ignore the disturbance.

While I’ve looked at my plant as a type of creature since the day I got it, I now see it as a far more complex being. It’s far more complicated than its tiny body would suggest. It calculates, decides, anticipates, hears, learns, shares, competes, and communicates. Much like humans do. And if it can do all that, who’s to say it can’t think and feel like humans do, too. There is so much left for us to learn about plants. In the meantime, I will continue to water my little plant, but not too much, and hope that if it knows who I am, it likes having me as a roommate.

Notes:
3. Ibid.
5. Pollan, “The Intelligent Plant.”
9. Ibid.
15. Pollan, “The Intelligent Plant.”
16. Ibid.

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Malleable Beings
Rachel Hurwitz

We are a catacomb of pipelines tracing oxygenated blood to the tips of our flesh and deoxygenated rivers back to our four-chambered pump. I heard once, that we are constructed like donuts, one tube running from our mouths to our anuses, so that the deeper you go in our bodies, the closer you get to our outer surface. We are tension lines, pulling desperately on one another to keep us together. We are motored feet following train tracks of filament, one foot in front of the other carrying protein burdens like Atlas did. We are a continuous ray of touch, feel, gentle, love. We are crystalline structures, strong but ever malleable. We are bubbles of fat and air and pockets of nutrients that we will eventually part with. We are maps of nerves, electrical pulses our telegrams, chemicals our instant messenger. We are incredible beings. We are not unique.

Yellow Light
Hannah Brauer

I have a confession to make as I step out of your moving car but I know I will never have the chance to tell you Even if you slow to a stop up the road blockaded into the traffic jam just past the next bridge Even if you refuse to move until we make amends the yellow street lamps lighting the asphalt will me to stay on the shoulder Their sheen holds me in the space between stop and go

I will always see your car up ahead with its bright brake lights but I know that I will never run to it We will never turn red will never turn green Everything unsaid will remain unsaid and though I have this confession to make I’d rather hold it within me than step out of my indolent cowardice into the flow of traffic

I’d rather us stay in this yellow light.
the
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