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My Island by Jayme Palmegren

Life is like the ocean. Your morals, values, hopes, dreams and all of the other knowledge accumulated throughout your lifetime is an island that you stand upon in the center of your ocean. It's what keeps you standing. It keeps you head above water. It's your support. But horrible tidal waves, horrible people and events, come along and begin to crash against the shores of you island, chipping away the edges and eroding the foundation. Piece by piece, the island breaks apart and the only thing you can seem to do is watch as the pieces float out of your grasp only to disappear in the distance. Your island gets smaller and smaller with each new wave. Everything you thought you knew is vanishing. Soon all that is left are small jagged rocks, torturous reminders of everything you thought you knew. Reminders of just how gullible you really are. Everything you once stood on is gone; all the little pieces of you stolen. There is not enough to hold you. You are sinking. Life swallows you up, and you die.

Prose: First Place Winner

Photo: Jillian Eads



Dear Janus,

I was wondering why i have not,
yet written to you to ask if you'd
like.

To read what i have yet not
written,
to share what which is not
hidden.

The reason why, i still have
no clue
I realized that my world
is no longer

black or white but shades of gray
and blue
the rights the wrongs it doesn't
matter

i miss the days when a kiss was a
kiss
and now i wake every day hung
over,
with the same question, what did
i miss?
was it the sex or the way i called
her lover?

Photo: Raísa Ramalho



Photography: Third Place Winner

Redemption by Eric Hunt

It had been almost six years since Charlie Perdu had been inside the Becker household. He'd forgotten how beautiful Crystal Lake looked in the morning sunshine. Charlie always joked that New Jersey's state motto ought to be "the garbage state." But on this bright June day in front of that old two-story split level with cherry red storm shutters, the City felt hundreds of miles away. He was truly in God's garden. Charlie watched as the sunlight danced in the wrinkles of the lake; they have a way of making a person forget himself. Unfortunately for Charlie, forgetting wasn't an option. Not today. Today, Charlie realized, he would be forced to remember.

The ride downtown, he knew, would take at least an hour. He left Abby Becker's house around 10 a.m. It was already starting to warm up when he took the bus over the George Washington Bridge. At Broadway, he got onto double-long bus. Charlie took a seat in the front section of the bus, but kept his gaze fixed on the center section. As a kid Charlie had loved double-long busses. They had fascinated him on his first trips to the City. It seemed ridiculous that busses could be so long, but there they were: cross-town, uptown, downtown. When he first rode in them, the center accordion was the only place he would ride. He would watch as the front and back of the bus would twist wiggle back and forth, while he sat on the center circle between them, perfectly still. He imagined this was what the inside of caterpillars would look like if you could ride inside them. Nowadays though, double-long busses just made him a little queasy, especially the cross-town busses through the Park. The twisting insides of the bus only made him think of plane crashes. Charlie just sat in his seat and stared at the floor and tried to hold in the pain that was slowly threatening to overcome him. He closed his eyes and rubbed his tired hands over his face to force back the memories and screams and fireballs. When he glanced up, he remembered that he had to get off at 157th street to pick up the Red Line.

Charlie pressed the yellow strip along the window of the double-long bus to signal a stop. His plain black T-shirt, faded jeans, and close-cut hair blended in with the other travelers. He quickly shuffled with the crowd through the bus and off onto Broadway. As the orange hand changed to the white walking man, Charlie quickly crossed Broadway and walked past the Twin Donut down into the depths of the subway.

Charlie swiped his Metro Card and pushed his way through the turnstile. Two flights of stairs later and he was on the platform. All he had

brought with him from Abby's was an old brown backpack, nearly empty. He looked around the station, at the grime in the trench, the scurrying rats, and down the long, black tunnel. Two small yellow eyes, at first almost invisible, then slowly growing, appeared at the end of the tunnel. Charlie quickly glanced at the sign above his head:

↑ To Metro Center/ Blue Line

Downtown/ South Ferry

"Stand clear of the closing doors please."

The cold, mechanical voice rang in his ears as he heard the hiss of the double doors snapping shut behind him. The train was unusually crowded for the time of day. Charlie let several women take the available seats while he tightly grasped the overhead metal bar. Nobody spoke. The only sounds were the metallic sounds of the speeding train jostling along its track. It screeched and leaned. For years now, subways had made Charlie uneasy. The motion of the train made his stomach feel the same way airplane turbulence did, bottomless. Stop after stop went by: 96th, 86th, 79th, 72nd...

"Stand clear of the closing doors please."

The train slid, then jerked to a stop.

"Columbus station, transfer to blue line, financial district."

Charlie made his way onto the E train, one hand on his backpack strap, the other holding a pole in the center of the car.

"Stand clear of the closing doors please."

Charlie reached around to his backpack and slowly pulled out a metallic gold pin, a set of wings like airline pilots wear. He turned them over slowly in his hand, then tightly grasped them. He had taken them off the bureau at Abby's house, with her husband's permission of course. He still wasn't sure if he could handle this. He kept his eyes shut tight, and for a minute his eyelids seemed to be the only thing holding back a breakdown. He barely fought it back.

"Final stop, World Trade Center"

Charlie stepped heavily off the train. As he climbed the stairs and emerged from the subway, he again tightly shut his eyes, took a deep breath, and turned down Church Street. The Federal Building loomed on his right, but he hardly noticed its glistening stonework. His eyes instead slipped right past to the dirt and rubble. Already cranes hung overhead, signs that life was returning. But so too remained the stumps of foundation and walls, honeycomb shells of hundreds of empty windows...

"Something is wrong. We are in a rapid descent... we are all over the place. ... I see water. I see buildings. We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low. ... Oh my God, we are way too low... Oh my God! *Oh my God!*"

Charlie hung onto the railing surrounding the site and quietly cried as memories he could no longer hold back flooded his mind. After a few minutes standing there he dried his eyes and collected himself. Charlie realized he would have to be strong for Abby, at least strong enough to do what he came here to do. He walked down the street a bit until he came to the metal chain link gate of a construction site. A construction worker was just walking out. He was a large guy with tanned, weathered skin, wearing an orange vest and a hard hat. Charlie approached him.

"S'cuse me, but do you think you can do me a favor?"

"Yo, what can I do ya for, buddy?"

"This might seem a little weird, but I really need to go out into Ground Zero to give my friend a proper burial. You think I could get out there...just for a minute?"

"No problem man, let's get you a hard hat."

"I'm Charlie, by the way." He stuck out his hand which the man firmly shook.

"Craig. S'good to meet you."

The two walked together through the gate. Craig grabbed a hard hat off the nearby rack.

"Here put this on."

The pair carefully stepped through the dusty construction site, stepping over cables and girders, winding a path until at last they reached a plywood walkway. On either side of the walkway were narrow sunken holes, about as wide as grapefruits. Charlie stopped and peered down one of the holes.

"What are these holes for?" Charlie asked.

"These are where we pour the concrete for the foundation"

"Ok, that oughta do."

Charlie took the pair of wings out of his pocket. His lip quivering, he gave them one last squeeze then placed his fist over the open hole and dropped the wings. He watched as they turned end over end, vanishing into the black hole. It was done. Charlie couldn't hold it together much longer and so he turned to Craig, tears in his eyes.

"Thank you," he choked out. "I think I'll get outta here."

Craig, who had been watching Charlie closely said, "I gotta better idea. I just got on lunch. Why don' we go and grab a slice ah pie? My treat if you tell me yuh story."

Only New Yorkers can be meeting one second, and going to lunch the next. Charlie hesitated only a second before stammering out an, “Alright.” They walked together around the corner of the World Trade Center site into a little pizza shop called Pronto Pizza. The neon sign was the brightest thing on the street, but the two men walking together into the shop had to be the strangest.

“Two slices of pepperoni, Marv,” Craig told the man behind the counter.

“Comin’ right up!”

The two men sat down at a red and white checkered table in the back of the tiny restaurant. The sweet doughy smell of fresh pizza wafted over the white counter, filling the empty space. Craig set his weathered elbows on the table and took in a deep breath.

“So Charlie, you wanna talk about what happened back there?”

Charlie had been listening to the ceaseless noise of the city bleeding in from the street. He hesitated a moment about opening up to a total stranger, but something told him that guy was alright. And besides, he really needed to get this out.

He began, “I shouldn’t be here. I’m supposed to be dead, alright? I should’ve been dead five years ago!” He paused and took a deep breath, then continued. “I’m a flight attendant for American Airlines. I was scheduled to be on Flight 11. That was when my life was supposed to end.”

“Well buddy, you’re still here. What happened?”

“I called in sick.”

“No shit!”

“Yeah, but that’s not the worst of it...I killed my friend, ok? I killed my friend Abby. She took the trip when I called in sick. I didn’t even know about it until I was watching the news on nine-eleven and they played a cell phone call. It was her goddamn voice! Every time I see ground-zero I hear her voice, her last goddamn desperate screams, and I know I killed her. And I know it should’ve been me!” He smacked the table then ran his fingers through his short hair, staring at the floor.

“Yo, that’s some heavy shit. But believe me friend, the messed up shit that happened that day, nobody can be blamed for that. Understand? Nobody ‘cept the crazy motherfuckers who did the shit.”

“Yeah, well ever since that day I’ve been dead inside. Yeah, I do my job, pay my bills; I’m still alive. But inside, inside.... All that I have left inside is the pain and the memories.”

Craig took the slice of pizza that Marv had set in front of him, folded it in half, took a big bite, and chewed it slowly thinking what to reply.

“I’m not gonna pretend to know what you’re goin’ through. My

buddy Greg got killed on nine-eleven. I was on a job on the Upper East Side. I could've just as easily been down here in Financial. What I do know is that you gotta live in the moment. The Big Man let you keep yuh life, now what are you gonna do wit it?"

Charlie thanked Craig for the pizza, which he reluctantly finished after some encouragement, and walked out the door, head down, hands in his pockets. He made his way back to WTC Station.

As Charlie stood solemnly on the subway platform, he couldn't shake the feeling of invisibility that he had since he visited ground-zero. He kept his eyes averted from the crowd that was beginning to press around him. Instead he peered down into the dirty trench in front of him. He absently studied the train tracks, listened to the creak of the approaching train, the musk of the smell that wafted up from the grimy floor littered with bright yellow metro cards. And the more he studied the scene around him the more he realized he didn't belong here, or anywhere. So he just watched the approaching yellow train lights and waited.

What happened next happened very quickly. A little blonde girl jumping in order to get her mom's attention jumped too close to the edge of the platform. Her arms waved like helicopter rotors... but to no avail. She slipped on the corner of the platform. Charlie couldn't believe it. He watched as her yellow print summer dress rustled like a thousand flower petals fluttering in the wind. She hit the center of the tracks with a thud.

Charlie leapt into the trench after her. He hoisted up the bleeding girl and tossed her like a sack of flour into the arms of her beckoning father. The father fell backwards at the weight of the throw, but kept the girl cradled in his arms. Charlie snapped his neck around and saw two angry yellow eyes barreling toward him. No time to jump out, Charlie fell to the ground and slid his body between the tracks. He smashed his head back as deep as he could into the dirt and garbage and swung his feet to one side. Charlie shut his eyes and unconsciously said his goodbyes to the world, finally at peace.

He hesitantly opened one eye and saw the bottom of the train slowly slipping by above him, pulling out of the station. Wires and cables brushed his face like dirty spaghetti; oils dripped down onto his cheeks. The metal wheels sliced dangerously close to his shoulders, cutting into his shirt. But Charlie quickly realized something very important: he had survived and so had the little girl. And for the first time in five years, Charlie Perdu felt genuinely alive.



Photo: Jillian Eads

Simon Says by Jayme Palmgren

Simon Says all people are innately
sick,
it's who we are and how we tick.

Simon Says that drugs and sex will
take you to new heights,
He should know,
he's always right.

Simon Says that Ann's a liar,
she didn't say "no,"
she's such a crier.

Simon Says to bomb the Middle East,
'Don't you watch the news?
They're all beasts.'

Simon Says our healthcare is fine.
Why must people bitch and
whine?

Simon Says we come from apes.
He says he can prove it,
he's got books and tapes.

Simon Says that God is dead,
his stories untold,
his readings unread.

Simon Says the sky is green,
Man, he's great,
so bright and keen.

Simon Says that truths are lies.
Shouldn't we all be so wise?

Photo: Misty Todd



Accept by Jayme Palmgren

The black clouds rush forth,
Dark and menacing.
Leering at me from high above.
The blackness grows heavy,
Grows threatening.
And then the rain begins to fall, as
Giant drops break through the
black abyss.
They bring the clouds release
and soon the storm begins to fade.
The splash of the rain,
Not the chaos one might expect,
But instead used to cleanse,
And purify.

Through the clouds shines a single
ray,
down onto the earth below.
A ray of hope, a promise.
And grounded below, I lift my
damp face
To meet the warmth of the single
ray.
I accept.
I smile slowly
as I return to face the world.
It is my oyster.

Shards by Ginnie Thomas

This vessel is cracked and dirty and
pale

Why do you want it, you know its tale

The water inside is old, and stale—
Moistens the dirt on a stained old
shirt—

And leaves a residue rough as Braille

The dregs are all that's left inside

Dregs of a soul, a demon bride
Where is the light it brought betimes?
Where is the flight to that milder
clime?

Rise up on wings, to the oceanside
Cast out the dregs with your ocean
tide

The flow of life may yet be caught
As illiterate men may yet be taught
Dry out the jar, wrap my soul tighter
Perhaps through the cracks, the light
may shine brighter

Lost as a clam inside its shell
A heartbeat cries its ringing knell
Perhaps I should wear it on my lapel
But no, unwise, though not a surprise
Would be that move; the coat would
rebel

But would that be bad? This coat, it
drags

And hangs in shreds like so many rags
Waves in the wind, the poorest of
flags

It isn't warm, and so often torn
Won't even hold what it snags
Dregs are all that's left inside
The dregs of a soul, a demon bride
Where is that light it brought betimes?
Where is the flight to that milder
clime?

Rise up on wings, to the oceanside
Cast out the dregs with your ocean
tide

The flow of life may yet be caught
As illiterate men may yet be taught
Dry out the jar, wrap my soul tighter
Perhaps through the cracks, the light
may shine brighter

I hate to say it but maybe they're right
Those people who told me they'd show
me the light

No matter how awful their lines, and
trite

The flat of a blade, the tilt of a grade
None of these flashes looks right.

But their souls are also broken jars
Their minds lost in broken shards
Foreign thoughts strike like so many
carved

Birds in a hall; though I may stall
I stretch out my hand and watch the
wars

The dregs are all that're left inside
The dregs of a soul, a demon bride
Where is the light it brought betimes?
Where is the flight to that milder
clime?

Rise up on wings, to the oceanside
Cast out the dregs with your ocean
tide

The flow of life may yet be caught
As illiterate men may yet be taught
Dry out the jar, wrap my soul tighter
Perhaps through the cracks, the light
may shine brighter.

Six Days with January by Allison Wisniewski

“Three days, January. You couldn’t have waited three dang days to leave?” My sister’s response was to pop her gum and put her feet on the dash.

“Mom and Dad aren’t here, Patience. You can say ‘damn’ around me.” That was so not the point right now. Had I not needed to watch the road to ensure our survival, I would have glared at her for as long as humanly possible. I settled for white-knuckling the steering wheel.

“I have too much class for that.” This was the most neutral answer I could manage. Passive-aggressive, absolutely, but this was January’s biggest screw-up to date.

“God, turning thirty has totally turned you in to Mom. Unclench.” She scootched herself right up to my ear. “You know what the fish said when he ran into a wall?” I shoved her away. “Damn,” she said, and fell into giggles.

“Shut up, January.”

“Aw, Patience, come ON. It’s just one damn word.” I lost it. This usually never happens. I was just really pissed.

“It’s not just ONE word, January, it’s EVERYTHING that’s gone wrong in the past six days! EVERYTHING that YOU—”

“ROAD!” January screeched, and I looked up just in time to swerve out of the wrong lane and avoid hitting an old lady in a land yacht.

We drove in silence for a solid forty-five minutes. We both feared death too much to do otherwise. But I was still livid. January seemed to sense my anger and sighed.

“It’s not like I set out to ruin your wedding.” I clenched my jaw.

“You could have fooled me.” January twirled a blond dreadlock, taking care to examine it closely. I would have sworn she was six years old by the way she was choosing what to hear.

“So what was it, January? Jealousy? Hated the fact that you weren’t the center of attention for once in your life?” But as soon as the words left my mouth, I knew they weren’t true.

January never really wanted attention. At least, she didn’t actively go seeking it, even though she was the youngest. But when January turned five, she got interesting. And by interesting, I meant being able to repeat conversations verbatim and recall whole plots of soap operas for the past month. Yep, my baby sister was a genius, and therefore she needed all my parents’ attention from then on to aid in her “develop-

ment.” But once again, so not the point right now.

But...I can't say I didn't see this coming. The whole January-ending-up-in-Denmark-at-the-least-convenient-time-ever thing. I always knew January was going to disappear on us one day. I figured it out the night she decided to go sleep naked in the wheat field. I found her around two in the morning, cold and shivering. She hadn't anticipated how cold nights in June could be. Typical.

I wrapped a blanket around her and sat down.

“I want to be a stalk of wheat.” January never did metaphors like normal people. But I played along, because at least it was always entertaining.

“Because then you'd be a stalk of wheat instead of a person?” I tried. January turned to look at me and rolled her eyes.

“That's not what I meant.”

“Enlighten me.”

“It's like this. You can't tell one stalk from another. And when you make it into flour it doesn't matter where it came from. If people were like wheat, you could disappear into the crowd, look the same as somebody else. It's not as if anyone would notice.”

“If we were stalks of wheat,” I finished for her.

“If we were stalks of wheat,” she repeated. Leave it to January to wax philosophic in the nude. We sat in silence for a few moments.

“Do you really want to be wheat, January?” She looked out into the field again.

“Sometimes. It'd be nice, to try it.”

Yes, January was the girl who wanted to try everything. Even total conformity.

“ROAD!” Came January's panicked voice once more. I swerved to avoid going into a ditch.

“I'm driving,” January declared. I figured this was probably wise. Even though January didn't have a driver's license, her driving would still be safer, given my tendency towards reverie on this trip.

January had just pulled back on the highway when she decided to say it.

“I'm not sorry.” I mulled over this. I didn't expect her to apologize. I had long ago stopped expecting that. January doesn't have regrets, and she certainly wasn't going to feel bad for something that made her happy. Even if that meant making her sister miserable because she missed her wedding, followed a trail of red herrings from Seattle to Chicago for four days before hopping an absurdly expensive flight to Denmark to col-

lect said girl from jail. Well, at least she avoided INTERPOL. It could have been worse. The situation, I mean, not her timing. No, her timing could not have been worse. I would not concede that point.

I leaned my head back on my seat, taking the opportunity to take January in. I wondered what she had done in Denmark. Besides getting arrested of course. I didn't want to be invested in what had transpired during her poorly timed and executed European excursion. Yet...January is just so interesting. The girl has charisma, I'll give her that one. Still, I wish I wasn't going to be in the car with her for the next 16 hours. I don't like to argue with January. It never ends well. Like that time at the poetry slam.

It started when she shouted "You SUCK!" from our table near the back.

"January!" I hissed, kicking her underneath the table. She glared at me as best she could in the hazy room.

"It's a poetry slam, Patience, that's what you're supposed to do."

"You want to say that to my FACE?" A voice interrupted us from the stage. I hadn't really taken the time to actually look at the poet until then and holy jeez, he weighed 300 pounds and was the poster child for a biker gang. What the heck, January. She sure knew how to pick them. I could see her start to speak, but I lunged across the table and clamped my hand over her mouth.

"No, she doesn't," I yelled back. He seemed to accept this answer and went on with his performance. January was not happy.

"What is your deal?" she spat at me, "Do you have no concept of how to behave in a social setting?" I stared at her incredulously.

"Do you?" January rolled her eyes.

"You don't have to be here, you know." I sighed.

"How else would you have gotten here? You're fifteen, you can't drive, and you know how Mom hates you taking the bus."

"So I'm supposed to be honored that my unemployed sister takes time out of her busy schedule to drive me to a dive across town to listen to some poetry?" She snapped. To be honest, I was taken aback.

"Well, yeah."

"You're impossible! Do you even know how to do something selfless? Something off your precious schedule?"

"Of course I do! I do it all the time," I shot back.

"Name one." Admittedly, I was hard-pressed to find an example. I looked around for something to spark my memory. And then my eyes fell on the poet.

“Watch this,” I said as I stood up and faced the stage.

“You know what?” I yelled at the poet, “You do suck!” I sat back down and gave January a smug glance. I did her one better than providing an example. I gave her a live show.

“See? That wasn’t on my schedule.” January didn’t seem to notice me talking. She pointed at the man on stage. He was glaring at us again. With a significantly more ominous look this time. Uh-oh. He made a move to jump off the stage.

“RUN!” January shrieked, and we made a break for it. For being a big guy, the poet was surprisingly agile. We tore through the exit and were panting heavily when we finally collapsed in the car. January smiled at me.

“Maybe there is hope for you after all.”

That was eight years ago. I looked at my sister once again. Twenty-three, dreadlocked, and well...January. I tapped my fingers on the dash. She would always be my sister. The one who could take me from yelling to laughing in sixty seconds. I decided to hazard a question.

“How’d you get in there, anyway? Wasn’t it after hours?”

“Carried a violin right in there with me. Trust me, no matter where you are, if you have a musical instrument in your hand, people assume you know what you’re doing.” The only proper response to this was to stare. And then subsequently burst into laughter.

I glanced over. She was smiling a wry little smile that she knew drove me crazy. And then it hit me.

January is an absolutely infuriating human being. But she is the easiest person I know to love.

Because she was right, you know. About the musical instrument thing.

I was still mad at her, of course. Furious. But January was January, and let’s face it, you can never know a month, human or calendar. There was nothing I could do to change her. She was my sister. If the past six days had taught me anything, it was that I had a calendar full of Januaries. I could keep trying to get her to evolve into a February or a March, but every time I turned the page, she’d still be January.

I guess I was stuck with her.

Which, okay, is probably not the worst thing that could have happened to me.

Because at the very least, I now knew how to get into Legoland for free.

Where I Live I'm a Saint by Dean Moran

It's so hard to be a saint in the city
But it's ever harder in a place outside
the city
Where all you can do is think and
fuck
You just hold on and hump which is
never enough,

This is a place like where I live.

I hold a grudge against this bitch,

But where I live isn't like your place,
As I look into the mirror my eyes
pierce my face.

The jolts of pain leave me ashamed
And I know the whole joint is a dis-
grace.

Within my body and within my
mind
Behind all the manners and being
shy

Once lived my wants, dreams and
desires,
But my brain once set my heart on
fire.

And behind my eyes there was a
flood.

They thought to use the water to put
out my heart,

But the flames still burns, and the
flood still flows,

And nobody in this place really
knows

What they should do with all these
problems.

So they just go away.

They go somewhere safe.

Where floods and flames are forgot-
ten,

Where most true feelings are forgot-
ten,

Where there is very little population,
And not a single bus or metro sta-
tion.

Where children lie restless after
they've been tucked in Goodnight.

This is just a small town with a row
of dim street-lights.

The sky once was beautiful glowing
with stars.

But the stars got ran over by people
in cars.

And the one place to go is a sleazy
old bar.

A place where (NO)bodies know
your name.

They are all safe at home with the
ones that they know.

And their feelings for them are the
feelings they're told.

So familiar to them like the stench
and the mold,

And that warm glowing fire that
keeps them so cold.

Though they still get drunk and they
can still fuck.

They are all too afraid of being in
love.

Cause love burnt in the fire,

And died in the flood,

Only lives in the memory of this
place

Though it isn't a city and there are

no saints,
 Most townies remember that jab in
 their face.
 But the hurt has been numbed, for-
 gotten is pain.
 A feeling this place will never re-
 place.
 A floating feeling of exquisite grace,
 Sensation that was felt on this skin,
 That was born in the core and devel-
 oped within.
 These people who know and remem-
 ber my name,
 May one day be able to put out that
 flame.
 But my run-down town is not burn
 down yet,
 So I'm as close to a saint as you're

gonna get.
 Get used to me, I am the ringleader
 of this circus.
 Purpose is beyond us.
 We don't need society, that shit is
 lame.
 In my society, I've got power and
 fame,
 Brains forget pain, trained to stop
 the rain.
 Such a shame to claim this place de-
 cline,
 All the same what's mine is mine,
 I define what I define.
 Mine head is holy, chapels divine,
 But these people inside me always
 are crying.

Dead Asleep by Dean Moran

I see you lying there without a care.
 For just a moment, I had to stare.
 I thought you may be dead.
 You were at peace.
 'Cause when you're dead (more than asleep)
 No, scheme, no dream will haunt your head
 No greed to feed or to be fed
 Denies your perfect slumber bed.

I wish your peace would last tomorrow
 For every day seems filled with sorrow
 But I--I cannot weep
 While I'm alive and you're asleep
 I bear the burden that we keep
 But for this moment drift and creep
 And I will find you dead asleep.
And I will find you dead asleep.

Photo: Jillian Eads

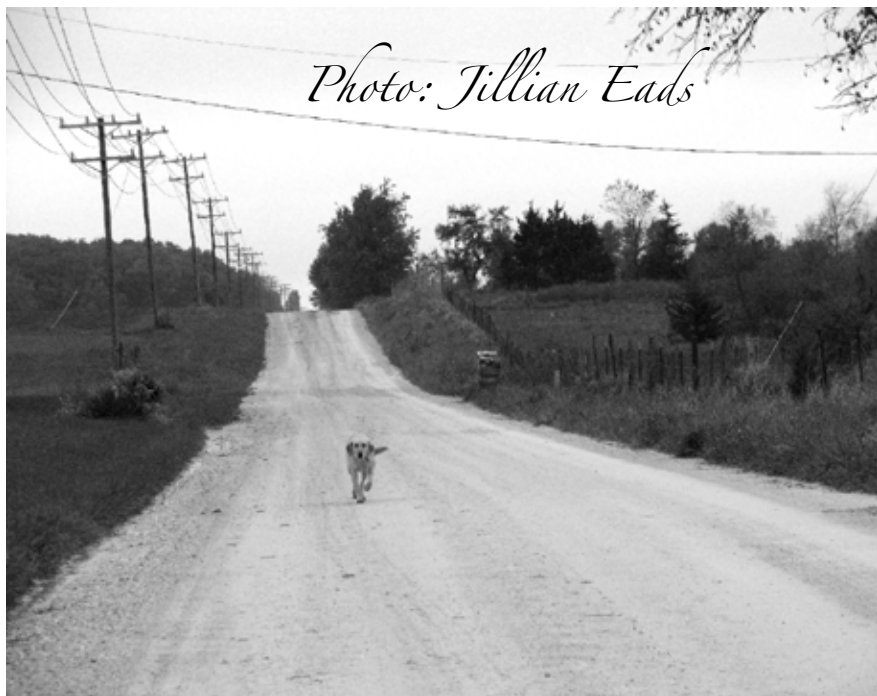


Photo: Joseph Armendariz



When Night Turns to Day by Sarah Blackmon

“I know, it’s not a white girl name. I know you were expecting someone else. Listen, I’m not a con artist that stole some ghetto lady’s credit card. I’ve had a long day, so just let me in my damn room.” The girl in the hotel lobby looks all wide-eyed and sad after I say this, like a wounded baby deer or a kid that just saw a man ripping off his fake, polyester Santa Clause beard. She hands me the key sheepishly and mutters, “H-ha-have a nice stay.”

I hadn’t meant to be rude, but damn. Always with this bullshit, everywhere I go. The receptionist at the dentist’s office, the guy checking my ID at the liquor store, the woman who reads my paper work at the DMV, all of them give me this crooked look, like I’m some not-too-bright identity thief or a blonde-haired, blue-eyed white girl that doesn’t realize what color she is. Hell, it’s not like I picked this name. Sheniqua. What the hell, mom? Out of all the names out of all the baby books in the world, that’s the one you had to choose. Jesus fucking christ. On my name plate at work, I just had them print “Shannon.” That way I can grin and hand people their miniature bottles of whisky and tiny plastic cups of coke without question or qualms. I can smile and say, “Peanuts?” or “Please turn off your iPod, sir. We’re about to land,” without any confused glares or condescending giggles.

Sometimes I wonder if I should just change my name legally. Whatever. Too much hassle.

After I drop my shit off in my room I do what all flight attendants do on their days off—went out and got fucking sloshed. Hey, don’t be so judgmental. We’re not all alcoholics, it’s just, what do you expect us to do? Almost every vacation I get, I’m stuck in some strange city, just waiting for the next layover, the next flight out, wasting time until it’s back to work. When I first got the job, I thought it would all be jetting off to foreign countries and traveling around the world. But it’s not as glamorous as it seems. A twenty minute layover in Paris isn’t shit except for a stale airport. No Eiffel tower, no city of romance. Hell, at least if you’re riding in the plane you get to look at the window and see the lights and shit. Do you think flight attendants get window seats? We don’t even get chairs. I may have been to twenty seven countries in the last eight years, but for the most part, I haven’t seen shit except for runways and terminals. Sure, there are benefits. Every day off is a little vacation in some far away place—except I’m alone. Who the hell goes on vacation all alone? Fucking losers, that’s who.

At least I used to get to go to interesting places. Now I’m stuck doing continental. But hell, I guess I’m lucky I didn’t get fired. How was I supposed to know someone would barge into the first class bathroom just as I

was doing the Lewinsky on some 6'1" Italian hunk (no, I don't remember his name). After that, it's no more helping passengers, or anyone, for that matter, get their membership to the mile high club. Hell, if it weren't for the fact that the co-pilot and I had already fucked in there at least three times I probably wouldn't have a job at all anymore. So I'll take what I can get – farm towns and the occasional trip to Seattle or whatever.

Tonight I'm stuck in some town in Iowa. I don't even bother to remember the name. It doesn't matter. I'll be somewhere else tomorrow. I'm always somewhere else tomorrow.

I get in a taxi and tell the drive to take me somewhere where they won't play country music and there's something on tap other than Bud Light. Beyond that, I don't give a fuck. Well, as long as it's not a dyke bar. No fish tacos for me, thank you very much.

The cab driver drops me off at some neon flashing place. I'd tell you the name if I'd bothered to learn it, but I didn't. The place pretty much reeks of sketchiness, and if I wasn't such a slut I'd say I was afraid of being raped at a joint like this. But I won't be. I'll sink my teeth into something soon enough. I always do. Oklahoma or Taiwan, Utah or Italy, New York or Croatia, Kentucky or Canada, I always find something, someone. I'm not the prettiest chicken in the coop, but I'm not bad looking, either. There's always some rooster willing to take me home.

Don't be so judgmental. What's a gal to do in a strange town all by herself? I don't know anyone in this city. Hell, I don't even know anyone in this state. Being a slut's so much easier when there's anonymity. Just ask the college girls that go study abroad for a semester. Ask the middle-aged broads on cruise ships, the bored ex-house wives on the beach, recently divorced upper-middle class bitches on vacation, they'll tell you. Or actually, they won't, but believe me, they know.

I check my purse for the night's essentials: tube of red Chanel lipstick, a hundred dollar bill, my room key, two tampons, and a couple condoms. I take birth control, but you can never be too careful. I'd like to think everyone I hook up with is clean, but you can never really know. Besides, I gotta make sure those tampons have something to soak up next week.

And that's all I need. No cell phone on nights like these. I won't need it. I never exchange numbers on nights like these.

I slam four Jack and Cokes fast and the bartender looks shocked, like he's never seen a woman who can hold a few drinks before. And from the glares of the other women in the bar, he hasn't.

I spot my target in the corner. His skin is sort of dark, but not olive. He's got that thick, shiny, black hair. Big, brown eyes. This may be Iowa, but I'm sure as hell not looking for any pale farm boys. I was never into

that country shit, the hick accent that makes some bitches get their panties all wet. I like things fast, not all slow and drawn out like a Southerner. I like things hard, not like mushy over cooked vegetables in some Texas diner.

I watch him a little longer. He looks sort of depressed, bored, alone. Alone.

And I know he's perfect. Perfect for tonight. I won't have to snake him away from any blonde bar bimbos. Those girls aren't interested in guys like him, and even if they were, he's too shy to make the first move, to be aggressive enough to pull them in. He's here by himself, so I won't have to deal with his already too-drunk friends, the ones who are overly-confident and always want to flirt. I never go home with guys like that. Those guys, the ones that make a big show about how popular and smooth and charismatic they are, those guys have small dicks. Tiny dicks.

I go over and sit down at the table he's sauntering around. I do my best Natalie Portman-oh-so-quirky-girl impression and soon enough he's sitting down with me. Personally, I can't stand that shit, but these dudes, they go fucking nuts for it. I swear, guys like this, they don't masturbate to porn. Instead, they stroke it to Garden State. I'm goddamn sure of it. Nobody fantasizes about growing up to be Michael Jordan anymore. They all wanna be Zach Braff.

I introduce myself as Shannon, knowing he'll think I'm using a fake name if I call myself Sheniqua. I order him two beers (nice ones, so he knows I'm not a trashy, corn-fed bitch just like all the other women in this bar) and then we take turns doing shots. I order tequila because he's brown and because, well, frankly, tequila makes people horny. I ask him about video games and admit that I was in the A/V club in high school, even though I was not. He tells me about his favorite band, which I've never heard of, but pretend to know all about, and his job as a lawyer, which was obviously a lie, now that I think about it. I only believe him in the first place because first of all, I don't actually care enough to question it, and secondly, because I'm devastatingly drunk.

Somewhere along the line I ask his name, realizing we've been chatting for nearly half an hour and he hasn't thrown it at me. Marcus, he tells me. "Marco?" I reply, hopeful. I'm on this kick for Latin men lately. I miss those flights to Spain I guess. "No, Marcus," he corrects me. Whatever. He's brown. He'll do.

As we stumble out of the bar the white-bread blonde ladies stare at me like I'm some cancerous leech on their town. Some unfamiliar drunkard with loose lips and even looser legs. Like they aren't here for the same reason, fucking hypocrites. Like they don't wish they had the balls to just be upfront about it and not care whatever everyone else thinks. They're all the

same as me. I'm just anonymous enough to be blatant about it.

I don't know dick about whatever city this is so I decide to take him back to my room instead of going home with him. This isn't too big of a place and I don't wanna be stuck at this dude's house tomorrow, unable to get a cab. I'd rather go home alone than have to deal with that in the morning.

When we get back the hotel room, he seems almost nervous, sobered up a bit. His face is a little red but I can't tell if it's from the booze or not. He's clumsy with the condom and comes fast. I smile slyly and say, "Don't worry," as I grab another and make him try again, drunk, insatiable. I know he's young enough to rebound quickly. Still, it's all just hard and fast in and out. No variation, no real technique. He just pumps away for a few minutes making contorted faces, finishing for the second time before I can manage to come at all. I roll off of him, wildly drunk and slightly annoyed, but not especially surprised.

That's the thing about one night stands. A guy's almost guaranteed a good time. I mean, a chick is always a warm hole. It's hard to fuck that one up. Sure, some girls are way better than others, but it's pretty damn difficult to be downright horrible. Men, on the other hand, are always a gamble. There's so much shit that can go wrong. The guy can have a really small dick. Even if the cock is big, the sex might only last a few minutes, especially when you factor in alcohol. Too much hooch and stamina goes to shit. And sometimes, even if a guy's got a monster cock and can go for a while, he still just won't do it right. Too hard. Too soft. Too fast. Too slow. Too monotonous. Too weird. God. Sometimes I wonder why I put up with this shit.

He falls asleep right after, just like every other man in the universe. I didn't come so I can't sleep. I troll the hotel pay-per-view for a while before finally dozing off. It's especially hard for me to rest though, his body taking up the bed, sweaty, moist. Sometimes men just seem downright disgusting after sex.

When I wake up I'm surprised to see he's still there. His back is toward me and he's awake, sitting up. I'm still wiping the sleep out of my eyes and I can barely see. Then, I focus on his hands and see that he's holding my wallet. I jump up from the bed and knock it out of his hand, then hit him over the head with it and begin yelling.

"What the hell are you doing? I buy you drinks all night and fuck you, and this is the thanks I get?"

"Wait, I'm sorry. Calm down!" he tells me. "I wasn't stealing anything. I was just looking through your wallet. I was bored and I didn't want to turn on the television and wake you up."

“So you go through my shit?”

“Listen, I’m sorry. I wanted to know more about you, that’s all.”

My anger starts to settle and I suddenly realize how young he is—his face is pubescent aside from his thick mustache, which looks almost fake juxtaposed with the rest of him. The smooth, soft skin. The wide eyes that look glossy now, like the receptionist I yelled at when I was checking in yesterday. I’d known he was a little young, but not this young.

Fuck, I think to myself. I hope this kid is legal. I quickly console myself with the fact that he was in a bar, so unless he has a really convincing fake ID, I’m not in any trouble. Still, I remember that I never actually saw him buy himself a drink, so chances are the guy is still under twenty-one. I remember him being awkward the night before, fumbling with the rubber, coming quickly, face red, hands shaking a little, body sweating. Jesus, I may have very well been his first time. Some A/V band geek kid like this, it wouldn’t be surprising. Not in the least bit. Fuck, I don’t want to be someone’s first time. You’re supposed to remember your first time forever. I do not want to be remembered forever.

I am thinking all this and suddenly realize I am not actually paying any attention to the man, no, boy, on the other side of the bed. He’s still naked and his eyes are still wide. He is silent. He looks small now, not like the tall drink of water I took home last night.

“Why’d you tell me your name was Shannon?” he asks, suddenly.

“What?”

“Shannon. Last night, at the bar, you said your name was Shannon. When I was looking in your wallet, your driver’s license said Sheniqua.”

“Don’t worry about it. It isn’t important.”

“What are you? Some sort of con artist or something?”

“Jesus fucking christ, what is it with everyone? People watch too many goddamn cop shows. Not everyone is some sort of crazed lunatic or criminal freak. This isn’t CSI: Miami or whatever other crap they play on TV,” I reply. This is obviously a sore subject for me.

“Hey, sorry. I didn’t mean to make you mad. I was just curious.”

“Whatever, like I said, it isn’t important. But I’m not doing anything illegal, if that’s what you want to hear.”

“That’s not all I want to hear.”

How long is this going to go on, I wonder. When the fuck is this kid going to get out of here? He should’ve been gone hours ago. He should have been gone before I even woke up. I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to talk to him. If this goes on much longer I’m going to have to really stretch to remember all the drunken lies I told him last night. Either that or cop out and tell him I’m a complete fucking phony. Whatever. I just want him

out of here, and fast.

But he doesn't want to get out of here and he especially doesn't want to get out of here quickly. He wants to talk, wants to know me, wants to go out for lunch. I make a mental note to myself to never fuck around with a guy this young again. They get attached, actually give a shit. I don't want somebody that gives a shit. I don't need somebody that gives a shit. What I need is somebody that knows how to use his dick.

I don't bother with putting it gently. Being too gentle in times like these doesn't soften the blow; it just draws shit out for everyone involved. Makes things uncomfortable. Or more uncomfortable, I suppose I should say.

"Listen, this has been great and all, but I've gotta be on a plane to Barcelona pretty soon, so you better head on home," I lie. I'm really going to New Jersey and I don't have to be at the terminal for another three hours. "I'll give you some money for a cab if you want."

"What? Are you sure? I mean, can't we just talk for a little while? Let me buy you lunch."

"Nah, I'm not hungry. Besides, I can always eat on the plane." By now I've gotten used to those little microwavable meals that Jerry Seinfeld seems to hate oh so much. They almost taste like home to me. Almost.

"But there's still so much I don't know about you. I want to know more."

"You don't know anything about me. Everything I told you last night was a pile of shit, a lie. I didn't mean a damn thing I said. I fucking hate Natalie Portman." I toss his clothes at him, slightly cold about it. I have to crush this fast. I have to stop it before it spreads.

"But...you didn't say anything about Natalie Portman," he says, a puzzle forming on his face.

"Whatever, kid. Just go."

His big brown eyes are red and I almost think he might cry, but it doesn't deter me. As soon as he's got his pants on, I start to push him towards the door. I need him to be on the other side. I need distance.

"Wait," he says, "I have so many things to ask you. Can't I have your phone number? Something?"

"Listen, Marco, you're better off not knowing me. You seem like a good guy. Quit going to bars to look for chicks or you'll just end up with more scum like me, or worse, you're gonna catch a case. Go to the grocery store or church or volunteer or something and look for women there. You should find a girl that's nice, stable, whatever. Not me. You don't want me. You want to get married and have kids, do all that normal person shit."

I am really pushing him out the door this time. My nails dig into his forearm just a little and it seems his resistance is wearing down. I get him

on the other side, finally. I sigh.

“Wait,” I say.

He looks up, his eyes perky, his face turned upward in a smile. He thinks he’s changed my mind.

“When you do find that nice girl, get married, and have kids, for the love of Christ, don’t name any of them Sheniqua.”

I lay back down in bed, relieved to be rid of him. I watch TV for a few hours, hungover. Shouldn’t have mixed whisky with tequila with beer. Shouldn’t get that drunk, especially when bringing someone back with me. This is how I got myself into this shit in the first place. Now here I am, head pounding, stomach in pain, dealing wit the tiniest little pangs of guilt in my chest and, most devastating of all, still fucking horny. I decide on some pizza before packing up. I want some food to absorb the alcohol but don’t feel like going anywhere just yet.

While I’m waiting on the delivery guy I get kind of nervous. What if that kid is really a pizza boy? God knows he’s no lawyer. Lawyers don’t wear jeans to the bar. God, if he’s working at some pizza place and he sees an order to my room, he’s sure to jump on it. Despite my hunger I am now dreading the doorbell.

It eventually rings and I have to face it. I open the door slowly and breathe out heavily when I realize it’s not him.

“That’ll be \$15.35, miss.”

“Oh, thanks. Just give me a second. I forgot to grab my wallet.”

I pull it off the bed and open it.

And that’s when I realize it. That fucker stole my credit card.

Photo: Corey Meyer



"Iron Lion of Zion" by Dean Moran

Stop Frontin', Start Confronting,
Use some experimentation, experiences are like medication,
To get you out of that box your living in,
You have to learn to sink before you learn to swim,
Be real with the one you love, Know your self and put him above
the others,

you will learn how to grow as you grow old,
you are always growing like a rose,
you bloom great beauty and everybody knows
about the thorns that you have but they don't make you mad,
because everyone has them, you know that now.

The whole world is suffering, fighting a war inside their minds, fighting the
lion inside, holding him back so he won't break the chains, then they will
knight you 'insane'.

You don't want that to happen yet, So the more you pretend the deeper it
gets.

Your soul is begging for a change, telling you god made people purposely
different, you shouldn't be the same,
not like them who already exist. Do you exist and to what extent? Is your
purpose intentional or is it all just meant..
to be multi-directional? Is that even acceptable?

Does everyone have such a handful?

The lion inside you cries for an answer,
He Roars that acceptance is not even tangible.

Breaking the chains:
vulnerability, confidentiality and fantasy vs. reality paying the salaries, of your
broken immortality,

but you have no sense of urgency, and no its not an emergency, its this gift
of temporary permanency.

Only on this earth to be
the only way you could ever be,
Natural purity, confessional surety,
That's how you know how to be happy.
Let the Iron Lion of Zion take control.

Think by Matthew Antone

The roots of our wavering tree dig deep into the black soiled sea
Over grown leaves, rarely flourish around me
Leaves of man's shade, leaves afraid to fade
Even those who endure the day might never find the meaning of this way
Reveal the cause of our decay, so that our tree may endure a new day
Alive in a place of endless rain, the dirt will not simply wash away
Nurture the needy, embrace the greedy
Teach the kind; find your peace, your mind

Help lose limbs to conquer the sway
Unite today, to keep from blowing away
Manifest the day, until the brightest of leaves fade
Able to thicken our tree, and soar above the soil sea
Needy fiends, cultivate its weeds
Sinister beings, hindering on flight of revolutionary dreams

Inducing evolutionary themes, we can set the mind free
Navigating our sway, to replant roots each day
Savor every seed, so that we may birth a peaceful breed
Unwrap the inner being; observe the similarities of you and me
Reveal to the world, what you have seen
Envelop those into one tree

Never reject faithful ones
Everyone born under the sun
Widow the Earth from which they come

Kings will rise and they fall
Induce the truth, to deepen your roots
Nature will withstand this sway

Poetry:
First
Place



*Photo:
Samantha
Montoya*

Rebekah's Journal by Ginnie Thomas

She sits straight, leaning forward
Hair in a long braid down her back
She frowns a little, tap-tap-taps her pen-
cil—

What to write, what to write?
Soft cotton pajamas rustle delicately;
She sips her tea—fruity, no sugar
Just the way she likes it
Cupping the mug in her hands
Holding in them the warmth and sleep
That hover close about her.
The chair sighs as she moves
Curling her feet beneath her, she settles
in

Lamp, couch, unmoving fan, mantle, all
fade slowly

As the pencil starts moving
Scratching smoothly against her journal.
Light pools around her, dripping, like
fire

From her copper head; sparks fall from
eyes

Black and twinkling
Against her winter-pale face.

A blue-veined hand flows across the
page
Little graphite eddies swirling in its
wake.

They can make all kinds of things
Dragons and kings and mice and men
But—she sighs—not tonight.
She looks at the clock and the room re-
appears

Too late, again—the boys wake early
And she'll be tired.
The baby kicks; she smiles, rubs the
spot

Where his little foot pokes her ribs.
She stands, sets aside the journal
Pencil marking her place
Turns out the light, leaving all dark but
her eyes,

Which still sparkle, and climbs into bed.
She sleeps, and the journal sits on the
end table—

While spinning within it are tales and
lives—

Innocently quiescent; utterly silent.

Family Leaves by Helen J. Rudolph

My brothers and sisters so close to me,
Straining to burst free from our home.

To reach out and make ourselves,
Confined in a cold and dark place
Will we ever break free?

Warm light touches us as we push
Out of our parent's confining shell.
As one we show ourselves tender and
new;

Easy to break, not yet strong,
We work to live in this world.

As we age, we learn to protect
Our softer sides with tough armor.

Nothing can touch us as we grow older;
Together we protect what matters that
most .

Stronger now, we learn to stand tall.
Feasting off the plentiful tears
That come to us, tasting so sweet.
Laying in the decayed bodies of our
past;

Uncles and cousins fell for us
So we can tower as they once did.

My family is able now to part;
Each sibling to take its own way.
Some stick together to build some more;
While others begin their own home

Standing rigid through heat and cold.

I feel I have almost reached my place
Where I shall stand until my death.

Looking back, I see the strength of my
kin.

We hold each other up and stand to-
gether

Separate yet united, in perfect unison

Finally, I breathe my first air free;
Never since my birth have I stood alone.

Reaching out to enjoy my height
The sun warms my face, I feel so alive
As I dance with the wind in my home.

Working to keep my family alive,
Energy coursing through my entire be-
ing.

Ever-Changing Painting by Daniel Grundl

My back window is like an ever chang-
ing painting.

With each passing season the beauty
Has never ceased to amaze me.

In the winter, I have the bleached
grass,

The slate gray trees, the dead sky.

In autumn, I have a barrage
Of greens, yellows, oranges, reds, vio-
lets

Every leaf is like dried puddle of bril-
liant color,

Each one possessing a different hue
Summer I have green grass, full trees.
Flowers appear as if they are watercol-
ors.

In spring, life emerges from winter's
dead presence,

Color returns to its home in the flow-
ers faces,

I never think about losing my youth;
But eventually I begin to slow down
And I know my time shall soon end.

The sun which once fueled me grows
cold,

And the winds bite at my delicate being.
My brothers and sisters fall down around
me

As I begin to lose my healthy color,
And my body grows brittle and frail

I lose my grip and begin to fall,
Slipping from the hands I loved.
Brown and dead, I hit the ground,
Amidst the bodies of my dead kin.
To give life to the next family's seed.

And the trees begin to bud with green.
Each season has a certain flair.

The summer has its fireflies;
They dance at dark and taunt us with
their lights.

The autumn has its animals:
Deer out searching, squirrels out scav-
enging, chattering.

Winter has its icy breeze-
It blows dead leaves across the streets.

With spring comes life anew:
Birds start chirping, building nests.
Plants creep out of the newly thawed
ground.

My back window is like an ever chang-
ing painting

It cannot be purchased, nor found in
a gallery

My back window is an ever changing
painting.

The Earth is Round, I Am Not by Anna Bjur

The Earth is round, I
am not. My body's
angles and curves break
through air yet I
am hardly there.

My throat does not dry,
I
do not cry but my heart
slows a beat when
photosynthetic organ-
isms
press against my feet
and I
cannot hear their
thoughts.

You kiss your dog and
say
you love things like
green
beans, orange juice, and
the color peach. But I
cannot love things I
cannot hear.

I feel no comfort
in a place of dead
quiet anymore than you
can rest your heels in
a graveyard without rais-
ing a riot.

Superstition means
nothing to me. I
will never understand
this fear for things
you cannot see.
What matters is

what you cannot hear.
Oh, what you cannot
hear.

As the morning alarm
screeches loud and clear
beyond good taste, an-
ger
stretches across your
face. But
that is not noise. That is
nothing like noise.

Noise is the chalice, the
grail,
the giant television set
you wanted so much.

Noise is my sweet, my
love,
my only saving grace.
Noise is perfection, sat-
isfaction.

Noise is this:
Echoes overriding other
echoes
thoughts upon thoughts
upon thoughts upon
thoughts
turning round and round
and round
my world my world

the preacher the bear
the pool the teacher
the hare the school

him you
me them

her us

all thoughts –
everywhere,
anywhere

sweets –
ready for the taking

A sea of thoughts:
your world under
water but without
the lungs bursting,
without the drowning.

Your world where

it can never go.
For your world
is a dead world.
Sound. Silence.
No thoughts.

Here is the funeral.
Here is where I leave.

I know you will shout
and take offense but -

The earth is round and
I am not.
I could stay but the time
is hot.

I want to sense all things
under the sky
so I fly, I fly.
Goodbye,
little deaf creature.



Photo: Raísa Ramalho



Photo: Joseph Armendariz

Life is [Not] Beautiful by Anna Cherry

I haven't exactly been sucking on the misery teat of life, but I just can't help cringing every single time I read one of those intellectualized novels/memoirs/essays/movie that finds some way of getting you to decide that your shitty life is beautiful. You know what I'm talking about—some author creates a creepily flawless fictional world just to hold it up to the light, say “Ah, that's boring”, and predictably conclude that true humanity is so much more fulfilling in all of its rich complexity and ambivalence. Well I am here to call that author's bluff. BULLSHIT! I'm here to say that if two people in a relationship, say, could somehow magically choose to be attracted only to each other and to commit knowledge of past sexual experiences on either side to erasure, that that couple would not be boring or oppressed or mechanical at all. That couple would be blissful.

I know this because, if that were an option, my shitty life would be beautiful. I would not be thirty-four, unmarried, and regularly visiting a counselor with whom I make endless ‘hypothetical’ examples about my ridiculous ‘hypothetical’ live-in boyfriend who sells porn for a living and, ‘hypothetically’ (why not?) shoots an occasional porno in my ‘hypothetical’ living room, resulting in my going ‘hypothetically’ insane and losing my ‘hypothetical’ goddamn mind. The funny (or infuriating, depending on how you look at it) part of all this is that I'm not that girl. And by ‘that girl’, I'm referring to ‘that girl’ you are currently assuming me to be, ‘that girl’ you are undoubtedly sizing up, cutting down, and measuring for a dress in which she can go to your imaginary strip club made specially for ‘those girls’ who are me. Well, I'm not her. I went to college. I have majors in business and economics. I play scrabble. I do not watch Jerry Springer, save for once and a half, when I couldn't help but gawk at the incestuous-bestiality plot unfolding with a four hundred pound woman and her pet Chihuahua. It terrified me, if you wanted to know. Also, I sit down with my family (or what's left of it) every Thanksgiving and give thanks to God or whoever is pulling the strings down here. I celebrate X-mas, and buy all of the politically correct X-mas and Happy Holidays greeting cards. I watch CNN and FOX news. I drink Dasani.

Justin sits at the kitchen table (which is mine) and thumbs through naked pictures of Monica, an appropriately named almost-pornstar who frolicked sexually last month on the dark green couch (which is also mine); the couch that currently sits, looking very green and unapologetic, not twenty feet from my own vagina. This makes me shudder.

“See how her nipples turn out like this?” He points concentratedly at her chest, shaking his head with, hilariously, genuine frustration. I want to laugh maniacally and eat my coffee cup. “This will just never do,” he says, throwing

down the pictures, “she’s not a star.”

I grunt and feign seriousness while looking intently into Monica’s left breast. “Hmph—yep. No winner.” After six months living with Justin, I am only mildly offended by his profession. He says he derives practically no sexual pleasure from this profession which is practically not degrading to women at all, and which I have almost practically accepted, ruthless cynic that I am.

“Mother, I already told you, he doesn’t sell cocaine. Or do it. Not all porn directors are snorting things up their nose all the time.”

“Honey, I just don’t know. Justin is a nice boy, but what happened to your wanting someone Jewish?”

I snort. “Mom! That hope practically died for me when Santa Claus did.”

“Alright, alright,” she says, not liking it when I get sacrilegious and hurrying the subject along, “but that doesn’t mean all of your standards have to go out the window. I mean, for Heaven’s sake, you went from wanting—”

“Mother, I know what I wanted.” And I do. I have it written down somewhere in my twelfth grade memory box. A man who is kind, just, strong, likes Queen and tolerates Madonna, and is all around virtuous. In college, this meant a man who asked for a first kiss, waited at least a month before suggesting sex, did not (unless by accident) view porn, and who, of course, was never rude to me. The next couple of years revealed how high these standards actually were in today’s society. They were too high, most men said, but I didn’t care. I looked onward to Real Men of the World. You know, worldly men. Out of college. Probably out romping around in the Peace Corps or, perhaps, I supposed, in a café nearby reading poetry. But slowly, very slowly, I never met a single one of these men, until slowly, very slowly, I came to realize they did not exist.

Which leads me to where I am now. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em, I always said. Or maybe Bugs Bunny said that once, back when he was racist and a bunny. Either way, it became my mentality, as it became altogether too much of an existential crisis to resist the demoralization waiting for me after my birthing of The Standard List. It became too much of a hassle to hope. And, among the most offensive, I was beginning to feel downright old fashioned.

“Lillian,” my friends would say, “what is wrong with you? All men watch porn. It’s part of their nature.”

Or, “God, Lilly-nun, don’t be such a prude. Men are men and they want sex. You can’t expect them not to ask for it.”

Or, “Didn’t you watch last week’s Oprah? The psychological imprinting of a mother’s shortened breastfeeding can be damaging to the blahboolbeebun cortex in the frontal lobe of the male brain—and that is why you cannot expect a man to listen to you or care when you are talking about emotional things.”

Until eventually, I shed away so many layers of standards, that they

were all around me on the floor, on the kitchen table, in my diary, stuffed into my tampon boxes. And they all looked girly—very girly—and embarrassingly naïve. I forgot I ever had some of them, or worse, pretended not to ever have had some, but could not yet escape the disappointment of their not being met. I decided this lessening of the strictness of old standards simply would not do. They had to be obliterated, proven wrong. Turned around. I was going to, needed to, really and truly believe that my standards were based on old fashioned myths perpetuated by the church and Lambchop and Happy Days. They were not mine, no. They were someone else's.

So now I am here, in my apartment, living with a porn director because it is a healthy expression of sexuality. Marriage is a meaningless joke of an institution. Sex is just two people forking. And dammit, Madonna is ridiculous. And I do feel (practically) free, now that I know that my standards were never supposed to have been met, because they were somebody else's, because they were unrealistic. Thank God.

It is a Monday and I am alone in my apartment. Justin is out because he does not live here anymore. He is living with Monica. I burned the dark green couch that had Monica's vagina all over it.

Thankfully, I am not disappointed. A long time ago I learned that Sylvia was right: If you expect nothing from someone, you are never disappointed. The funny (or infuriating, depending on how you look at it all) part of it is that you are never very happy either. The lows aren't so low and the highs aren't so high. But I'm not here to talk about that. I'm here to spread the word—the gospel of reality.

"Mother, I'm fine."

"I know, I know, but what was his reasoning? He must have said something."

"Not really; I mean, does it really even matter? People talk all the time and they rarely say anything remotely meaningful."

"Didn't he say he loved you, though?"

"Oh, yes, of course, Mother," I say, growing impatient with her infantile illusion of any one human emotion being some sort of panacea. "What has that got to do with anything? He cheated, he loved me, blah blah."

"Well, doesn't that bother you—he said that he loved you, but then he cheated on you?"

"No," I say blankly, like a Prozac queen. "No, Mother, it doesn't at all. Things like this happen. They are to be expected."

"Well, they shouldn't be," she states, with a conviction that is disgusting.

Violet by Kristen Painter

And it's when you pick up that guitar. It reminds you of her. The connection is still there. You think of her when you are with me, let's see, can I leave a mark on your heart? Can I outstand her? I need this chance but to you, she is forever. I'm just temporary, not legendary. She's perfect, she's forever. I'll never hold a candle to Violet.

Four hours could have ended it. Hell, that Sunday should have told you. Baby, I'm gone, it's no longer a want. You're not mine. I'll never be yours because she is forever. I'm just temporary, not legendary. She's perfect, she's forever. I'll never hold a candle to Violet.

As you pluck those strings, you think of her. You wish she could be here, where I am. Your fragile, she's familiar. It doesn't matter what you throw away. The memories stay. Each note is just a reminder of her. She's forever. I'm just temporary, not legendary. She's perfect, she's forever. I'll never hold a candle to Violet.

Who knew this would be such a challenge. Falling so fast to hit the ground so hard. She would catch you right? But you just let me fall. Her kiss was so important. Her touch, much needed. She still wants you so go back. Just pick up that guitar and leave. Let her guide you down that road. Let her lead you to nothing. She's forever right? I'm just temporary, not legendary. She's perfect, she's forever. I'll never hold a candle, to Violet.

Sensory Memory by Lyndsey Bittle

It is odd how the littlest aspects of life bring you back to that one place in which you care so deeply about. In my case it is the smell of freshly cut grass. Just the slightest smell of freshly cut grass takes my mind to a serene place where I have full control of my surroundings and the passion in my eyes is light as day. The soccer field always makes me feel at home whether it is 200 miles away from my house or right in my back yard. The smell of freshly cut grass creates an instant remembrance of how the ball feels at my feet, how my worn and callused toes slip effortlessly into my cleats, and how the smell of sweat somehow soothes my pain and exhaustion. So, next time you see me walking out of my way to walk past a running lawnmower you will know that I just want to smell the freshly cut grass, to get a small hold of the person I am and aspects around me when I step onto the soccer field.

Growing Up by Jaclyn Muff

And when I catch a glimpse of a child playing, I
Believe for a moment that I, too, can be
Carefree and run towards the edge, not away;
Dive head first into the ocean after walking the plank, only
Evaluating whether I am Peter Pan or Captain Jack Sparrow.
Forget about the chains that lock me to reality, and
Go in and out of different worlds at my own pace.
However, I am always brought back to my own world too soon.
I didn't notice the moment I threw away the key to my chains.
Just yesterday, it seems, I too lived without worry.
Ken was my boyfriend, and the pink dress was always the best.
Long hikes turned into adventures, calling for an over-night bag.
My crayons once too colored outside of the lines, but
Now, they only guide me in organizing Anatomy. My
Obligations have become priorities, and the crayon and paper are long gone.
Pencil marks all over my heart, pencil marks all over my planner, and
Quiet time is no longer for naps, but time to study.
Reality once merged with imagination and now it's lost in a haze of T.V. shows.
Someday, one day, maybe today, could I please just be
Taken back, taken back to the time when
Unbelievable was ordinary and having a
Vivid imagination did not constitute negativity,
When throwing caution to the wind might result in a
X-ray or grounding, but that never stopped the momentum.
Yesterday, yesterweek, yesteryear, if I could just pick- but there is
Zero time left to relive those moments, only time to remember...

Photo:
Alexander
Mirzoyan



Photo: Keith Stegall



Photography 2nd Place Winner

She by Jayme Palmgren

She holds the boy's hand
as they cross the street,
And when they reach the other side,
She lifts him high
and swings him around.

The boy flies through the air with a
laugh,
She stops,
She hugs,
She laughs, too.

The woman leans down
And kisses the boys face,
He squeals with delight,
With embarrassment.

"Let's race!"
They're off.

The boy stumbles,
He falls,
He scrapes his knee.
And now the tears flow.

The woman leans down,
And kisses his wound,
She tickles the boy.
His tears become a smile.
His cries turn to laughter.

She is his superhero,
His savior,
His partner,
His best friend.

She is his Mom.

Breaks by Helen J. Rudolph

To some breaks are a time of joy
To relax and not worry about the future.

But holidays reduce me to nothing but
a shell

Cold, hollow, alone and still.

I used to be filled with laughter and
life,

Never more than a minute's silence.

My siblings hate the holidays too,

Perhaps it is an inheritance of ours.

An occasional ghost of our past drifts
by:

A laugh, a call or an embrace,

Only to be locked away again.

For this reason I hate the breaks

That happen throughout the year.

They drain my veins of bubbling life

To empty corridors for wind.

My only companions are not much
good:

Swirling leaves, a frightened squirrel
and many cigarette butts.

The occasional hope of life walks upon
my face.

A few have stayed! I think with glee,
Only to see them lock themselves

away.

Without my life, fleeting as it is,

I become still and foreboding,

Despising others for their happiness.

I am rich! I am proud! I am loved!

Why then do my loves leave me

To be with others during these awful
times.

I will change with the times to adjust

With my new waves of life.

But they too will abandon me

To leave me still on these breaks.

Vacations to others, perilous torture
for me.

Repeated again and again by year.

My bursts of life mean nothing,

I will be alone again.

I beg them to stay, to live with me.

But they all fade away.

They all walk differently and learn a
different change.

My loves, all unique and creative.

One kneels down and speaks to me

During one of the most awful times

A spark of life spreads to me

As my love takes out a pen

And writes out my silent cries.

Lion Dandies by Jessica Kunze

It's the age old story of he loves me.

He loves me not.

Flowers have never been my thing,

I much prefer something less...

delicate.

Something that comes in

with a hostile take over.

Something that wants to consume;

willing to fight dirty for what it wants:

Life.

I would have passion with mine, ripped
up by the roots with contempt than be
allowed to wilt into the background
and thrown out with yesterday's trash.

I do not ask that it stand against the

test of eternity, just be the moment.
So when I look back all I can do is
feel. Feel the unrivaled need. Passion.
Lust.

Something where the flame is still
hot, as it crashes into a million shards
of glass.

Something willing to fight for existence;
till the fabric of it's time has unraveled,
leaving only the threads and the memory
of the perfect moment. Something where
caution is given to the wind, in order to
embrace the wonderful, the horrible,

and the suffering.

I want something that makes everything
beautiful, as it all comes tumbling down.
The sound and fury, the rise and fall,
a beginning and end, the fire licking on
my heels.

The rise and fall of the joy in heart-
break.

But he loves me. He loves me not.
It's a way to suffer I'll never understand.

"Material Issues" by Dean Moran

Dedicated to Jim Ellison

"Material Issue," a childlike awe in his voice rang and he spoke of these men like prophets, "They will change your life man." I heard this unlikely threat before, at this same sleazy bar. The next "big thing" was said to come through this town every other Saturday night.

This man who sat next to me at the bar, with his messy brown hair and his cheap trick T-shirt, had been making this promise to everyone at the bar. "You are definitely gonna enjoy these guys." He told me, not like the drunken roadie that he was, but more like one of those crazy, southern Baptists; the ones who are always following the "word of the lard," without question. He smelled like marijuana and had at least three gold teeth though. I got the feeling he had given up whatever sorry life he had once lived to travel with this group he was here with now.

Blindly, I believed him without question, simply because I wanted him to be right, you see I was painfully nice to drunk people, and I thought if anything was gonna change my life, why shouldn't it be a bar band? With a couple of shots already in me I was as naïve as the next guy. Although I knew better than to look forward to a great band in this crummy place, this was the climax of my week and I had no choice but to enjoy myself. I sat there in the thick layer of haze, which blurred the walls around me that seemed to be just four gigantic displays of posters representing every one of the bands that have come through since 1975. Hanging there on the dim-

ly lit walls like a museum of nobodies, I realized I had paid the five dollar cover for just about a majority of this history.

A couple of lonely chandeliers over the bar and stage told the unforgiving stories of the kind of people who came to drink here. Mine was not much different I guess. I was stuck between love and laziness and my life had as much clarity as my eyes did at the moment, my contacts forced from my pupils by the pollution of the raunchy air. Sitting there watching the bands, I wondered if that was about all there was for me.

I still felt the excitement in my stomach though as I always did as the singer began to check the microphone, and the drummer testing the bass drum at a steady pulse mimicking the quickening pace of my heartbeat. I always got to the edge of my seat ready to get up and dance, begging for the music to wake up that feeling inside me. As much as this place hated me sometimes, I always felt fondly towards it. With the dwindling faith I had left, I believed in what happened here; the drinks they shoveled out without any shame of age or current condition, the weekly poker games, which almost always turned into a brawl in order to gain back five bucks worth of pride. More than anything I believed in the bands. I wanted to live in the music they were playing. They were never great. Most of them weren't even that good, but they all had a purpose. They all had a sound that they loved to make together. Every once in a while that turned into something transcendently beautiful. It was like they were showing off the fact that they were living how they wanted to, I admired and despised them all the same.

As this singer stepped up to the front, looking down at his feet, almost exactly like the kid who just got caught with the cookie from the cookie Jar! His nose pointed towards his toes and his forehead intimately touched the head of that mic. I saw great conflict in this man, and right as the drummer cried, "One!(click), Two (click), Three(click), Four!" Whatever it was, was immediately resolved and an instant calm fell over him. His eyes got big and assertive, he threw his head back revealing his pale face previously covered by straight brown bangs, then he immediately belted the lyrics, **"Well if the beds in your sky just continue to fly, tell me why, tell a lie, can I have your love?"** His eyes as he sung swelled as if whoever he was singing to was right across from him in the bar. **"And if the leaves in your trees only sway with the breeze tell me dear, tell me please!? Have you had enough?"** His look intensified as he burst into the chorus led by thunderous drums, so certain of that breaking beat! The leader, stabbing his guitar, which he wore like a cross, seemed to know nothing on this earth but the song he was singing; he was an honest poet of our time! "Well if the car that you drive, were to suddenly collide, can I give you a ride, oh can I take you home?"

He cried the unabridged verses of the American pop song! By the time he begun to belt this second verse he had already redefined my idea of pop. Was it power-pop? It had incredible power. Maybe punk rock? The angst was beautifully raw. New Wave maybe?!

I couldn't decide but decided I didn't care! I just followed the magnetic force with the others leading us to that glorious dance-floor!

It was a song catchy enough to catch us, the tune penetrated our minds, and moved our feet.

I decided to myself that the words this man sung mattered! The immediate importance of this band flooded my ears!

We had little in common; He sung of nothing so terribly important to me,

But the words he said existed in a way that we could all relate to them, words every lowlife, unconfident, loser, absolutely needed to hear!

In the silence we would wait, watch him sweat with the band. Anticipating some non-musical communication following the applause. But all he could do was look down at his feet for a couple of seconds, without a single word, after taking one more cookie from the cookie jar, he stepped back to the drummer, jumped into the air, and polluted it with his sound. Raw, real, sound!

We hung on every note he strummed, the messages he sung, they were all about love, but so easily overanalyzed by the presence of this star, he shone so bright in the cloudy sky of that bar. You would think by looking at him that his lyrics explained the meaning of life entirely.

Like Jesus of the dive bar, his drunken disciples raised their glasses in approval,

We tasted the tears of every broken heart, felt the rage of every innocent mans struggle!

We danced to the power of every triumph, swayed to the pain of every loss,

Forgot everything we ever knew and were under the impression we cared about.

Issues were beyond us; his music led the way to dance around them.

For a moment I forgot if I was wearing clothes, I couldn't remember my name or what country I was from. I couldn't remember the importance of these things. Did I have any money? I danced blissfully to the score of the set-list without concerning myself with this non-sense.

Turns out I did have some money. I spent it on booze and band merchandise. In the serenity of that night, I didn't give a damn about

money or how drunk I was! I didn't even give a damn about my deader than dead end job, or the fact that the woman I loved, was almost positively with another man this very moment! As I sat in contemplation of nothing at all related to the atrocities in my life just previously mentioned, the cheap-trick roadie come to the bar and put a hand on my shoulder as friendly as an old chum. "what'd I tell ya?" he gloated. He smiled huge, showing off those pirate looking teeth of his. "I don't think I've ever seen a band so full of life!" It was true. "I haven't felt this good in so many years." I admitted. His face lightened and he tightened his grip on my shoulder looked straight at me in sincerity and said, "wow, thats great to hear man! god bless." I said "oh, thanks man." I was caught a bit off guard but he walked away and went back to his roadie work. I felt a bit guilty of my initial judgments of him being a "crazed Christian" for this band. Who would of thought he was actually a religious man? I heard his boisterous laughter as he loaded the drums into the van. I couldn't help but envy him for a second and think that this man, who was around my same age, was not so very different than me at all.

At the time I wanted to give up everything in my sorry life to join this group and nightly feel the light that they would be shedding in every dive bar in the u.s.a.,

I spent a whole 20 dollars on posters, stickers, and a T-shirt that would look slightly ridicules on a man of my age, but I didn't care. Somehow now I understood why people could give up their lives and believe in the religions and things that before I thought were so trivial and meaningless. The completely **unrelated** meaning that this precious pop sensation just relayed to me, felt like something to believe in. You know; I felt faith and everything. Because I thought just than that people might not mean anything without the love of some unproven wonder. A thing that provokes powerful emotion, but will never really show you the reality of it. Although Material Issue was live and incredible in reality, they were somehow more in the world of **faith**.

Materials are just issues, even our hands mean nothing if we don't use them. Our eyes don't really know how to see. It's these sort of experiences that don't make sense to our logical senses, but touch us in a place that we are too distracted to think about on the average day. You can't find this place with words alone, no sound can tell you without sight, there is a feel for the rhythm there, and to go there you can't simply walk, you must dance there! When you **dance**, you can really **love**, and with natural grace too, you can't force these things. It is a transcendence of your senses to ignore inhibition; it's like a peace treaty to end the constant war between your

body and mind. This place is where I was that night. Now that I've been there I can believe in it, now that I've been there, I can believe.

Today I continue to think about that singer, his bulging eyes are on my mind just about every day now. He looked so natural on the stage but when he quickly left the club, he seemed so out of place; as if up on the stage he was on a different planet and on the floor he was an alien in unknown territory. A couple of month's ago the first full Material Issue album came out. When I heard again that first song they played that marvelous night, I could almost go back to that state of serenity I experienced. I couldn't quite go there, but when I closed my eyes I could see it in my memories that singer glowing center stage like an angel of light. The band put out more albums but didn't ever get the following they deserved.

In 1995 the lonely singer committed suicide by locking himself in his car he choked to death on carbon monoxide. I wonder if there is room for sad pop singers in heaven?

"In the Kitchen" by Keith Stegall

He hated dicing tomatoes. The goopy, squashing, driplike, running nose, yellow yolk of eggs spilling down the countertop onto the kitchen floor, his socks, shit!, soaked through and stained forever, remarkably unlike catsup, ketchup, catch up to where you should have been an hour ago, and he didn't even like tomatoes.

He hated dicing onions, too, for very different reasons. For one, he loved onions, although, as soon as the outer layers were peeled back and torn off, first those crisp pieces that rustled like dead skin and then the slightly wetter ones that started that alltoofamiliar sting that rose through his nostrils and hit his brain like snorting Ajax, but the worst was still to come, for when the blade found its mark, nestled sweetly between that damp, fibrous muscle tissue, oozing its pungent juices, and later, its small cold heart, even when he tried to chop quickly, like ripping off a Band-Aid, but, of course, just like the Band-Aid, it wouldn't matter, no, not one bit, for his eyes felt that alltoofamiliar papercut and the last half, as blind as Oedipus, eyelids closed so painful that he didn't care if he cut himself and sprayed a thick ketchup all over the cutting board. But the fajitas would be well worth it, he know, and endured the abuse.

They say that, holding your nose, the textures of an onion, a potato, and an apple when bitten into are indistinguishable.

He didn't think that peeling potatoes was so bad. Maybe it was because he loved potatoes but never ate them, and, thus, never had to peel them either. Maybe it was because he received some sort of sadistic pleasure out of cutting the eyes out of a living thing (a sort of justice for being blinded by the onions). It was not because of its prominence in Ulysses, which he started once in high school, and tells himself that he might try to read again someday.

The French for "potato" is *pomme de terre* – literally, "apple of the earth."

He had never sliced or peeled an apple. He rarely ate apples, but if he happened to, he would bite into it like it was a small animal, a rodent perhaps, and he would feel its lifejuices seeping out onto his lips and chin, dribbling with his saliva to the front of his shirt, shit!, but he didn't care, ambrosia of the ages, golden and delicious, he was Hercules, Atlas recently deceived, and triumphant and uncaring, but he was a man among men, God dead a century and a half.

Tomatoes were once called love apples; later, wolf peaches; but, as mentioned, he hated tomatoes (and didn't hold peaches in much higher esteem).

Fade to Brown by Jordan Bitticks

In my twentieth autumn I watch
heavy hearted

As the sun hides her face and the
nights draw out;

I fall as the last plum and saffron
leaves fade to brown.

In my twentieth autumn my
dreams have been thwarted,
The dancer, the painter, the scien-
tist forgotten.

In my twentieth autumn I gave up
heavy hearted.

Our friend, the broken mind, has

not turned his stead-fast frown,
You know, after tonight he may
never wake up.
I fall as the last plum and saffron
leaves fade to brown.

At a party with old friends, you
cried when we departed.
I held your hand and knew what
you already missed;
In my twentieth autumn I watched
heavy hearted.

In my twentieth June I strung my
last daisy crown.

I danced the last dance like those
leaves for whom
I fall, as the last plum and saffron
ones fade to brown.

I see the change in my face.
In my twentieth autumn I am
heavy hearted.
I fall as the last plum and saffron
leaves fade to brown.

In this season of whither

Attn: Prayer Dept. by Jessica Kunze

To whom it may concern:

If it really concerns you at all...

Second
Place:
Poetry

I doubt You're the one up there
Giving a peon your time
Listening to someone like me...
The non-'believer'
The Skeptical
Maybe even a tad cynical

For we (time-wasters) – have probably our own department manager
With a crappy hair piece
Donning an ugly white smock

Could I request Job?

I'm sure he wouldn't mind
Who wouldn't want a desk job?

Look at what happens, when you work in the field...

If not...

You should look into it,

Free up some of that infinite time.

Also...

Could you feed the starving children of China?

Maybe even Ethiopia?

Possibly take care of those in Fulton too?

I mean if you're feeling froggy, that is.

Just when you find the time.

Amen.

Oh. P.S.

While you're out there...

You know...

Tending to your flock...

Could I get some Cheetos

(Flaming Hot?)

I Just ran out.

Flowers Who Grow Wild by Jordan Bitticks

I picked some wild flowers today. I had no one to give them to. On my usual walk along the creek I decided to begin a collection. I found light yellow ones like daisies, pink ones that reminded me of the crystal rock candy in souvenir shops, the kind they keep next to the boxes of saltwater taffy and home-made jams. A ways off the trail I found others that looked like little bells of mustard, drooping heavily away from the sun. Lazy. Indifferent. Purple bells were scarcer, but easier to spot with their faces turned up at the sky when dawn goes down to day. I found ones that looked like babies' breath, and some like white forget-me-nots: the kinds of flowers that usually accompany a red rose on the boutonnière you'd pin to boys' jackets. Sumac the color of currants and Dandelions found their way into my collection as well. Dandelions always find their way into the smashed handfuls of flowers kids give to their mothers—that is—before they are told dandelions are weeds. I think the weed flowers are just as nice any others. My English teacher doesn't like the word "nice", and my mother doesn't care much for dandelions. Actually my mother doesn't care much for any flowers, "they make me think of death" she says. Mom was in charge of the flower arrangements at my grandmother's funeral two Decembers ago.

Her funeral was the first time I'd gone home in nearly five years. Snow drifted over the Arizona desert; icy flakes dusted petals with glitter. The flowers were there for no reason in particular, perhaps simply as a tradition; there are always flowers at funerals. That day the flowers were malevolent. They jeered and teased in at my grandmother's grave; a one foot by one foot by one foot hole, meant somehow to hold eighty nine years of Delfina. We all put a white rose in with her, a last embrace, a last motion. A last "I loved you." Then the blessed water. Then the damned cement. We stood there for a moment, as the father offered his faith to her and to us, "peace be with you always." The little crowd dissolved, each family climbing into their cars, with warm air and padded seats. I ran to ours, ahead of my sister and father. My knees were shaking; I leaned forward, pressed my head against the back of the driver's seat, hair sticking to my wet face and hands curled into fists, prayer card in the right, wad of tissue in the left. It was the first time I had cried since she died, I sank while my mother sat vacant in the passenger seat, grandma's rosebud and gold rosary tucked in her hand and a basket of ivory lilies in her lap. Peace be with you always, Amen.

I troubled much over what to do with my flowers. By normal stan-

dards it was a lame bouquet; the colors weren't so bright as the ones planted just a quarter of a mile away on campus. Though, that's why I liked them. They may not have had the blue miracle dust that transforms pinks and pale yellows to fuchsias and golds; but there they were growing wild, in defiance of pollution, recent flood waters, and the lack of a gardener's loving thumb. I envy their will to grow. I thought of giving them to a boy, but boys can be funny about things like that.

What boys know about flowers is what most girls know too: they are little plants that used to grow in Grandmother's garden—geraniums, azaleas or sweet Williams—they are brightly colored and terribly delicate. Also, flowers come wrapped by the dozen in a cone of shiny cellophane, easy to transport and to present after the walk from Dad's car to her front door.

Lance Begnaud brought flowers to my door once for no occasion at all. He was a film and theater arts major who had a heart of gold but had never been in love, "I'm going to die before I'm twenty five, why fall in love with someone just to leave her." He needed heart transplant but had no health insurance. Too sick to hold a full time job, his wages as a part time card dealer and a freelance movie director provided him with little more than enough to pay the rent and buy a girl a dozen roses. That summer we spent every possible moment together, we listened to a pulsing jazz concert from under a magnolia tree, We spent many a late night talking over coffee at the Denny's near the his neighborhood which my parents referred to as the bad part of town. There was one occasion that Lance and I attempted a nature hike, I say attempted because Lance grew tired and restless after fifteen minutes on the trail. I was annoyed, but I knew it was a result of the gap in his heart. That summer, at twenty three, four years older than I, Lance fell in love. Face bathed in flickering pale light from the small television monitor Lance poked "I flove you, you've filled the gap." My mouth went dry and my eyes went wet. I away ran as fast as I could. Weeks later the roses still claimed a place on my dresser. I kept them until they were so brittle they turned to dust when I carried them to the wastebasket I couldn't save those roses. I couldn't save Lance.

Like boys, I don't know that random strangers would know how to accept my flowers were I to offer them. I thought of passing my bouquet along to a man who was working by the side of the road as I headed back to the dormitory. I've always had this idea that flowers are to be given. I want to get whole batch of daisies and attach a message, "pass it on." Take fifty or so of these flowers and watch. Lovely. I looked down at the pale little bushel in my hand and feared the man working on the street may not appreciate like I did.

Garden flowers—the pansies of the plant world—droop sadly, their petals

curling up only minutes after being plucked, my wild flowers still held their own by time I reached my room. I sat at my desk and neatly placed the handful flora on the keyboard of my laptop. In my head I read and reread the list of people to whom I could give my flowers. None would do... but flowers must be given.

Scanning the room for ideas of people on whom to bestow my sad bouquet my eyes passed over a stack of books.

Years ago at grandma's desert-town home there was a box filled with old encyclopedias that she'd bought from Victor Adias the next-door neighbor. Nogales is this community stranded in the southern Arizona desert and sliced in two by the U.S and Mexican border. In Nogales you knew everyone's name, their nickname, and their addiction. In Nogales the asbestos buildings and killer snakes were the least of the majority's worries, they were more afraid of border control, so its no surprise those encyclopedias I found were written in Spanish. I was told not to go into the back room or any of the boxes back there—you see— it wasn't uncommon for black widow spiders and scorpions to hide in the dark unfrequented corners of my grandma's Arizona dwelling. Naturally, defiant of her warnings, I explored that back room and found the box of encyclopedias , I flipped through "R" and a black-eyed-susn out of the pages onto my lap. What I knew of flowers then was simple was they were delicate and had to be handled with care, the flower on my lap was especially so, very dry and very brittle. This one was dead and yet a marvelous shade of goldenrod. Excitedly I galloped and stumbled into the TV room where my aunt Yolanda was balancing her check book. I needed to share my discovery. I was scolded for rummaging in the back room, and then Londa put her pen down and explained that when she was a young girl she liked to press flowers in books, so they would look nice forever; the flower in my hand had been given to her by a boy in high school. She took the flower, gazed at it hungrily. I went off when she slipped it between the folds of her checkbook.

In college skipping is about fifty dollars down the drain, but I ditched my next class to go back to the creek anyway. For some reason what I had to do was more important, I knew who to give them to. Stinson creek saw a wet summer and the excess water came up on the banks at one particular spot and carved out a narrow gutter with entrance just off the paved walkway. Here, nestled at a bend in the creek, trees cradle the water on all sides like long necked birds stretched over to see their reflection on the riffled surface.

My canvas shoes were easy to kick off and I tucked my long skit in the elastic on my underwear so it wouldn't get wet- no one could see me here anyway. Hopping to the first stone I summoned every ounce of grace and bal-

ance left from those ballet classes I gave up so long ago. My blue polished toes helped to grip the algae covered rocks. Aha, this is what toes are meant for! A crawdad shot backwards over my left foot causing me to squirm a bit and collapse. My heart lurched in my throat even after my knees crashed on the dry bank. I tottered along the rocks a ways upstream till I settled on a great flat limestone bed rock that forked the creek.

The mustard and faded purple bells stared up at me, and the little daisy drooped, finally, the lack of water taking a toll on her. These wild flowers on my were never mine to begin with. I did consider pressing them in the books, but I've learned that flowers are not meant to be kept forever. Nothing gold can stay.

Without hesitation I cast them out into the water and as I watched them float off—just out of reach—I sank.



*Photo:
Samantha
Montoya*



*Photo:
Keith Stegall*

Bound by Rachel Nolting

Why walls? Why boundaries?

What has this achieved?

We are separated and

Bound

Contained by borders:

Background, ethnicity, upbringing, simple dislike

We are bound by our shallowness and lack of sight

Judge not for what a man has done

But what he plans to achieve

Yet, we assume, judge, critique

Nothing can be taken as it is,

A simple expression of joy

No pride, conviction

It's only beautiful if someone else says so

Bound

By another opinion, a different thought, an idea

What would we be without borders?

Free?

Does a lion like to be caged?

Could we be kings?

Our shackles do not pick us

We choose our chains

We chose to be

And remain

Bound

3 Years by Jayme Palmegren

I slept on the couch last night.

It was the last place you slept before it was over,
Not that I didn't want you to sleep in bed with me,

You just looked so peaceful,

I didn't want to wake you.

But last night...

Last night I laid there and tried to get a part of you back.

I wrapped myself in the blankets you used,
made it my cocoon, pretended I was wrapped in you.

But I didn't feel you there,
only the tag of the blanket scratching against my skin.

Poetry:

3rd

Place

Winne r

And every time I hear a car door slam outside my house

now,

I hold my breath...hoping...

Hoping it's you,

Hoping you're here to tell me it was all a mean joke

That you're sorry

That we can make it right...even if we can't.

Speaking of can't,

I can't even get into my own fridge.

Those leftovers from the dinner you made are still there,

And even they taunt me,

reminding how only hours ago you were mine.

How ridiculous is that?

I'll have to get someone to throw them out.

I wish someone could throw it all out,

All that stupid shit that makes me think of you.

Those things you've tainted for me.

BlueOctober&Camels&Insomnia&ShinerBock&McNally's
StolenTShirts&TriptotheAirport&EmptyCokeCansAllOvertheHouse

You were always good at making a mess,

And I never really minded picking up after you.

I guess I never really believed

that I could be something you would discard so easily,

that I would be the last mess I had to clean up.

I guess that makes me wrong.

Picking Olivia K. by Jordan Bitticks

She was on the phone with a lover, or maybe her mother
When I spotted her at the corner of 3rd and Grand.
Upset, involved, and distracted she looked at her watch--
I took my window, swiftly swooping in to pinch her bag.
She screamed after me and started to run but couldn't keep up;
I was the fastest on my team, they never can catch me.
Another day, another dollar, oh, I know it's not honest,
But I could be doing worse.

The bag was made of pliant leather, time worn, weather worn,
love worn; it reminded me of my mother's.
I tossed out her license—blonde hair, green eyes, five feet seven inches,
she had a happy face—Olivia K. McCormic.
Loose change, five ones and ten, a crumpled family photo
and recipe for some kind of Indian food. A ticket stub
from that movie theater down town that serves booze and
plays old movies after midnight; she saw Planet of the Apes last week,
I did too.

No credit cards, 3 giftcards, one business card with fancy scrawl:
an art curator named Sebastian Leopardi, that can't be his real name.
Tossing about in the bottom of the bag was an empty pack of smokes,
a sack of dope, an unpaid parking ticket and a tube of red lipstick.
Always loved the look of red lips.

A little ceramic pot filled with solid perfume, cinnamon,
sandalwood and oranges, warm and lightly floral.
The little leather planner had today's to-dos all
crossed out, some of tomorrow's to-dos were crossed out too.

I wonder what Olivia will do without all of her to-dos.
I wonder if Olivia would have anything to do with me.
I wonder if I'd crossed out more to-dos maybe I'd be doing more.
I wonder what Olivia is doing, looking for her bag? looking for me?

Blind Faith by Sarah Blackmon

I fell in love with the stubble on his face.
He was not smooth, not perfect;
just as I am not perfect.

I can tell how many drinks he's had
by the whiskey on his breath
and the creaks of the floor beneath him.

He made a joke once that he could have
another woman in the room
and I'd never know.

I laughed it off and so did he
as we rolled in bed as feathers from the pillows
whispered to my earlobes.

He wakes me at night
when the electricity goes out.
In the darkness, we are even.

We bring our bodies close in true night,
fingertips feather-grazing skin;
he says he is a pineapple but I am a peach.

But the inside of his mouth is the real fruit,
slippery and wet as the soap in the shower.
Night after night, he cleanses me.

Last night, when I came home
I could smell rose and sandalwood and ylang-ylang
the combination is pleasant but unfamiliar.

I slip into bed and contemplate the scent's origin aloud
he says he has been burning incense
but there is not even a hint of char in the air.

A Dream of Winter in Late June by Jordan Bitticks

The early morning moon sat
upon my window pane
Her siren song called
the ghosts from my head.
I blinked through the dark,
out past the curtains furling
And set my sights upon
the sycamore who stood unswaying;

Her leaves were lush chartreuse
beneath a crystal coat,
A strangely solid reminiscence
of the far off snows.
With the cold glaze breaking
like glass under calloused feet
I set out to find who had stolen
my dear summer's heat.

At the waters edge I lofted
a stone at the center of the lake,
My pebble skipped and danced
along

the firmly frosted face.
Beneath the tottering dock I found
a family of mallards and loon
Huddling, confused, shivering
and yearning for the humid air of
June.

And in old Willies garden the ripe
tomatoes hung their crimson heads,
heavy pendulums on the vine,
glittering under the icy moon.
In the flurry the geraniums
lost their spicy fragrance
To the smell of ice, a biting scent:
electric, raw and crisp.

Senseless tingling toes and frostbit
heels
begged I turn to home,
I wept apology to the sycamore
who found no solace from cold.



*Photo:
Jillian
Eads*



*Photo:
Raisa
Ramalho*

*Photo:
Samantha
Montoya*



Snow's Short Stand on Stage by

I watch it gather in graceful white sheets
and feel the thrill in my mind it has raised,
Yet though each new sun its caches depletes
I think back to it and still am amazed.
With each flake there rests the ancient rumor
That each one falling isn't like the others;
Each bloated cloud is the sky's kind tumor
 and each ones' children—not twins—but brothers.
But it does not strike me with disbelief
at the thought that each flake has been hand-made;
I sit and look at a Baroque relief
and then at these beauties that quickly fade.
We'd fill our pockets with sun if we could,
and we pluck the flowers that please our sight,
we buy the paintings that give us delight
(and that go so well with my kitchen light);
Snow comes, goes so fast that to own one should
house it care'fly, to mere' survive the night.
Why? Oh Why? has there been no beauty spared?
in these short-lived paintings of endless sky?
I hope to understand—though few have cared—
 With the ground almost covered smooth in snow
 And the Earth with beauty enough to share,
 With mys'try 'nough to feel you never know
 yet motive 'nough to search, to hope, to care;
I hope to understand, before I die,
why these fleeting beauties of endless sky
are unique and unlike all the others
and why there is never any contest
between these frozen and famous brothers.

The Story I Don't Want to Tell by *Sarah Blackmon*

I still remember the way you were
when your fingers were chubby and
you had never been close to a
woman.

I still remember how your eyes
looked
when they were just a little bit dulled
but had not quite yet turned into
glass.

I still remember the red of your
cheeks
after a hazy and slow vodka after-
noon
and your knees gave out on the
lawn.

But then we spent a year or more
apart
memorized ash grey and powder
white,
as your body grew more thin, weak,
pale.

The first night of summer, we met
again
your bones rattled into my same
lawn,
I flinched at the hollow mass before
me.

We both knew I could never turn
away
from a broken bird or desperate
child,
You knew I'd be holding you for a

while.

Our branches grew, rapidly inter-
twined
we slept never and wasted away
together,
everyone knew what we would not
say.

On a trip across state our bodies
locked
just before you went your way and
I mine,
you called me that Sunday at three
A.M.

In the morning we drove back and
you
had rope burn around your skinny
neck,
I didn't say a word; I just let you tell
it.

We kept a spare blanket in your old
car
and spent a dozen nights in the
cemetery,
not once sleeping or looking at the
stars.

You told me every secret, every
night
my eyes were fixed on your rusty
face,
your eyes were planted on the
ground.

I would buy you smoke and fire-
water
hold your hand through the with-
drawal,
as you shook like fall's last browned
leaf.

And this went on and on, around
and around
through the accusing glares and
sister stares,
you began to fidget and twitch in
my arms.

Eleven nights after the car was
repossessed
you slept in a bed with my flesh and
blood,
But it was not my flesh; it was not
my blood.

It took me a few days to choke
down the truth
to let myself believe you'd sinned
against me,
but on Sunday, when she left town,
I knew.

I slapped your face, made it as red
as my words
cursed you in the street, in my
house, my room,
where you tried to lay next to me
one last time.

Your arms wrapped around my
sinking body
for a fleeting moment, it felt the
best it ever had,
you holding me, not the other way
around, for once.

But you said nothing, had no apolo-
gies or regret
were confused by my anger, my
quivering body,
in that moment, I finally saw the
monster in you.

And in a split second, my fists flew
and struck
you were a dried out junkie, a
shadow of a man,
it did not take me long to push you
out the door.

I saw you a last week; even thinner
than before
and the only spots of color left in
your face
were the sallow, dark circles under
your eyes.

You told my best friend, if you had
it to do over
you'd love me and keep me and let
me fix you,
but I am no longer in the business
of repairs.



Photo: Josh Brown

Play Upon Your Strings by Jessica Kunze

Within my attic, was a sight to see,
A fool in harlequin trimming saw me.
A small menacing man fashioned of pine
Donned with strings and wear of silver and wine,
A sinister look of knowledge unknown
'twas painted high upon the smile shown.

His evil grin beckoned me with true lies
And from his dusty grave I helped him rise
By my light touch his face did come alive;
Telling the trick the maker did contrive.

"I am just a puppet upon your strings,
With my eyes alone I can show you things.
Be sure, you need not fear nor run and hide
I will astound you while I'm by your side.
All I require? Keep me safe and sound.

Else you must profit 'neath a dusty mound."

So I played my fingers upon its strings
And called forth all of what his eyes did bring.
They told me tales, and told me all too true:
Stories of me, of things I've dreamed to do.

One by one, every vision did I live,
Each godly sight did not lead or miss give.
Knowing before through those malicious eyes;
Which gave me more than even money buys.

Soon after the urge grew for more and more;
That one day while standing within in the door
Again I heard it speak, telling of more...

Twice it spoke to me of its secret lore,
"Should you take from me this godly power,
Have that you desire, in this hour.

Within these eyes holds the key to your prize,
But there is a price to pay for such eyes.
Such sight only a block gesture can play,
Within in another's clutch you must stay."

No wonder on how long the bid would last
At the last of his words I broke him fast;
Heart pounding heavy deep within my chest,
My mind firm, fixed, arm giving it my best.
His face, oh how it smashed – broken did leak.
Like tar running, it was my flesh it did seek.

Its mysterious sheen did hold me fast;
I do not remember what I saw last –
The man standing within the doll's bile
Adorned with a known sinister smile,
Or the strings falling wayside by my place,
Or the aged draperies of woolen lace.

I had fallen prey to the Master's schemes,
"So long have I wanted this dream of dreams;

To behold the glory of a man's sight,
 No more darkness and silence, only light.
 Farewell, my dear friend who ne'er did listen,
 I shall now enjoy all that does glisten.
 Worry not, I will keep you safe and sound
 As you prophet 'neath this dusted all mound."

No longer do my eyes see or I feel,
 Only my thoughts to wander this black seal.
 Here I have fallen with my desired,
 Showing the fates that I have to sire.
 Hidden in a dust filled attic I lay

Waiting to show what a jester can play.

Cosmic Relation by Dominique Sciacca

A man who marched
 for civil rights in Washington,
 lived in Germany, wooed the fraül-
 eins,
 spoke Hebrew and German,
 burned everything he cooked,
 made me eat split-pea soup,
 gave wonderful advice.

Hitchhiked back and forth across
 this country
 more times than I have years.
 His name is peace – Shalom.
 putting positive energy into the uni-
 verse,
 every time it is said.

Carried from a random Texas road-
 side
 to our farm in Arkansas
 in my dad's dirty, old
 pick-up truck.
 Born ten years after he moved

South,
 he was already suffering
 the mutiny of his own body
 but still smiling.

In my very early childhood,
 after my parents had split up,
 he cared for me.
 Pinned my diapers.
 Warmed my bottles.

If I cried,
 he would chant.
 He would sing his deep songs
 like an Indian in a rain dance,
 holding me close,

so I could feel the vibrations in his
 chest.
 The humming of his lungs
 shook my little heart
 free of sadness.



Photos:
Raísa
Ramalho



Nana by Kathryn Leech

Nana,
I sit here now, content,
And think of our time together.
Before cancer consumed your veins,
Before I watched you suffer therapy,
before you endured extreme pain,
heartbreak.

My red hair and freckles, my Irish temper,
songs and dances
quilts and necklaces
good food, funny presents, and
big hugs.

Now that you're gone I've realized,
how much you meant to me.
Tears still come to my eyes
when I remember the
good times.

Each time I look at your picture,
Each time I see a four leaf clover,
Each time I wear the bracelet you gave me,
I thank God for such a
blessing.

Thank you for the gifts,
Thank you for the embraces,
Thank you for the stories,
Thank you for the cookies,
Most of all Nana... thank you for the
memories.

This isn't goodbye, it's,
"See you later".
I miss you, and I love you,
Forever in my heart,
Me.