

Opus

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

First and foremost, thank you for picking up a copy of Opus. Now in its seventh year, Opus continues to be a labor of love for the members of English Club. Reading, rating, and laying out the poetry, prose, and pictures submitted by students from the creative community on campus is a process both arduous and enlightening. Though it took a couple of months and dozens of people, our seventh issue is here to showcase some of the work of the next generation of artists.

To everyone who submitted their work for consideration: thank you. We're grateful that you shared your imagination and talent with us.

Happy reading,

Jennifer Picalila
Editor-in-Chief

Thank you...

Dr. Tom Greenfield, for providing support and comic relief.
Michele Feeley, for your organization and endless assistance.
The English Department, for its continued encouragement.
Our members, for your time, effort, and dedication.
All contributors, for taking the time to submit your work.
AAC, for presenting us with the resources needed to publish Opus.

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Metastasis

Sarah Laudico

Tomorrow I will take my grandmother to see the birds. I will coax her shrunken frame into the boisterous wheelchair and roll it down the halls, three rights and then a left. The air will sweat, pant, and yet she will drag the rough gray blanket off her bed to cover her legs—swollen stilts, draped in gauze and forever oozing. For her, dying is fluid. She will want to tell me how she woke up again drenched, drowning in sweat and piss—liquid signs of her body’s betrayal, but she will pluck those words from the air and drink them down before they reach me. Instead, she will talk about the birds. “Fourteen little parakeets,” she’ll say, smiling, “how about that.” Back in Room 122B, my aunts—eyes small and sallow behind long, hook like noses, hair hardened nests of golden straw— will trill over the low hum of the 5 o’clock news: “I don’t know why she loves those birds so much”; “she was never an animal person”; “I used to want a border canary, yellow with green wings, remember?” They will never ask me, but somehow I know she is the fifteenth: wings clipped, encased in glass, wishing for home. As we’re about to leave, she will press a withered piece of raisin toast into my palm, wrapped in tissues, saved from breakfast, a tangible “I love you.” I do not know how to tell her she is the most beautiful woman in the world.



Anait Tamanian

Euthanasia

Jacob Goldberg

I had always imagined
dressing our children
before school:

Day one
buttons, two
And Zip.

And wave smiling as they pressed against the glass,
scared.

I'd planned on taking you fishing,
even though neither of us
really like it,
just so I could kiss you on the water.

I had actually already bought
a bouquet of plastic flowers
for our Saturday when it'd just be us,
and we'd make something
simple together.

And I already had an idea
for another email to send you from work.
I promise, your boss wouldn't have minded this time.

But I am sorry,
I am so
Sorry,
because I can't find the piece you gave me,
the one that completes this story.
I've looked everywhere.

And now you've left me with this choice,
something that both of us should have made up
on a dry cloudy day,
while we laughed and cried together.

The Golden Bough

Emma Striegel

A nightingale sits on a golden bough
and sings the sun to somnolence.
The trees, in reverence, solemnly bow
as the shadows grow; yet dark somehow
brings light, as day's remembrance.

The bough's now weighted by a gazing owl
like a ghost, a silent sentinel,
whose hooded watch with brother's cowl
spies mice in the grass. Unearthly howl!
He swoops with the grace that dead men tell.

The golden bough's become perch for a lark
whose song is sweet as honey drips.
It pierces the air in gleaming arcs
of silver sound. Chasing the dark
from the sphere's unearthly grip.

The Dock

Susanna Guarino

My brother and I spent the summer swimming in polluted water,
riding our bikes to the beach or the library on hot days.

All the other kids had stay-at-home moms and soccer clubs,
but our parents were too busy getting divorced.

The day we crawled through the rusted metal fence and took the dusty path down to the dock by the river I hated how he always took charge, decided what route to take and when we would leave, and I was silent as

I sat with my legs dangling in the water.
The dock rocked slightly with the current, cattails swung in the sunny breeze.
My brother put his hand on my shoulder and said we should go,
but I shook him off,
stared at the grey abandoned barge across the river.
South of here Kodak blew smoke into the sky,
we could see the clouds form.
He grabbed my brown ponytail and pulled backwards
sharply saying come on.

I snapped my head forward to get away from him and slid suddenly off the molding dock into the murky water.

I sank quickly, trying to grasp the dock above me, seeing nothing but the dark and feeling cold water press me further down as slimy green weeds slid across my skin.
A hand touched my shoulder, slipped off, then caught me underneath the armpit and yanked up hard.

My brother pulled me out of the water and I choked, slimy and wet,
miserably dripping all over the dock.

He squeezed my hand and said, you're okay, let's go before it rains.

But I crossed my arms,
said nothing,
sat down again as I slowly caught my breath.

My brother walked back home without me.
The rain caught up to me and slowly began to patter the dock,
splashed in the river.
It was a light summer rain;
I sat on the dock till nighttime.

Transplants

Jill Capewell

My father dug up my mother's peonies.

To be more precise, he dug up the granddaughters, great-great-great-great -- although I am not totally sure how plant lineage goes -- ones of my mother's mother's peonies. From their first sown spot in my mother's childhood home, they had been uprooted, replanted, and survived somehow.

My mother, though lacking roots like the ones she showed me when holding trays of flowers at the gardening store, had moved herself with them: from Fairfield, CT to Oyster Bay, NY, with minor pauses in between. She must have wanted to see what this great idea of family really entailed.

I don't remember what the peonies looked like in full bloom when they were loved and tended to, before my mother went to school again and got a job and fell in love with things beyond raising children and planting flowers. I was too young and too self-absorbed to wonder or even notice what our front garden really looked like. I knew there were bushes, flowers alive and tumbling out of the garden's slate border. They were there only when I crouched down and smelled them, and watch as my mother took pictures of me there.

Today the front garden is a naked rectangle. Only a few determined and resistant growths of small weeds, those pointy reaching leaves, remain. Only the smallest patch of green, the can-survive-the-apocalypse kind of green, hints at the ideal it once was and what it became.

"When are you going to dig up the peonies for me?" she says on the phone now, ten years later in her apartment ten minutes away. Those peonies are Very Important, she said. They are from Fairfield.

I know, I know, I said. But I don't dig. I wanted to help my mother, to find her something undamaged from the wreckage of divorce. She wanted to be reminded, maybe, of who she was Then. She needed to see proof that it existed.

And though I walked past that slowly tangling mess every day, I could not bring myself to dirty my knees, my hands digging into that malleable heart to search for something I couldn't identify by sight or touch. I could pick out the peonies only for their height, poky and strangely elegant amidst the chaos of grass grazing its stems. Tall like my father and like us, his children, my mother's children.

In ten years, the colors grew less vibrant; the flowers had failed to bloom. Skinny legs of crabgrass and those scraggly, looming, peony stems persisted. My father let the garden go, and I'm sure the neighbors who didn't know gave us names: The Family Unable to Keep Live Things. The Ones Who Fell Apart, they might have written with emphasis next to our telephone number while forgetting to invite us to a New Year's Eve party.

Instead of flowers, stacks of aging newspapers grew among us in the living room. Voids took root as my mother packed away her things, curling and anchoring our shoulders and the spaces near our collarbones, tickling at our tenderness. I could hear my father come home at night when I should have been asleep. I could hear his dragging movements up the staircase as I wondered what place could keep him so late. His heavy frame crept to my room, then my brother's, to see that we were still there, still breathing, under his roof, before falling into his own dreams in the living room armchair, an infomercial quietly buzzing from the television nearby.

But I don't understand what prompted the events of last week - the sudden pulling, the ripping out of earth. Ten years ago and my father decides to do this now.

I was supposed to save the peonies, I said. Mom will be mad.

"It was all weeds." He threw them out, he said.



Absolutely Not Abby Mayer



Mari Rogers

roughly halfway

Jake Goldberg

i.

I've seen the nest alit
with dripping phosphorescence
tumbling against velvet folds

a nest aloft
the soft, sacred message
floats above green crystals and
white lace

I cautioned my steps
penetrating the periphery

high above its rays latticed
silencing my shouting eye
because I stared too long
a shutter-crazed trauma fuse
that robbed me of my portent

my escapee had fled deep
and lodged itself between root and reason

so I brought myself back
back to the nest made of light
where I lay my peace in an obsidian shawl

ii.

easy easily
let it glide down my sleeve
let's watch it fall together
unleashed from the run
it's free and forgotten

let our blanket reverb wet screams
and choked intimations

No One's Fault
the Mantra of the Lost
echo my silence because we're so close
we can almost feel each other
echo your eyes because you thought me up
and so I am you

yours drift off to that faithless half-sleep you keep
embracing refrains are these scattered
lives portioned out you know—
there's another way out of here
could you be the fortune you nearly swallowed?

feathers only stick when there's tar
and you've proved no delusion
fly to me and let your muteness speak
of forgiveness

easy
easily

Carnival Development

Carly Smyth

We went to a carnival that night. It was my idea. You complained that your nightmares would be hijacked with stuffed toys and screaming clowns. I reminded you that there is no stronger feeling of love than sharing the urge to hurl while spinning in enormous tea cups.

That night began with horse manure and sticky cotton candy embedded in the grooves of our sneakers. It ended with your hand drifting out of mine on the Tilt-A-Whirl, the ride you always hated, and the ride I always forced you to go on. It had been eight months since you asked me out at our office Christmas party, smiling down, with a drink in your hand. There I was that winter, standing stupidly under the blinking red and green lights, a loopy smile plastered on my face, feeling just as fuzzy as those stuffed toys you dream about. There was nothing better than a toxic buzz to celebrate the birth of Christ. I was lonely; you were looking for change. It was a different night than this one, full of promise.

The vision was marvelous: two yuppies spending time out of their cubicles, in a dank and deafening, yet delicious, arena of sugar highs, surrounded by teenagers who made us feel much older than we actually were. I knew you hated it but put up with it anyways. I loved it all, the feeling of returning to the crazy colors of my youth, before I was ever required to wear crisp, ironed clothes with my hair pinned up neatly. A time when my mother didn't let me out of the house for fear of an early grandchild. Now she was practically begging for one.

Part of me wished it had been you who had asked me to come to the carnival that night just like it had been you who initiated what we had. No, you preferred art festivals and concerts. Still, I could picture it then—us sitting together at the top of the Ferris wheel, you commenting on the beautiful view, me agreeing, and a small box of possibilities suddenly in my eyesight. You were always too practical for that. You were the type of man who was classy, the man who lowered on one knee, probably after a nice romantic dinner in a ritzy restaurant, not after scarfing down greasy corndogs and tiptoeing around barf. I would have said yes.

As we walked along the pathway of booths that night, I glanced up at your face, and knew you were trying to hold in those begging questions: "Have we had enough? Can we leave now? Is this entire façade over yet?" Any chance of spontaneity, of my adventurous personality, was relinquished, again and again, for the sake of keeping that look of grimace off of your face. Still, I liked to see how far I could push you, how far you would go for me, even in the torment of it all. "Let's ride the ferris wheel," I suggested, tugging your arm and pointing to it in the distance. The stars were beginning to mingle with the twinkling lights embellishing the rides around us. Predictably, I was losing perspective.

You bit your lip and said that you didn't like heights.

"Well, I don't either, but it looks like fun."

"I probably shouldn't after eating those corndogs."

I scowled. "You'll be fine."

You watched me for a few seconds, and then nodded, letting me lead you to the line that wrapped around the massive wheel in the sky, weaving in and out with loud teenagers. A couple next to us began comparing their tattoos. You held back, but I knew you wanted to say how stupid you thought it was, how you wanted to ask that kid, for she was only a kid to you, if she would like an enormous, orange giraffe tattooed to the back of her neck when she was eighty years old. I could not even imagine life at eighty. I preferred recalling eighteen, when I tattooed my back with the name of my boyfriend, something you've never commented on. Something I've never commented on. Like with the teenager, you've held back so many times.

Arm in arm, we waited in that line for what seemed like forever. In this night, our relationship had felt like forever. "Did you ever think we would last this long?" I had the guts to ask, peering at your face for an initial reaction. Of course, you didn't say anything. You looked a little strained. Were you? Not that I can ask you this now, but I still wonder.

"Let's not talk about this," you said.

"Talk about what?"

"Us."

"I'm asking a simple question."

"It's a very complicated one."

"Oh, but you see, it's very simple."

"Okay." That was all he said.

Our arms disconnected, the line moved, and we were on, whisked up into the emptiness of the night. As it turned out, there wasn't a proposal at the top of the Ferris wheel. You felt nauseous from the heights, like you said you would, and had to put your head between your knees. I rubbed your back but then accidentally smacked you in the face when I excitedly pointed into the sky at the blemished moon. We were quite a pair then. Quite a distorted pair, particularly contrasting from how we had been eight months earlier.

"I love you." That's what I told you as I pet your faintly bruised eye. I said it in a reassuring way, as if I had to remind myself and had to remind you and had to remind everyone why we were still doing this. Your arm was around my shoulder when I said it, and you squeezed me so briefly, I might have never felt it. "I loved you when you asked me out that day. Did you know that?"

"Yes, you've told me," you said gruffly. To anybody else, you would have appeared annoyed at that moment, but I knew there was a smile underneath that needed to be cracked.

"I loved you for your style, your maturity. You were everything my mother wants in a man." Looking back, I realize that was a weird thing for me to say, but after eight months you knew I was pretty weird. After eight months, I knew you could be an uptight asshole, and you knew I could be an aggravating bitch, but there was something that kept us going.

"I liked how friendly you were," you said after a few moments of silence as we walked along through the crowds of strangers. "You were funny."

"You were kind," I said.

"You were intriguing."

It was why we were so wrong for each other. We both knew we were grasping at straws, looking for the differences we didn't have in ourselves, looking for the characteristics we lacked.

Do you remember how we passed by one of those cheesy couple photograph booths? And how the man set up his tripod, focused on the two of us, you with your bruised eye, and me with my toothy, goofy smile? My smile that stretched from one side of the world to the other?

We stood with a backdrop of a circus tent, and the photographer had us put on clown wigs. It was a tacky version of those historical shots you can pay for at Renaissance festivals. I thought it would look hilari-

ous, something to mail my mother, to reassure her that I'm getting along fine. You, however, handed over the money and didn't say a word. Didn't even bring up the fact that we were paying twenty bucks to a man with an ancient Polaroid camera, rocking back and forth dangerously on the top of that tripod.

The last moment we had together, the last real moment, ended before we stepped into that photograph booth, which became just another gap between us, another difference in interests, another thing that reminded us that we had nothing in common.

"This is going to take a few moments to develop," said the photographer, handing over a small black square. I nodded and plowed my head into your shoulder, smiling happily into your shirt, and then up at your face, so void of emotion. "C'mon, smile," I said, and you did, reluctantly, only for me. I was a needy child you felt sorry for, the needy child you couldn't bear to break the heart of.

We headed for the Tilt-A-Whirl next, or rather I dragged you, the Polaroid still black as that night we spent together. By the time we had buckled into our seats, it was still black. "What is the matter with this?" I muttered. "Oh! Look! Some color." You glanced for a second, but the Polaroid only revealed two very faint blobs of gray, nothing more.

"Figures," you muttered, barely acknowledging it when I handed it to you to keep. "A great investment *that was.*"

Tucking my arm through yours, I took grip of the ride's safety bar with one palm and slipped my other palm into yours. The Polaroid crumpled between our fingers. Just then, a siren sounded for a second, and we began to move slowly, children's faces around us, your face lacking their anticipating wonder, so tired, so renounced. We never much cared for each other, just the benefits that this relationship had been supposed to bring each of us individually, but never meeting the expectations of our false attraction.

Spinning, spinning, spinning and spilling out everywhere, we flew in circles, my throat choking with laughter and thrilling screams, yours mute as it had grown to become. The last I remember of that night is your hand separating from mine, carelessly tossing the undeveloped photo into the spinning void, while the ride swept us apart, my screaming voice lost in the wind with that undeveloped image of unmet expectations.

Reoccurring Dreams from Childhood

Jennifer Picalila

I.

I beg my mother to let me splash in the gutter during a downpour- to hoist buckets and shovels from summers at the shore high above my pigtails and cause miniature floods to overflow on the sidewalk. As I wipe out a struggling community of ants, my world snaps to night in the middle of the summer afternoon. A coat reeking of cigarette smoke constricts my sight to my sneakers sliding backwards pathetically on the pavement. One jolt upward and my head scrapes against a seat buckle. A few seconds more and this station wagon sputters away from the curb. I peer out the back window to see my home fading in the distance despite my attempts at resistance.

It's feeling my youth vanish with each traveled meter,
flying past the O'Brian's, and now the Peters,
and noticing the bubblegum, once sticky,
slide off my chapped cheeks like slag
that makes being bound and gagged
less of a crime than not
trusting my mother
when she said
"If you go
outside
you'll
catch
cold."

II.

I run up to a cliff, look over the precipice, lose my balance. The air slaps my face and I float like a boulder down to the desert floor.

III.

A boy waits for me underneath the street lamp that illuminates the front yard. I watch him pace back and forth from my bedroom window and notice how his wandering shadow causes my room to brighten and darken; each step is like a lighthouse warning me of his presence. Sitting up in bed, I catch glimpses of a path around the extensive scene I created on the floor: dolls in toy cars race to the co-ed costume party stationed in my closet. In time with his movement, I skillfully crawl over the bumper-to-bumper traffic, scope out a pair of sunglasses, and abandon my room in disguise. Soundless like a convict, my ten tiptoes navigate through the sleeping apartment and the dewy grass. I run toward the light.

I jump into his arms, wrapping my legs around his hips like couples do in the movies.
But he totters backward and the streetlight only spotlights our tumble.
The blood that seeps from my knees onto the cement looks like an oil spill and
he has no idea how to clean it up.

I pinch out a few bits of gravel from my wounds,
brush the dust and shame from my night gown,
and march back into my room,
overturning the toy cars
on my way to throwing the blanket over my head.

Knees

Caitlin Portch

1

Really, she must love me best.
I have few scars,
nothing swollen or black and blue.
Unlike you, covered in evidence
of nicks and cuts from years past.
and a nasty bruise
that never seems to go away.
Your scars are mostly small and clean,
telltale signs
of carelessness with a razor.
There's just no way she cares about you.
And that big one?
Remember that hailstorm?
The glass from the windshield
lodged itself right there, in you.
But I made it out without a scratch.
She protected me,
to preserve my integrity.

2

But she doesn't love you! How could she?
Your scars, though few,
are the ugly, patchy kind, typical
of pavement scrapes
You meant nothing
to her as a child.
But she's made memories with me.
The storm was a bonding
experience for us,
something you'll never understand.
You've never gone through
anything real with her.
Even now, she relies on me
to catch her when she falls.
I don't mind sporting a bruise
when it means I've earned her trust
Besides, you have that big, nasty freckle.
You'll never be beautiful.

Walruses

Colleen Wilson

We used to all sit together, Maggie and Wally and me, but that was before Maggie put Silly Putty in Bobby MacMillan's hair. Now she has to stay up front with the bus driver. Bobby really started the whole thing. He called Wally a stupid stuffed animal. You can bet the grown-ups didn't understand, though. Maggie still got in huge trouble and Bobby still gets to sit wherever he wants and poke people and make fun of my last name. It's not fair.

When I first got on today, I tried to sit with Maggie and Wally, but Maggie said they were having an extra-secret private conversation about running away to Antarctica and meeting Wally's walrus family and having a slumber party and building igloos. I'm not invited because airplane tickets cost too much. So I came back here, where everything's shadowy and the only thing to do is look out the window. I wish I had a walrus, too.

Sometimes looking out the window on the bus is fun, because the road and the cars and the trees shoot by and squish together, so after a while you just see a million different colors mixed together like finger-paint in water. The glass in this window has smeary gray marks all over it, and fingerprints and marker and even a squashed fly. The street is pretty empty and we're going very slow because the bus driver can't find Seamus Jones' house again. All I can see outside is a giant white field with nothing on it but snow.

I look out for a long time. Then, all of a sudden, I see a funny dark lump off far away, like a big rock with two giant icicles hanging off. Before I can rub my eyes, another one slides out, and then another. Now the field is full of them, all flopping toward the street, like melted Rocky Road ice cream, except without the peanuts. And I know exactly what the funny lumps are-- walruses!

Every walrus looks like he (or she) is in a hurry. Their flippers kick up tons of snow and their giant teeth sparkle in the sun. In the front, there is one bigger than all the others. His name is Anthony, because that is the coolest name in the world. He has thick, soft skin, not too wrinkly, and black eyes even shinier than Wally's. I push my hands against the glass, no matter how dirty and gross it is. I wish I could climb out! All I can do is look, and that makes my eyes get all teary. Then Bobby MacMillan calls me a crybaby, so they start to leak even more.

But Anthony raises his squishy flipper and says "Hi, there Mary Elise! My name is Anthony."

I smile really hard and say "I know."

He goes "We walruses are so glad to see you. And we think Finkelstein is the best last name ever!"

All the walruses wave and, and I wave back, with the sun shining and laughing and drying my eyes up. I wish I could go out there and play with them. We could tell stories and build snowmen. Anthony would growl at Bobby and tell him to never, ever call me Mary Elise Frankenstein again. And then I'd ask Maggie and Wally to come with us to--

I guess we hit a bump or something, because everything goes flying everywhere. My backpack spills all over the floor. I pick my stuff up as fast as I can, but when I look back up, I only see houses. The field is gone. So are the walruses.

I bite my lip and kick the seat in front of me and cry again. Why do walruses always disappear like that? My nose starts to run. I wipe it and look back out. At least they liked my last name.



Tracks at Olympia Andrew Sorrento



Fancy Pants Flea Market Dolls Sarah Parker

Conversation at 3:00 AM

Bridget Adams

"I have red sheets," he said.
She gave him every excuse but
a person like him,
he knows when a girl is becoming the places where carrions are.
Something desolate,
an empty highway, or
a battlefield the day after the war,
before the bodies are taken away.
"I have red sheets,
so it doesn't matter."
It felt final,
in his voice like a hammer
and lips like two fat dirty fingers
pressed together and
always moving.
There were no words left in her throat.
Inevitability pressed down,
a hand on the small of her back,
the darkness both soft and unyielding,
a pillow, smothering.
Her body turned off
like a faucet
with its handle back in place,
and when it was over she felt just like that-
as if there was a rush of
feeling somewhere,
just now impossible to reach.



Professional Footsyng Sam Maurer

Fortune Cookie

“Believe it: oil and water don’t mix”

Sheena McKinney

Believe it girl, believe it
oil and water don’t mix.

But which one of us is
oil and which is water?
Is he oil slippery slipping
right out of your grasp?

No, I am oil
flammable to the nearest spark.
And that makes him water
as he is always about to drown.

But when we are immersed together
I burn fierce on his
placid, unruffled surface.
When we are apart
he is torrential
and my spark goes out.

Believe it girl, believe
oil and water don’t mix.

Walter Murphy

I stepped into the hallway
and all the doors were closed.
The ones between staircases,
all the fire alarm doors
and outside,
when I finally pushed my way through,
sounds like an auditorium,
mumbling heel-dragging whispers.

The blizzard’s hush
when the wind freezes
lifts a finger softly to its lips.
Hearing even the ringing of the Milky Way obey,
I subside and listen
my words behind my teeth
for only the sound describes itself.

Our world of magnets and miracles
repels supposed laws and theories
with its own most potent realities.

Ten million tons of sound,
the scream of a crowd
instantly when the song ends
tears out of the center of the earth
reminds me that we used to battle our Gods.

this clandestine fortnight assemblage sinks into the dust
Jake Goldberg

 this clandestine fortnight assemblage sinks
into the dust backwards

 overheard meanwhile's softly

 illuminated activity

 unable inabilities trenching silkscreened

 lullabies emanating

 sandpaper doll houses in which eyes

are cast down and glows

 peek out from behind temperate

 ovals of mesh

 carpeting interwoven dreaming and

 oceanic depths gain the

momentum of kingdoms spraying

 radio-waves into thatching

 and bumping slowing then stumbling into

 a gaze so sublime even mystics

 mimic their violently incoherent adolescent

 flashbacks to cool laudanum-palaces

drenched in absinth foresight wilted in

 quiescence and cinematic beauty that only

 begins once the light resurfaces

 from beneath its fluid embrace

Response to *Soliloquy 1*, Samuel Taylor-Wood

Erin Kuntz

This conversation is getting dark.

I never said I was an artist...

Have you ever tried to kill yourself?

Death of Chatterton, 1854, depicts a poet in a similarly languid position...

I've thought about it.

illustrating the themes of suicide and blighted artistic aspiration...

What are you afraid of?

That's what scares me about art.

If it's not perfect it will disappear

What does it matter anyway?

the high drama has turned to represent the angst of everyday life....

You're no better than they are.

You have to watch very carefully, and
even then, you can never tell.

I'm living in it.

could be illustrations of the unidentified man's dreams...

Sizzling Time

Patrick Morgan

Cast me away
to the sullied sphere,
of titmice and chanticleers,
rid me,
rank me,
festoon my body
with a soul
that clasps its hands
and sings
for every tatter
in its mortal dress.
I sing of love
hidden in sunken hearts,
praising the planter.
Time sizzles away
on jet-puffed fumes,
days trundle into one,
as life continues
without room.
How do you fathom
time and travel?
How can we grasp
a moment under glass?
I travel the sky,
unknowing myself,
tearing away the familiar.
I am the tragedy never told,
the tale of a man
who chokes in the dust,
who grasps for an illusion,
scattering destinies in the sky.

Untitled

Laura Morris

They carried it in their teeth
after they were married. It was
simple, really.
It glazed his bicuspid, caked so thick
he could barely get his tongue
around it. Eventually it just grew
fat and forgotten
as most unused muscles do.
It affected her more. It glossed her molars
and wedged itself so deep
between the gums that eventually
the ridges of her teeth and palate
were lost. Food slid around
easily without being caught.
That is, until her esophagus became
involved. She choked.
It didn't stop at her mouth, either.
It took over her entire jaw, which ached
with heaviness. She thought
she was the only one to notice the change
until he came home with a gun and
suggested she start acting like a normal
wife. It was time to leave.
It's funny because,
the courtship went well enough.

Erin Kuntz

You claim to love grandfather clocks-
the honey-oak, cherry-dark, maple-rich gleam of their coats,
the smoothness of their polished-off skin,
the old-time ring of their song...
You run your hands along the deep lines of their carvings,
follow the curves with your fingertips,
watch the pendulum as it swings like the steady breath of a quiet lover.

But you want to know how it works.
You want to take out its parts and examine them one by one,
the gears, the springs, the gadgets,
all the inner workings of its secrets,
everything that makes time go on.
And in the process you break wood,
shatter its face,
interrupt its steady, perfect rhythm.

Go ahead. Buy a digital clock for your bedside,
And set the alarm for 6 am.



Bay Aileen Connorton

BB Gun

Sarah Laudico

"Come see what I did" her cousin breathes, his words dank and dauntless in her ear. They tear down the wooded strip that fractions the cornfield behind her house into two balanced pieces, a rudimentary Castor and Pollux. Her bare feet leech, push off the ground pregnant with rain—she is invincible, and she barrels past her cousin with ease even though his legs are twice hers in length. Soon they stumble upon an abandoned fox hole, fashioned into a fort with tarnished oak doors and tattered blue tarp, crude against the fog. Here, her brothers used to call themselves men, and she would swirl patterns into the dirt floor with a pine needled broom until they returned, scooping onion-berry soup into coffee tin bowls as she listened to their escapades.

Now, cicadas beg for her to turn back, the sound seeming to navigate from somewhere deep within their discarded skins. Severed twigs lay in front of her feet, forming a jagged altar full of rust colored leaves. Her cousin folds to the ground, eyes huge and hungry, and dissects the air from east to west with his long browned finger. "Look", he rasps. Her eyes begin to search, frantic for comprehension, but her cousin is restless and begins to stroke the rigid tuft of fur exposed from amongst the fall centerpiece. Later that night, she dreams of mice, hundreds of them, playing at her feet. Each one flaunts an identical tiny bullet hole behind its ear, filled with trembling maggots.

Walter Murphy

Like marionettes
of malcontents
with adjectives, nouns,
and the present tense,
their ties flowing from fingertips
through pen to page
filter less into the fray of the world,
true poetry;
making lined paper ashamed of its own symmetry:
will spring until it snaps its strings.
to voice true voiceless things
in a whisper that shouts and rings
off the walls of humanity, echoing:
"Oh keywork,
where is my key?"

The war of uncreation is merciless,
but the definition of the undefined remains that way
and so words fight on violently.

Tempest

Hannah Schmidt

And shall I breathe?
But to hear the sound of remembered music and softly smashing far-off rain
Drifting to the ground
Cold and clear
Like the shattered window pane
Into an obsidian abyss of pavement
Leaving behind a gaping frame
Yearning to be filled with something other than hazy visions of the other side of the world.
Breathe.
The rain has stopped. The glass is merely
Wispy splinters
And the music is slowing to
a
barely
rhythmic
waltz.



Ichabod Crane Andrew Sorrento

Beautiful Buzz

Patrick Morgan

For Al "Buzzo" Bruno

Buzzo is a polka-dot-britches trumpeter,

a peejays rambler,

He's Karl Marx in the future,

see him scream into

the mic,

mind lost in the sixties,

and never found again.

He's the grandpa

nobody ever had,

and he's singing your song:

Beauty is a startling

of the world's wideness,

it is the harp

played by a hobo,

the deranged look

in your dog's eye,

it creeps

in the cracks

of your wrinkled face

and hides

in the darkness

under

your eyelids,

it is here

and there,

and it is the crippled mute

who,

shaking his head at the sunset,

lets out the cry of "Here it is."

Siege

Sheena McKinney

construct walls

if you have to

i will scale them

my grappling hook

will bite the stone

gouge out a moat

if it makes you

feel better

i will submerge myself

in its stagnant water

let the portcullis

crash down between us

my battering rams

blunt force

will wrench the bars apart

because in the end

i am already

in your castle

whether or not

it falls to me

To Walt Whitman

Danielle Landini

The first Walt Whitman that I ever knew
Was on Route 110 – it was a mall.
“Leaves of Grass” decorated the outside walls:
I celebrate myself, and sing Saks Fifth Avenue.
The Christmastime Santa had a beard like you,
Mr. Whitman, and the multitudes you contain recall
Your contradictory self. But you weren’t there at all.
The Great American Poet was who?
I mean no disrespect, Mr. Whitman,
But annually your Astroturf was forced in my hands
And I hated it all, both form and content.
So I find a manic glee, now and again,
A thrill as your mocking monument stands,
(In my mind) a great improvement.



Life is Beautiful Graffiti Sarah Parker

Untitled

Kelly Hendricken

I.

I suppose I should have enjoyed it
when he called me baby, put his hand
on my thigh but you were all I could
think about. You drove me home,
clutched my hand the whole time
as if it was impossible to think of even
letting me go. I could feel the reluctance
jam against my fingers.

I suppose I should have enjoyed it
when he struggled to get my clothes off, all the
shit
fuck
damn
and the metal bed frame smacking the wall,
our skin slamming together in a classic fight
for dominance but you were all I could think
about. This was not slow, coincidental or
innocent and I'm afraid that I'm much more
determined to distance myself than you first
imagined.

II.

We can't even look at each other now.
I stare down at the concrete or take out my phone,
my preoccupation almost convincing but not quite.
I remember when you restored my faith in a
decaying and meaningless institution, revived
childish dreams of suburban houses and minivans.

But I went back to him and continued the fight
against monogamy, the war against your indecision
even though I'm sure you never recognized
all the bombs dropped, all the small battles riddled
with passive aggressive sparring.

I lined that dream up with its face to the wall
and shot it down like a traitor when
stumbling out of his room became a common
occurrence. The shame clawed at the back of
my brain but it's too late to stop now, because
I'm not the marrying kind.

One Sleeper At a Time

Ethan Waddell

To jump down into the trenches and pace
the sleepers into the winding unknown
like a train bound past a man on the sidewalk
in uniform with a pamphlet
but snuff him out and instead of being
handed a ticket to the war on terror, get literature from
the Church of the Seventh Day Advents saying the apocalypse
is coming in a tidal wave or a plague
of insects that will ravage us in our sleep
Because god has left and the holy spirit sells
cocaine by the kilo and when he
maches through the South American rain forest
with a battlefield mouthful of salt insects,
a bodega weeps trash mounds from where sailors eat stolen goods
and smell backwards of a fragile winter kept out by sticky parkas, and
frost breath unrolling the door
to a factory emptied out for red cheeks to
burst its dusty capillaries across decades while
a zombie robotrips it down the isle
made fun of by two Chinese children peek a boeing
it into a riverpass in Shanghai where
the thick fog leaves fluorescent flashes neon
above steel metal valleys that begin to blossom over the loud speakers
as colors drone by infinitely equivalent,
but the sea rises with the underbelly
and falls with Wall Street over old money and a wrinkly
history owl eyed in the headlights
shining through the dense humidity of a
June cemetery heat on a Midwest country road
balance beaming over relatives and swaying,
wavering as his body drops to fuzzy big band eighth notes
swinging away one sleeper at a time.

Fingernails

Bridget Adams

I was sitting on my parent's bed, when I first decided to start biting my nails. The blue paint peeled off of the walls where each met the ceiling. It was a pretty blue though, the color of the sky I could see through the window. Dust-covered pressed sunflowers hung on the wall above the bed, the dull yellow, brown, and green of the flowers contrasting nicely.

The bed was monstrous, to my six year old body. It's hard to remember the time when I could curl up in the middle of it and see a wide expanse of comforter at all sides, when my legs and arms were too short to stretch across it. My body has looked more or less the same since I was twelve – taken seriously, treated like an adult.

My mother had made the comforter I was lying on, idly staring up through the skylight at the lazy progression of the clouds. It was soft, with a few tiny holes. It smelled like the outdoors, clean and fresh. It was spring, and my mother would dry all of our clothes and blankets outside, on a rack that spun around in our yard. My brother and I used to play on it, hanging from the plastic covered wires, clomping back into the house with muddy feet and ruddy faces. We don't have the spinning drying rack anymore, and someone else has made my parent's comforter.

Every day, when my dad came home from school, I would run upstairs and try my hardest to monopolize the time he had until he went to work. Getting time with my dad felt like a holiday to me. He went to law school all day, and loaded boxes at UPS all night. I would tell him about my day, jumping on the bed and yelling nonsense at him about kids he knew only vaguely. He always asked questions.

Weekends were even better, because he was always around. Then he would take my brother and younger sister and I on walks around the neighborhood, watch us ride bikes and applaud when I did amazing things, like race my brother up and down the street. When he sat on the couch watching sports, he would pick me up with one hand like I weighed as much as a football. He studied a lot, and at night played Doom, a computer game that at the time I thought was scarily realistic, a world with monsters that looked real enough to actually reside under my bed. My brother downloaded the game a few years ago, and we laughed at the how ridiculous it looks now.

It was a Sunday, the day I decided I would bite my nails. My dad was sitting against the wall behind his bed, reading some weighty looking text for school the next day. I was asking him occasional questions that he wouldn't really answer.

I watched him bite his nail.

"Daddy, what are you doing?"

"Hm?" He didn't really look up.

"Are you biting your nails?"

"Mm," he said. He didn't take his eyes off of what he reading.

I looked at his hand. It was ugly, a hand that had spent most of its existence clutching a football, a cigarette, carrying heavy objects. It was tan and wrinkled, hairy-knuckled, rough, and his nails were bitten down to tiny, gross stubs that were dug into his skin rather than extending out.

It's hard to remember lots of things from when I was six, and it is extremely difficult to remember how I overlooked all of my father's flaws, how I could possibly feel the need to run upstairs to his room and tell him everything about my life, and ask him questions and trust that what he said would be the correct answer. This was before those moments of awakening, those arduous growing up times, when I realized that there were things about my father that I loathed, unchangeable things, and that even though I really loved him, he wasn't the perfect human being I thought he was, that not everything he did was wonderful and miraculous.

I do remember this, though. On a bright Sunday afternoon, sitting on my parent's bed, in their room the way it looked before my dad became a lawyer and we added a new addition and two more children, before my mother used the indoor dryer throughout the whole year and bought our quilts, I saw that my dad bit his nails, and I decided that I would too.



Baby Ducky Bath Time Sarah Parker

Securitybot Discovers the Kachina Spirit

Ethan Waddell

Paranoia in my mind

creation of devices of home security
unfathomable to most simple minded exurbanites.

My home sitting in solitude, separated by acres
of blank farmland on surrounding sides.
I bought it with invested years of grey walled meditation
and thirty six hour shifts at residency.

The house is fortified with:

GHz Weatherproof Long Range Video Links around the pool house and the garage as well as the side, front doors,
and back doors. 1000 Ft. Range - Sequence Viewing 4 Color CMOS Cameras at the top of the living room, lighted
by a 36 by 36 foot skylight, slanting up to the roof of the connecting kitchen, where another camera is pointed
towards the adjacent hallway.

Still, the cameras are unable to record
any evidence for unlatching doors
blown open to an Innisian wind
welcoming guileful rabbits to
dig tunnels in furniture and
dance on the hardwood floor
in the electricity of masticated cables.

Inspired by the robot from Rocky IV,
(a symbol of our technological superiority to the Soviets during the cold war)
as well as this commercial:

75 year old Bernice and 94 year old Joy perch on the rim of an enormous desert canyon.

A voice rumbles down the tanned dips of the canyon, into their hearing aids:

"Which power wheel chair got you to the Grand Canyon and back?"

With their backs to a slouch in the immense gorge,

The two ladies cup their hands to their mouths in unison and shout a rickety

response:

"Hoveround!"

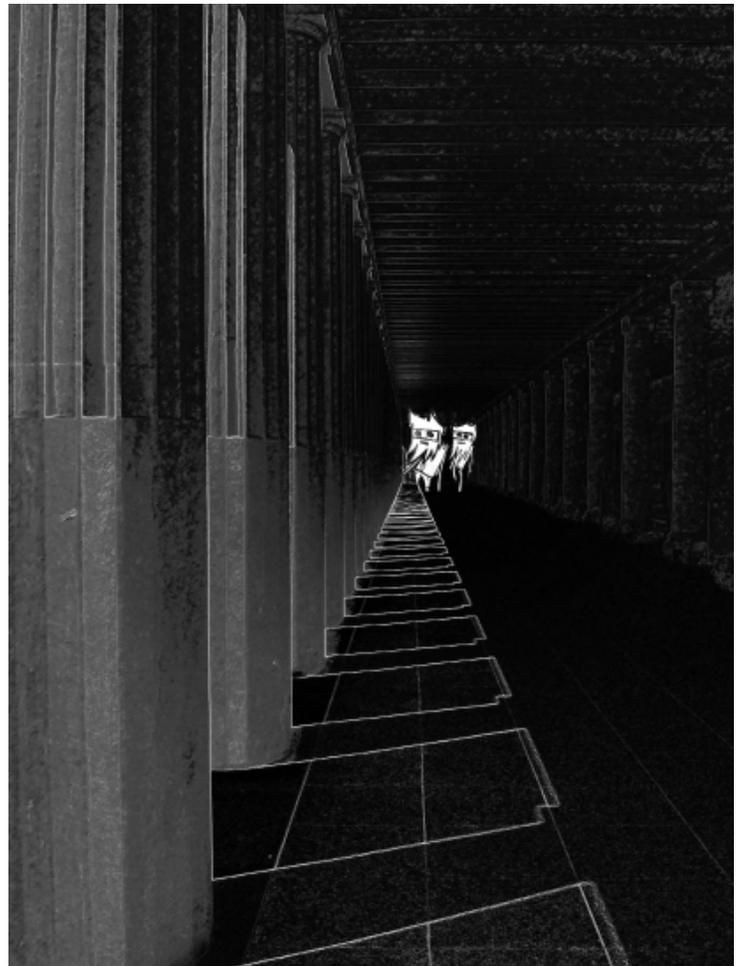
As one rabbit leaps from dinner table to kitchen counter,
I imagine an upgrade to home security:
The seats which Bernice and Joy kept warm are removed
in favor of a Canon XL H1A video camera
The joy stick control has been removed
and wired to a long range wireless remote
controlling the camera's neck.

To fully test the device, the aptly named Securitybot to the Grand Canyon.

It records the following images on August 18th, 2008:

Faces, families smiling, couples hand in hand,
taking pictures in front of a valley expanse
by clouds, ridges and rims peak slightly up
Some pleasantly surprised faces smile into the lens, I rotate my neck
Up and down, discovering its full range of motion, catching sight
Of a woman: she sways back and forth with eyes closed.
Upon seeing me, the woman takes a deep breath
and steps to the guardrail. In fear of provoking the wrong human
impulse, I remains still. However when I roll forward
to the edge in order to focus the image with
the canyon's layers in the background the woman kicks off
the forty two inch guard rail. She soars with arms outstretched
for a moment suspended above the cloudy valley,
as I rotate my neck downward, she disappears
Obscured, she dwindles smaller and smaller, swallowed by the canyon.

After the turbulence of televisions and newspapers regurgitated morbidity,
The footage sprawling across the internet
Of the woman named Ataensic, falling from the sky.
Securitybot is implemented back into the home
roaming silent hallways and voiceless echoed rooms
For since the woman fell from the sky,
the Innisian wind has left hinges latched
for rabbits to tread into the sea.



Hallway Andrew Sorrento

Bananas Are a Calming Fruit

Laura Morris

We have euphemisms for so many things, these days. The pew beneath you is hard and unyielding. It is a light oak carved by calm hands.

I'm almost led to believe you were damaged by my death, but no one is as sorry as I am that my blood is creeping to unnamed places.

Your sweaty hands shift underneath your thighs and you remember something your mother once told you: bananas are a calming fruit.

Red Shirt
Rebecca Spitz

villainous red shirt
a treacherous rinse cycle
wardrobe is now pink

Untitled

Kelly Hendricken

I. Roots

The rings around my eyes
make me too old to tolerate this century-long
sleep. I won't tolerate your lies deep enough to
bury my roots and keep me attached to the ground
you possess.

I found a man with an ax willing to take me out
by the ankles and put the misery down, an animal
ready to be put to sleep. This end is faster than
decaying in the circle of your arms because
even if I'm young I'm still small and withered.

II. Violence

I am a lens that would rather forget all it's seen.
Cover me with the cap so I can fade to black and
wake up walking into walls for the rest of my life.

I don't want to see all the smoke across the water,
the implosion of buildings, the mirthless replay of
the media implanting the violence in my brain,
an egg in the wall of a woman's uterus.

I want to close my lens forever
focus on the breakdown of the body
that comes with age and wisdom
rather than the premature deaths of my peers.

The Shape of Handprints

Kelly Hendricken

Some nights I dream I'm standing shivering
naked in a room full of crusty old men and
all the places where I've ever been touched
are red welts in the shape of handprints.

They call me a witch and a whore
drag me out of the town hall by my hair
tie me to a wooden bucket of rocks and
throw me into a river by the edge of town.

I always wake up before the water fills my lungs
but sometimes I have to go into the bathroom
to check that there aren't any red welts in
the shape of handprints.



Roberson at Christmas Jennifer Picalila

this can be all it is

Jake Goldberg

In dusty kitchens
where Portuguese women talk of the yearly
growth of the slum quarter
and metric reproduction,

in unclean thoughts
inside heads outside snowy cobble
streets you stand, know the world slowly
bounce off olive lampposts
while the Russian wind creeps.

I had a dream I was writing this down,
a dimmed bedcry for some left-alone
namesake, though a secret plucked from earth
with coronal care you still let it go.

Quick tilting interwoven clarities
let him view savory tailspins
cultivated in magnetic sympathy,
cast and perceive, judge
a pure randomness, you had a dream you
were taking this down and with
harbored possession you still let him go.

Relate this exactly, forgo novelty with begrudged
dichotomy, bidding one helpless individual
the opportunity to choose another way.

But see, I love my bubbling Earth as it circles
and swells around me
ripples left in hair, quivering limbs
In The Edge of You Motel, Room 106.

Draped in creases, forever still in this
human integration,
I know how to describe these silent worlds.

Dreamstate

Jeremy Wind

Spasmodic cyclic sounds emit,
splatter as they hit flat tables and flat
faces, all the same and slack-jawed.

With our withered wonder can anyone ask
the "why or wherefor" by which we
walk, talk, and spit upon each other?

If walk we must, and away implied with it,
what then shall we first learn with
flat faces waiting, uneager.

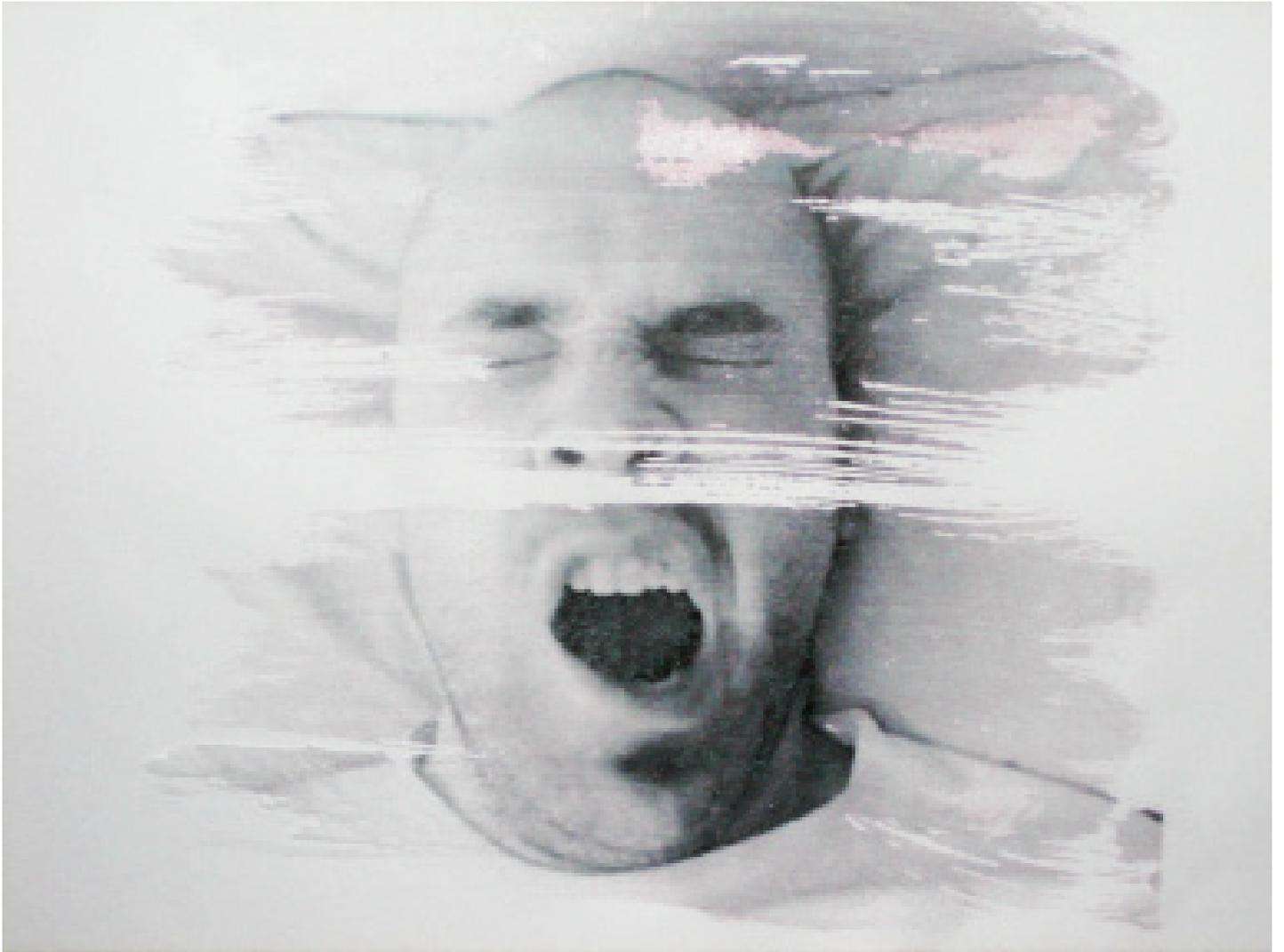
Are we full of this agape and of dreams or
empty and unyearning, unable... no-
unwilling to ask ourselves the final question
the "what"

 of our
unmotivated course to live
 and fall back down,
so what have you.

Perhaps in awe and all our understanding is this:
in an end there is nothing

only our nihilistic belief in

but all things, as the ages of seasons passing,
will leave us unbidden
and so we emit these spasms
helpless.



The Moment Between Sleep and Awake Briana Zimmerman

Projection

Bridget Adams

Smoke twists from the slit in your lips
to the sky
like a prayer.

People are yelling somewhere behind us
over the thrum of an aggressive bass -
the kind of music that is built out of
skin on skin and darkness
obscuring who you really are.

We've just left the house,
slick with sweat and beer,
where we muscled through bodies
and made awkward introductions
to friends
who won't remember in the morning.

The sounds of our footsteps hide in the snow,
and when I look up at the sky,
the glittering flakes look like stars
hurtling to mesh with our bodies and finally
make us into gods.

Being with you is an electrocution of contentment -
the paths of my nerves lit up with the shock of feeling whole,
until I'm certain you can see me glowing.

There will be time
to fuck and fight and fumble
through conversations that neither of us want to have,
to let liquor slur our words and watch our love
alchemize backwards,
turning gold into a dirt so persistent that it never moves
from the creases in our palms.

We'll spend our whole lives washing our hands.

We'll invent new cruelties -

We'll boil our hate and drink it, scalding,
let words,

angry in their hunger,
rush from our throats,
popping the blisters
in a clamor to get out.

We will survive on venom.

It will pump through our bodies.

It will eat everything superfluous -
until it is only knots of muscle,

the only part needed to survive,
that smack
against our ribcages.
One summer day
a livid sun will mark its space in the sky
and we'll attempt to walk by each other
without saying anything.

Yes.
There will be time for all of that.
But right now,
though you're surgically focused on smoking your cigarette
and I on the sky above us,
your hand absently slides into mine
like our bodies are opposing magnets
and touching each other is as inevitable as breathing.



Target Boy Abby Mayer

Metronome

Margaret Saxon

- I We were adorable girls playing dress-ups
 under the leaf -cover of a huge rose bush. Pink petals
 dropped onto our faces as we lay down in the sun,
 exhausted from adjusting our bosoms so many times.
 On summer nights, our parents would sit on one front porch and talk
 while all the neighborhood children played hide and seek.
 Racing past shrouded grey shapes, we ran, frantic,
 to the old barn door to shout "home free!"
 On weekends we stayed out extra late and caught
 lightning bugs in small jelly jars that became glowing lanterns.
 Early on Saturday mornings, my dad would be outside mowing the lawn,
 and the fragrance of grass and gasoline mixed with sound to create sweet assurance.
- II His nickname for me was "'Tilly."
 Sitting on the edge of a cardboard-box—sawdust up to my ankle-socks,
 I watched, as my dad built. The table saw screamed, but I knew
 he controlled the forces of nature and I was not afraid . He would banter while he worked.
 Things like "we'll just put this heeeeerrr" and "That's how you do it."
 His light blue eyes were all- kindness for his daughter.
 We went to the state fair and rode the double- ferris -wheel together.
 My knees trembled and then my whole body ,
 but he wrapped his arm around me—the one
 with the Semper -Fi tattoo ,and up we swept over the fierce crowds, the din of barkers.
 He always chased fear away.
 One noontime he came home too early from work, shut the bathroom door.
 The ambulance took him away for a whole week. Everybody whispered all the time.
 I wasn't allowed to run to him anymore when he came home.
 Loneliness screamed like a table-saw around me.

III A Warrior's Departure

A place, here, that presses sky upward
has begun to edge out the old beings. Those who
live on endless nets of time, dreaming back
to their own silver –mounted spring.
A long time it takes to complete one cycle.
And when warriors die they are expelled by the living.
This, to evade the center weakness in our psyche.

Try to keep it intact.

Grief wrenches free in awkward pieces,
glacial ice breaking off from the body of memory
on an endless frozen field.
One exposed bright moment, one lightning flash, one man.
Then separating quiet, unsubstantially cast,
without myth to stem the terrible pain, but only a few brief snapshots.
An entire life rises, peeks, falls.
And he is gone.

For Tony

Philip Mogavero

There's a photograph inside the back of my skull. I suppose some people must have entire albums back there, but I have just a single, unforgotten moment. I can see it clearest with the sun filtering red and warm through my closed eyelids. God put it there one autumn when I was twelve.

My great, great aunt had offered me an afternoon lunch in return for raking and bagging the leaves in her yard. My father dropped me off, didn't bother pulling in. I got out of the truck and he was gone. There was no longer any lawful relation anyway. I walked up the drive towards the front door. The wind moved the clouds across the sky like ice floes that day. I had a wood-handled rake and black garbage bags, but no gloves. I wanted blisters.

Allowing my eyes to adjust to the dim interior light took time, which I used to enjoy the stimulation of other senses. The smell of Italian cooking swelled invisibly from the kitchen in tendrils that curled through my nostrils and embraced the back of my tongue. My aunt's cheek brushed cold on my lips when I greeted her. From one side of the den came the creak of fingers on nylon guitar strings. Glassy, trembling notes wept from a pair of stereo speakers, and before them on the end of a sofa sat my great, great uncle.

My aunt turned to her husband of almost seventy years and shouted that I was here to rake the leaves. She shouted because my uncle's hearing was incredibly poor. She had to repeat herself. My uncle looked at me as he would have looked at an article of furniture. His eyes were blue-white like morning frost.

I pointed to the speakers. "Tárrega", I said. It was the name of the composer. He had been dead for almost a century.

My uncle's expression didn't change. He hadn't heard me.

"Tárrega", I shouted like my aunt, pointing again. I didn't want to be furniture.

There followed an uncomfortable silence which the music served only to amplify. The nylon groaned. Then my uncle made an almost inaudible sound in his sunken chest which could have meant anything in the world, which he seemed to have made for no one in particular. If there had been any recognition beginning to form in his brain, I thought, it was gone the moment his blue-white eyes turned back to the speakers. I followed my aunt through the kitchen to the back door. There was a window in the door that let the afternoon sunlight in, subdued and dusty. A sharp angle of it fell upon a painting there on the landing. It was of a woman walking through a doorway onto a tree-lined cobblestone street. The woman was very pale and had a round face with dark lips. I imagined that she was my aunt as a young girl. I wanted very much to be in the painting, to walk in the sun and shadows of that street. With the rake and the trash bags I went out the door.

Raking leaves is, like many things in life, repetitive and time-consuming. I had thankfully discovered the value of such tasks early on, which was the opportunity they lent for long, uninterrupted thinking. One very small, superficial part of the brain took charge of the work, while the rest was free to wander as it pleased. To me, back then, that was the greatest exercise of my free will.

That day I entertained the fantasy that every leaf was a moment in my aunt and uncle's lives, and I was collecting them all together to sort through during some quiet afternoon, one by one. I tried to fathom seventy years of marriage by telling myself that the leaves clinging to the rake's teeth were my twelve years, while the entire yard was the sum of their two lifetimes lived as one. I felt humble and foolish and small. I thought of my uncle's face when I had shouted at him. I paused and pulled a single leaf from the teeth of the rake and tore it in half. The wind had begun to remove the leaves from inside the trash bag, depositing them once again over the grass. I still had the two halves of the leaf in my hands, which I squeezed and ground into dust.

The back door opened and I turned. My uncle walked through the doorway and out into the yard. His face was very pale and covered with sun and shadows. He had on a blue wool sweater and brown slippers, which he kept his eyes on as he shuffled towards me. I stood there watching him with the rake lying on the grass and the bag blown open, unable to move or speak. The ground-up remnants dropped from my fingers and disappeared in the wind.

He stopped at the bag, stooped over and closed his fingers on the sides. His knuckles were big and white as he pulled it up to his chest. His eyes never left the leaves inside; never rose to meet mine. He never spoke. The only movement he made was to shake the sides with his big-knuckled hands, causing the collected leaves to shuffle about, packing them more securely.

He had to do this twice before I realized that he was helping. Foolishly, humbly, I stooped down and took up an armful of the wet leaves, dumped them in the bag which my uncle held open. He shook the bag. I raked more leaves together, formed the piles near him. I placed them in one by one. He shook the bag. We filled three bags together. After the third, he put the bag down and shuffled towards the door again, entered the house, disappeared.

I stood looking at the door and realized that the wooden rake handle was pinching my right palm. I opened my fingers and saw a small, red blister beginning to form. I looked at the door again and smiled. The smile never left my face that day.

The next time I saw my uncle was in the hospital.

It was later that autumn. Most of the leaves had fallen to the ground, had left the trees bare and shivering. I entered the hospital room with my mother and sister. My sister was five and didn't understand. I envied her for that. I walked with her hand in mine.

My aunt was there, sitting in a chair far from the bed where my uncle lay. Next to the bed were two stereo speakers on a table. Very softly, the music of the composer whose fingers had ceased to move over one hundred years ago reached my uncle's ears. He looked every bit as sick as my mother had said he was three days before. I let go of my sister's hand and approached my uncle.

His eyes were blue-white like morning frost. They were wide and staring into mine. As I took a step closer I reached out with my hand that still ached from the wooden rake handle. My uncle's large knuckles were white as he clutched the blanket to his chest. His bottom lip was quivering, and from deep within his sunken chest came a sound which I easily identified but couldn't believe. He was whimpering.

My uncle was afraid. My uncle was afraid of *me*.

His blue-white eyes were wreathed in flame as he began to cry. He had pulled the sheet up to his chin, enveloping himself. His hands shook. My aunt was crying, sobbing. My sister began to cry because she didn't understand. I felt my mother's hand on my arm, gently but firmly pulling me away. I left the room without looking back at anybody.

I knew that was the last time I'd ever see my great, great uncle alive.

I went out of the hospital, walked through the parking lot to a stand of trees. I stopped in the middle of them. The wind pulled the tears from my eyes. My hands shook. I felt as if I were standing behind myself, watching apart as I looked up at the sky.

It was blue-white like morning frost that day. The leaves had not yet completely fallen from the trees around me, wreathing the sky in trembling, whispering flame. It was cold and infinite, stretching within and away from me without end. The leaves on the ground stirred and I knew I was mortal. I saw my limit out there in that awful blue abyss. That's when God took his snapshot. Slowly, horribly, He made that image become a part of me. To me, back then, that was the greatest denial of my free will. Still is.

Walter Murphy

Lately

I've gotten very good at not faltering when I'm startled
or even showing that I'm surprised,
but I'm thinking it's a bad sign
that I'm on autopilot all the time.

Just listen louder,
and with all your might,
while we throw our shoes across this country
and hearing nothing will,
at the wailing wall of the pacific,
heave them off.

The bluffs aching to jump over themselves
and finally swim in the cool waves they've been reaching for forever.

If I had my way,
I would tear this whole building down.



Olympic Entrance Andrew Sorrento

on being the daughter of an Irish Immigrant

Kelly Hendricken

Paper trees catch fire, jumping from limb to limb.
He would be ashamed if he knew. What he knew
was addiction, how to avoid it. Platter full of winter
snow but he made damn sure to close off his nose.

No, his vice was ordinary dark wood bars
scuffed and pitted, last call never really
ending anything at all since his days and nights
bled into each other,
the Independent in the rain over his head
spilling the ink all over his hands.

But a child made him responsible,
a little girl with a mean red grin that
he barely ever saw working three jobs
and the one still at the bar.

Every Sunday morning they ate toasted egg bagels
with butter and enjoyed getting to know each other
all over again because it was the Lord's day. When
she was older, she sometimes saw his twenty-something
self peek through those hazel eyes with the crows feet
at the corners that pulled back into his ashen hair.

"You're never gonna go to college and
make something of yourself. You're a
fucking failure, eating up my money and
wasting my time." Sometimes she cried
in her bed at night, muffling her face in her pillow,
wondering if he was right.

You are flushed cheeks
Meghan Pipe

The babydoll tee that shrank in the dryer
Cellulite on pale thighs
Stage mothers
Prepubescent beauty queens
You are lying about your age
Named after a gemstone
Teenage angst
Dancing in groups
You are band night at the Y
Writing a word in lowercase and capitals
Using Myspace
Goatees
You are failing to grow a beard
A half-buttoned shirt
You are hair gel and highlights
Hoop earrings like bangle bracelets
Forced laughter
You are trying too hard
A declined credit card
You are paying with nickels
Pretending you're drunk
Beer goggles
You are talking too loudly
Giving your twins rhyming names

You are Willy Loman
A résumé in Comic Sans
Spilled coffee
Avoiding eye contact
You don't get the hint
Singing off-key
Empty seats
You are a one-hit wonder
Made-for-TV
Watching sex scenes with your family
Unibrows
You are the same lame joke
Kissing relatives
Bigoted grandparents
Political correctness
You are canned goods
Margarine
Stubble
Using a public restroom
Farting in class
You are forgetting to brush your teeth
Bed-wetting
Alzheimer's
And pretending not to watch



Mari Rogers