

Towers

2005, Number 85



Towers

2005

Number 85

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THE EDITORS WISH TO CONGRATULATE THE AUTHORS OF THE EDITORS'
CHOICE WORKS IN EACH CATEGORY FOR 2005:

CASSIE PETERSON
Creative Nonfiction

RYAN CATHERWOOD
Fiction

MELISSA McCARTER
Poetry

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CASSIE PETERSON

A Mother's Touch

I remember the stale musty smell of the old church on a late spring morning. I sit watching the dust hanging in the sunbeams that dive through the stained glass windows. The dust seems trapped in the beams, motionless, as if time has stopped. Maybe it has. At least it seems that way to a five-year-old trying to sit still through Catholic mass. I know what the priest is saying is supposed to be important, but his monotone hangs in the air with the dust. It is all beyond my understanding and quite boring. I remember standing next to my mother, gazing at her hands, which rest on the pew in front of us. Her fingers are long and graceful, except for the pinkie on her left hand, which is slightly crooked from breaking it when she played volleyball in a high school gym class. It is rather an odd memento for her to carry around, her disliking sports so much. Her hands are young and strong. She wears a white gold engagement ring with a marquise-cut diamond that shatters the sunlight into tiny, brilliant shards of color. Then there is her wide, yellow-gold band that never leaves her finger. Her nails are short and plain, with a trace of dark earth from her tending the flowers in the backyard.

I set my little pudgy paw next to her hands. My fingers are so tiny, still padded with baby fat. They are clumsy and not under my control well enough to draw the beautiful pictures of Cinderella that I beg mom to draw for me over and over again. Will my hands ever grow as big and graceful as hers? Will they become as magical—able to create beautiful drawings, detect a fever, or heal any injury with just one touch? Will they ever be full of warmth and security when my children grasp onto them?

Mass finally ends and mom firmly grabs my hand and guides me out of the pew.

I am ten years old and standing in the same pew in the same church. I know I should be paying attention. It may be a sin, but I just can't seem to concentrate as the priest's words stubbornly hang in the air. I am chastised when I pick up her hand and lay my palm flat against hers; I can almost reach her fingertips, especially if I scoot the heel of my palm up just a bit. My skin is smooth except for an oval-shaped scar between the first and second knuckles of my right hand. It's been there as long as I can remember, but I don't know why. When I ask mom, she explains that I burned it on a radiator while she was holding me when I was about a year old. She felt so bad that she cried nearly as much as I did. Now her hands are slightly older, though still young and strong. Her skin is slightly worn and dry from years of dishes and gardening. Her veins are slightly more visible and her fingers seem slightly thinner. These are busy hands, those of a mother and business woman trying to reconcile two different worlds. Her nails are painted but do not extend past her fingertips. She never can get them to grow long. She brushes the overgrown bangs from my eyes and then gently rubs my back.

I am fifteen and stand next to my mom. My sinewy hands are now longer than hers, longer and now thinner. Young and athletic. Moderately capable of handling a basketball. Jock hands, my mom would say, even though they spend considerably more time clutching the bench than handling the ball. My nails are long, amateurishly painted, and slightly chipped. The hands of a young woman are trying to stretch through those of a child. I notice for the first time that my mom's fingers are shorter than mine. Her skin is not smooth: the pores and tiny creases are becoming more visible. The engagement ring and the wedding band are gone. These divorced hands are not welcome to rest on the pew anymore, but they remain. This conspicuous absence of her rings is a reminder of how she was cheated of her happily ever after when things didn't quite work out with Prince Charming. Her skin stretches over bones, and blue-green veins bubble over the back of her hand. Her perfectly painted acrylic nails click against the refinished wood. The clicking echoes the rapidly turning gears in her mind, marking the time until Mass ends and she has to run off to the office.

At twenty-five, my hands are elegant, complete with a flawless French manicure. I anxiously grip the bouquet of roses and gardenias. Mom takes my free hand and folds it into hers. With a firm grip and a proud smile, she pats my hand. She turns and grabs the arm of her escort. With a quick wisecrack and a little laugh, she steps into the chapel.

At twenty-six, we return to the church, this time for my daughter's baptism. Grandma hands firmly, but lovingly, cradle the infant. They are fiercely protective, yet tender and adoring. No longer slender and smooth, but thicker and tougher now. The creases are clearly cut into her flesh. A few faint brown spots are scattered across the back of her hand. Her professionally painted nails are shellacked candy apple red—her color, her life. The marquise diamond has returned, now in a yellow gold band. Tiny sapphires gather around the bright stone, which is set off by vertical lines engraved in the gold. She's so proud of her badge of success. The diamond, at one time a promise to a young girl, is now the emblem of a grown woman's independence and achievement.

I reach over to tickle my daughter's tummy. She clutches my index finger with her tiny fingers. Her nails are so tiny and delicate—little slivers really. Her skin is perfect, soft and silky, too pure and perfect for this world. She clings to my finger with strength beyond her years, clinging as if her life depended on me, and for now, I guess it does. My hands are plain and humble. My nails cut short so I will not scar the baby's perfect skin. I have no time to mess with polish. My skin is dry and cracked from washing my hands so often.

I'm thirty-five and I stand in mom's living room. She's curled up on the couch in her teal-green robe, but she's not sleeping. I reach out to touch her hand. I'm thrown back as if by an electric shock. All the warmth and comfort have left it. The chill pierces my soul. Her skin is tough and pale, except for a splattering of brown spots on the back of her hand. The underside is slightly bluish. I look away, unable to see more.

A few days later we are standing in church, a beautiful new church with pews stained the color of rich, black coffee. I rest my hand on the pew in front of us. A damp, wadded tissue clutched in the other hand. Not far away, my daughter's left hand grips the pew's back. Her nail-bitten fingers clutch the ends of the pews as she swings her legs back and forth. She's nine and old enough to know better. I should scold her, but her carefree action brings a faint smile to my tear-stained face. I whisper to her to come over and stand by me. Her busy hands momentarily land by mine. When did they grow so big? Nimble enough to master any Lego set, confident enough to pitch a baseball, and creative enough to produce an endless number of crayon and marker images. Now my hands are the older ones. Blue-green highways map the back of my hands. The skin seems to buckle around my knuckles. The lines are more defined and there are a few scars. I brush the hair out of my little girl's eyes and gently rub her back.

Twisting around, she grabs my hand and presses her palm against mine, sneaking the base of her palm a bit higher than mine.

"See, Mom, I'm almost there."

RYAN CATHERWOOD

Twilight (Of Cough Syrup and Cherry Popsicles)

Pyretta was driving to the place that they would meet, the sherbet colored iridescence of the setting sun reflecting in her rear-view mirror. She found herself glancing at it over and over again, never lingering for more than a moment, but hardly keeping her gaze from it for more than a few. She'd always liked sunsets; her life was lined with them. The end of the day, like the end of almost anything, was the best and most beautiful part of it.

She shook her head, about to snap out of her trance and focus on the road. She sighed as she brushed a hot pink lock of hair out of her face and skillfully slipped on her leather coat to guard against the cold night. Shivering, she wished she had worn a longer skirt. The stereo in her car was broken, so she drove in sterile silence to the place where she would meet her boyfriend.

She was thinking about the night they met. She had been on a snowball, a sloppy combination of speed and cocaine. She had never tried it before—not the combination at any rate. Before the party, she was relatively certain she had tried every drug known to man, and all that was left to her now were experimenting with the myriad blends.

This particular mixture, she didn't like. She wandered through a maze of chattering human bodies that all looked vaguely familiar though she could attach a name to none of them. She wanted to listen to each person's gibberish chattering and laughing hysterically. She wanted to do laps around the building. Unable to decide, she crawled into a corner and cried. No one heard her.

She cried for an uncountable amount of time. She cried for the waste that she was, and she cried for the terrible world and the misery of her place in it. She cried until she had no tears left. No one heard her.

When she was finished, she knew what she really wanted to do. She could hear her mother saying, "Drink it down, dear, it's good for you." Her mother was right. She stood up and looked around. She was going to find a man, she was going to ask him to take her away from the party so that they could sit and drink coffee and talk and not smoke anything or shoot anything or snort anything and finally be right.

She found a man who wasn't talking to anyone, a man standing alone with his drink. She said something to him, she wasn't sure what it was, but it worked, and he took her away. He took her home. It turned out, he didn't want to talk or drink coffee, he wanted to have sex. She didn't mind this, as the sex took place in a nice apartment with no drunks and no drugs and everything was finally right.

The next day, she and the man who introduced himself as Snow were dating. She wasn't sure how it happened, but it did. And as the months passed, she realized that she was glad it did. She wasn't sure what had happened that night, she couldn't remember the party or why she had approached him or left with him, but she knew he was handsome and he didn't mistreat her, and with a bit of prodding, he could be very pleasurable company.

Together, they broke into a small used car lot and didn't leave until they had run a marathon that ensured their sweaty bodies and a fair volume of sexual excretions had graced the back seat of every vehicle in the lot. She watched the smiles on his faces, every one of them so pure, and she loved him for it. Together, they had gotten drunk and ran naked in fields. His body glistened in the rain and nothing had ever seemed so virginal and she loved him. Together they had stolen shopping carts and ridden them around the streets in the afternoon. She loved him.

Pyretta smiled. Then, she didn't.

She reminded herself of the time she wanted to go out to score rock and he had stopped her. She reminded herself of the spontaneous trip to Mexico she decided on, and that thanks to him, it didn't happen. She reminded herself of every party she missed and drug she hadn't taken. In a way, she loved him for that too, but she could hear her mother: "Drink it down dear; it's good for you."

She wasn't frowning, she simply wasn't smiling. She thought of Snow, thought of what would happen when they met. After last night, there was only one thing that could happen. She drove, a cool determination about her, reminding herself why she was going to meet Snow.

Snow was driving toward the place that they would meet, the fiery glow of the setting sun beaming ahead of him. He squinted and flipped his visor down, wishing he didn't have to stare straight at it as he drove. He didn't understand why, really, but somehow, the sunset always made him just a little sad.

Snow adjusted his suit, having just left the office. He slipped off the London Fog overcoat, too hot with it over his suit jacket. He turned off the annoying chatter of talk radio and let himself reflect.

He thought about the night he met Pyretta. That day at the office had been like every other. It was a place without taste or smell, and that was what his life had become. He had walked the straight and narrow path since high school. He had graduated college near the top of his class. He was by every measure a success, even if he was without friends. Without love.

He didn't know why that young intern had invited him to a party, which he described with a slang adjective that Snow didn't know the meaning of and had since forgotten. He also didn't know why he accepted, but he did. When he reached the party, he knew why he had accepted. Life was becoming a walking death, and this was something different.

He didn't know a soul at the party; the intern had decided not to show up. Nevertheless, he had a fantastic time, and drank until he couldn't see straight. He vomited thrice; it was *fantastic*. When a woman approached him asking him to take her away, it was the frosting on the cake. Drinking, partying, and a random coitus to top the whole thing off. He took her home and had the best sex of his life.

In the morning, Snow awoke with a throbbing headache and a strange woman in his bed, calling herself Pyretta. He couldn't remember what he had done, or why, but he felt a responsibility, as he always did, and he never backed down from responsibility. They began to date then, and he loved her.

Every time he kissed her, he tasted cool cherries.

Pyretta was in many ways the perfect woman. She laughed like an angel and fucked like a devil. As the months passed, she brought him to do things he never would have imagined. She showed him joy that he never felt before. He loved her. She had her faults, her problems, to be sure, but slowly, he was changing that. He was helping her to keep from doing the things that would hurt her, hurt them. He watched her change; watched the hair dye gradually grow out of her hair to give way to her natural auburn and she was all the more beautiful. He loved her.

He was smiling at the memories until they reached the previous night. He had invited her to his company banquet, had bought her an evening dress. He stood in his tuxedo waiting for her to walk through the doors. An hour late, she arrived at the banquet hall in a red leather miniskirt, fishnets, and a black tube top, her head afire with freshly dyed pink hair.

Precious few words were spoken in precious little time. The evening ended early for them both, and they agreed to meet today. Snow knew she was telling him something. He knew she was.

And so he knew why they were going to meet.

Pyretta was born Stephanie McAlister to two of the most Christian people the world had ever known. Any time she wanted to sum up her childhood, she knew precisely how.

"Stephanie, you are sick!"

"No I'm not! I don't want it!"

"But you need it; I can hear how hoarse you are when you yell like that. I don't understand; you're willing to yell that you don't want it, which must have hurt your throat badly, but you aren't willing to drink our cough syrup?"

She sighed, "Fine."

She stared at the spoonful of red cough syrup for a terribly long time of anticipation. It was like holding a gun to her head, save for the knowledge that it was "good for her." She hated the taste of the stuff more than anything. She knew it was good for her, but she would rather have pain than this. She loathed it more and more with every second it came closer to her lips.

"Drink it down, dear; it's good for you."

The cherry cough syrup passed her lips and lit her mouth on fire, blazing a nearly vomit-inducing trail over her tongue and down her throat. It was terrible. It was good for her.

What her mother didn't know was, most of the time, she would wait until she went to the bathroom, and then spit it out.

At eighteen, Stephanie knew that something had to change. She left her parents and lived with a boyfriend, then another boyfriend, then another, until finally getting an apartment of her own. She dyed her hair and wore miniskirts and did drugs and for a long time she never tasted cherry cough syrup.

Who would name their son Snow?

Born to "flower children," Snow's childhood had been a story of ceaseless indulgence. But he knew exactly the moment when he came to an understanding that

would shape his entire life.

“Mom, can I have another popsicle?”

“Have as many as you want, baby.”

This was an offer impossible for a six year old to refuse. He unwrapped it and filled the air with the cool scent of sugary cherry. He bit into it and it fractured into icy shards of heaven in his mouth. He ate another, and another, and another after that. At times, he would wonder when his mother would stop him. She never did.

He almost managed to finish the box before becoming terribly sick. Sitting in bed, holding his stomach, at only six, he came to a crucial realization: he could do anything and no one and nothing could stop him. He could take anything, he could have anything, and nothing could stop him. Nothing, save himself.

And he did. Snow’s life became controlled, with rigid self-discipline and abstinence and denial.

A Jewel supermarket stood solitary on the north side of the highway, a small street connecting the parking lot to the highway at a T intersection with a stoplight that was quite unnecessary due to lack of traffic. Snow and Pyretta approached the intersection from opposing sides of the highway, and one after the other turned into the parking lot.

Slowly, hesitantly, both got out of their cars and approached each other. They stared at each other for a long time. Finally, Snow spoke, his voice shaky. “Pyretta.... We know that last night means something.”

“Yeah,” she said, “It does.” She lit a cigarette and fought down a shiver in the cold wind.

“Do you want my coat?” He asked.

“No,” she said, “I don’t.”

Silence fell. They stood bathed in the glow of sunset. It was setting fast now. “Pyretta, haven’t the last months been incredible? Haven’t we had great adventures? Hasn’t life been great? I don’t understand this...”

“I know you don’t,” she said. “You wouldn’t.”

“I’ve tried so hard—I love you.”

There wasn’t a drop of sympathy in her voice. “I know and I love you too. Look, Snow, we both know why we’re here. Shouldn’t we get it over with?” He nodded. They looked at each other and she seemed to want to spit him out. He seemed to want to devour her. And he said, “Pyretta, I have to break up with you.”

“I figured that was why you asked me to come.” She nodded and he was crying. If Pyretta had been any other woman, she might have gone to him, hugged him. But she didn’t. And he understood why. She had moved on already; their ending was behind her before they had even reached it. He cried and she smoked, and both fell back into doing what they had their whole lives.

They got into their cars, the twilight gone, the starry night upon them. Both pulled into the intersection, one turning right and the other left, and waited until they were signaled to drive on. And when they did, they each took one look in the rearview mirror and saw the other’s car bathed in the red glow of the stoplight. A red glow that for one moment looked unsettlingly like the color of cough syrup, and

for the other, like the color of cherry popsicles.

SHARON M. HECKMAN

Slipping Away

Ah, you broke my heart that day,
The day you felt yourself slipping away.

The keys of the piano beckoned,
Smiling like a well-remembered friend.
I wheeled you to the greeting;
Your eager, trembling fingers
Shook.

Your hands caressed
The face of your friend,
Achingly recalling the familiar lines and planes,
But you could not make it sing,
Or even speak.

The rejection sliced your soul.
Of all the insults of illness,
This last one could not be borne;
Without this ally on your hard mountain
The cords that held you would snap.

You wept at the silent piano;
You knew it, too.
“I feel myself slipping away,” you said.
The knot at the end of the rope
Had let loose.

All I could do was watch you fall.

MELISSA McCARTER

Starting

The morning yanked me,
forced me up through earth,
pulled me high while dirt slid down
my shoulders
Like pennies falling from a broken bag.

I rushed past pale seagreen bathroom tiles,
and reached for cream colored soaps,

while I screamed—
while I fell up—
I groped for baby blue blankets
and rosebud pillowcases, yellowed from sweat,
and I could smell them a little
before they drowned in
the wishing well.

The last I saw of you
was a whirlwind of paper,
all stale, so old, none of the
pieces sticking to my fingers.

I came up, surfaced through
the heavy glare of grey
mouth agape but no sound,
mending my pocket
to shut out wisps of
white noise.
My feet crunched in snow,
to melt it with the heat of *me*—
a new softness:

daisies pouring out,
blowing slightly in the
vacuum of my world,

I started small.
The faintest scent of flowers
can ruin a thousand memories
in the way a flood rusts and binds

the pages of old books in a basement.
This swirled past my neck,
wrapped around my shoulders,
and washed away the whiteness—
a silk scrape to conjure color,
to feel without prickling.

Wind led me lightly past memory,
coconut embalming my skin
and melting in my mouth,
fresh with the sting of salt.

I licked my lips and felt
as concrete, as unclouded as the
brightest blue.
It painted me, filled the over-head,
my chest,
the in-between my toes.
The wind blew, and I could breathe.

What would it be, to live on that shore
and gulp the world like blue air?
basking, skipping, sitting, singing—
sometimes running in the sun,
under the moon.

At night dreaming safe in color;

starting small.

KELLY RETZ

And So It Goes

My bookend and I decided to travel alone this year.
We got tired of making other people happy: always supporting other people's
decisions, and carrying their burdens along with our own.
So, we went to Italy to get away, to, in a way, get some fresh air.
The sun seems to shine more color and cool warmth there.
We went to the picture show, my bookend and I, and saw a French film, imagine that.
But the theater chairs were too much, too heavy. The chairs kept folding over my
bookend, like trying to uphold the Oxford Dictionary of American Literature
without his sister's help on the other side.

So we left and went for coffee at the nearby delicatessen.
My bookend didn't like it either—he's tired of coffee, rings of it, pages soaked and
stained in it—enough already.

On to the theater...Il Teatro del Mondo it was.
The two of us were so excited, we got seats towards the front but not too close to
the orchestra. It was a Norwegian play about a mother's convictions
regarding wife and motherhood responsibilities...Ibsen's *A Doll's House*,
that was it.

My bookend was furious at the attempted adaptation, it was merely
allegorical and nowhere near a transposition.
With his back straight, long and thin, he walked out: penguin style,
rather ridiculously actually; offended.
I stayed for the rest of the truly awful effort and returned to our villa
late in the night.

I called for my bookend....

He did not answer.

I roamed the streets, crawling on my knees to appropriate my height to his.
After several hours of searching, I glanced up from the abandoned newsstand and
saw my bookend.
Through a window, a collection of Rilke leaned up against him. She practically
plastered herself on him.
I stood and watched as she pretended not to be able to hold herself up, slipping
down—aslant.
He would catch her and prop her back up like some Pulitzer Prize Winner or
something.

*

I left Italy shortly after my bookend ran away with that Professor of
German Poetry from the University, and little Miss Collection of Rilke.

*

GALLERY I





Dog Hydrant
Lisa Laurenz

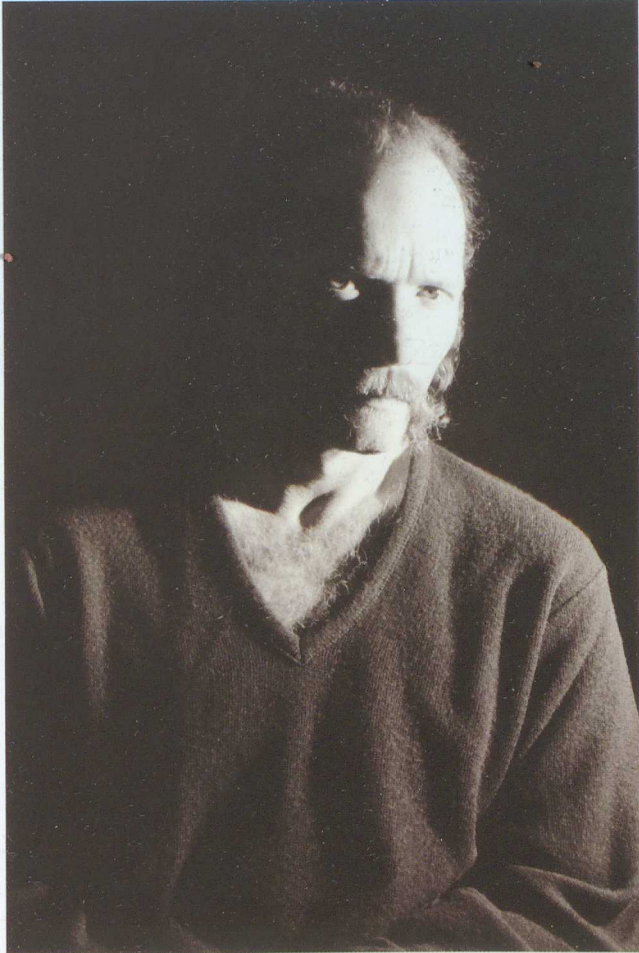
Untitled
Kimberly Strom





Still Life With Pillow
Monika Wolarek

Untitled
James Waynauskas

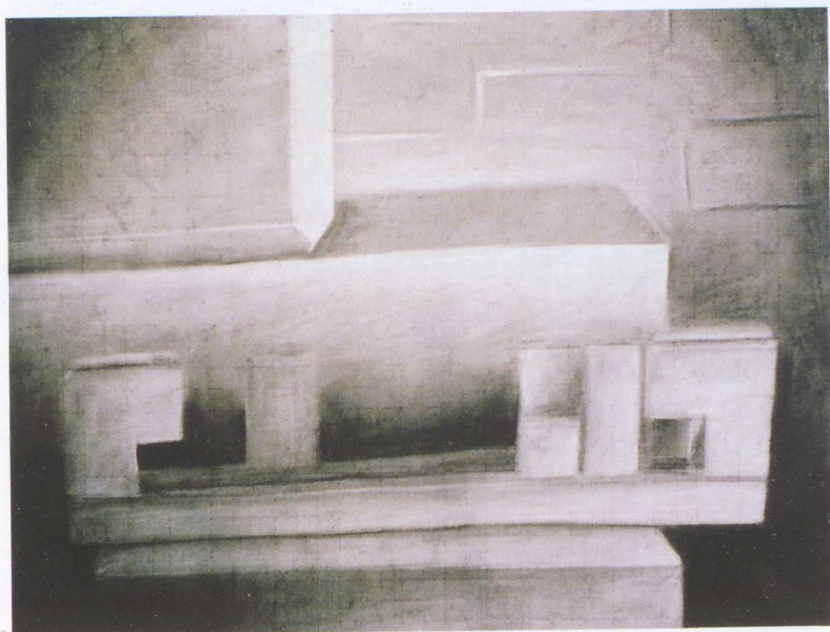




Untitled III
James Waynauskas

Untitled
Kimberly Strom





Styrofoam Still Life
Monika Wolarek

Untitled
Kimberly Strom





CHARLES BOSWELL

Astronomy in a Fishbowl

There's Tabasco on the dashboard
it's spilling on the concrete spicy
terrible tasting asphalt hot
marketing ploy gone awry
in an Easy-Bake oven.

The children dance like uniforms
in a sweatshop, finger-painting with blood.

Dirty rain drops like a tornado on your
feet, lifting you into an iceberg, where you
freeze like electricity, and die like thunder.

I put on a mask to forget—
Forget there are people with cleft wits met.
Met on a wagon wheel that spins.

Fleas gotta live quick
like mercury on a stick

A slurry sledge looking for a time zone—
zones where it's possible to pass what's zipping by.
zipping out with sex shouts
sex with blonde hairs on an Escher stair.
sex with hair
sex with a back.
Sex with a face partly formed
a nose with a peering eye
a quarter-face with a nickel chin
A square jaw set over a red pen writing

Apple green sex bends a flimsy spork
a plastic knife through the heart of cheese
a cheesy cut, a pepperoni lust
a straw fidgeted, an expulsion of liquid—
the stars die out like a golden gurgle, waterless

Waiting for fate to mix it up
in a blender full of chaos and strawberries
Absolut vodka, absolute oblivion

Kittens slink away on the broken glass.

ADAM PERLY

It Seems That I Am the Only One That I Have Been Thinking Of

There is a picture that hangs on the wall in my hallway. Acutally, there are quite a few pictures, but this is the most prominent. My attention is drawn to it every time I visit home. It is a picture of my father, when he was six, and my aunts, two of which are older, then nine and twelve, and one of which is younger, three.

My father leads us through the labyrinth-like halls of the hospital, an expert at the proper navigation by now. Outside of each door are wall-mounted sanitizer dispensers, and my sister pumps sanitizer from each into her palm. She peaks into each room, at the various ailing people, as she passes their rooms and when I catch her, I say Knock it off. She asks Why should I? like she is twelve again and I tell her it is disrespectful.

On the way to the hospital no one spoke. Warm breaths escaped from my sister's mouth, my mother's mouth, my mouth into the cold, but never a word. My father, with clenched jaw, exhaled steam through his nostrils. Without noticing I was biting my fingernails. A habit I thought was broken—a habit I worked at killing for years—rearing its ugly head again. “Bernadette” by The Four Tops played on the radio.

My fingernails are in my mouth again and I'm biting them shorter. My sister hits another pump and I start to tell her Knock that off, too, but she interrupts by announcing that the doctor in the framed picture we pass removed her tonsils way back when. No one responds.

And then we are at her door, and my father knocks. Jack, my uncle, greets us and we are ushered in. Kathy, my aunt, my father's younger sister, adjusts her bed into a pseudo-sitting position. I gotta make sure I am hitting the right button here, she tells us. Otherwise, I'll get all loopy. This red one is what dopes me up.

Later, we are all laughing, joking, ignoring the tubes running into her, out of her. Ignoring the drugs dripping into her. Ignoring when she tenses up and then hits the red button and becomes all loopy. Pretending not to notice when she keeps rubbing the stubble where all her hair once was. Ignoring the gravity of it all.

I'm sorry about the room, Kathy tells us, apologizing for either being short two chairs or the few books sitting on a shelf that she would see as messy or both. I had company yesterday, Kathy says, when the cleaning lady came. She wanted to take out the trash and I asked her if she could come back later. Apparently the answer was 'no.' We all laugh at this, my sister's laugh being the only one I could recognize as false. Tears stream down Uncle Jack's face when he laughs, and he tries to wipe them away, but some run all the way down to his beard.

My mother wasn't talking much. My sister stops talking about herself only long enough to present a present for a Christmas which may never come for Kathy. Jack and Kathy unwrap the Harley Davidson leash and collar. Kathy says it's really

cute and says she will use it with the new puppy after she goes through walking rehabilitation.

No one spoke on the way home. We sat and listened to the radio playing “Werewolves of London,” and I watched everyone breathe deep.

Sam calls to see how I am doing. She says she wishes she could fly in. Sam knows how close Kathy is, but we just don’t have the money. Sam apologizes for getting angry with me. She says she understands that I had to miss our engagement party. I apologize again anyway.

Later that night I had a dream about Uncle Jack. The entire family was at my parent’s house for a Christmas party, chatty as ever. Uncle Jack was sitting alone, in the middle of a blue couch. No one would talk to him. He had a white towel that he was wringing so hard that his hands began to bleed. When he started to cry I woke up.

The floral arrangements are innumerable. The line to greet Uncle Jack stretches out the door. There is a steady flow of elderly women who approach me. A few tell me I look like that Jude Law. Oh, so handsome! I look at Kathy and Jack at their wedding, I look at Kathy as a child, I look at the group shot of the family. Kathy with the same big, sincere smile in each and every picture and it is now—I had been fine, composed until this point—then I lose it and break down. My eyes burn and tears streak my cheeks. I lower my head, not wanting to be seen, embarrassed for some reason. And I can’t stop.

I make my way to the bathroom and as I reach for the handle the door swings open and Jen is surprised to see me. I am surprised to see her. And then her mouth is on mine and she is pulling me into the bathroom. She’s sucking on my earlobe, biting my neck. My eyes start to roll back. I’m running my fingers through her long brown hair and squeezing the back of her neck. My face is sticky where the tears have dried. I lift her off the ground by the waist and set her onto the counter. She almost falls into the sink and it’s almost like we are attacking each other. She wraps her legs around my back and untucks my shirt from my pants, struggles with my belt buckle. I help her with it and my pants are around my ankles.

She moves her mouth from mine back down to my neck. She kisses around my jawbone and I open my eyes and into the mirror at her body through the dress. It looks to be tighter than I remember. I press closer to her and she bites my earlobe and I snap out of it and back up so fast that I hit my elbow on the door. I pull my pants up right before her gorgeous, deep, penetrating welcoming brown eyes land on mine. I want her, I want her, I want her, but I hold up my hand for her to see my ring. She doesn’t slap or yell at me. She pulls the door open and walks out past me. I take a leak. I wash her lipstick off of my face and neck.

I take a seat on the couch next to my sister. This is probably the first time we have shared a couch without arguing since she was seven or eight. When the twenty-third psalm is read I notice my hands are together and, in my act of defiance to God if He exists, I unfold them as to not cause any confusion as to whether I’m praying or not. I don’t read the psalm aloud like everyone else, but I feel my face

burning and I notice my fingernails between my teeth and I wish I could spit in His eye.

Before I headed to the airport I stared at the picture of my father and his sisters, mostly my aunt Kathy, in the hallway. I had to stare because I felt that if I didn't she would disappear; she would just fade from the picture. In the taxi Sammy Davis Jr.'s "What Kind of Fool Am I?" came on and I asked the driver to turn it up. My flight back to New York was a smooth one.

CALEB MEDEARIS

Mine is a spirit broken

Mine is a spirit broken
Directionless as sound
Shattered and scattered like the stars
To a conscience bound
Tempted by the ageless bounty
Enduring catacomb
On the endless Golden Wing
I see the others fly
Revealing to each other secrets
Of the diamond sky
But mine is a name without a home
A weary vagabond
Who rather than oblige you
Into the night absconds

CALEB MEDEARIS

Merciless the winter comes

Merciless the winter comes
seasons change, time assuages

More distant familiar scenes become
days serene, slowly receding

Geese assemble in 'v' formation
homeward bound, southward drawn

The last leaf's descent provides affirmation
no sooner begin, now come to an end

To me not unlike the love we once had
't was forever, now dying embers

But rarest it be we too are not sad
from each other learn, friendship eternal

May always your lessons dwell in my heart
from cold winter gloom, spring always returns
though no longer one never we be apart
complimentary, like winter and spring

SHARON HECKMAN

To Our Newborn Son (in Critical Condition in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)

“Snakes and snails and puppy dog tails...”

You are more like a fish
Who’s fought and been caught,
Hooked and reeled in, removed
From its wet and watery world
To gasp and pant as it drowns
In our ruthless, invisible ocean.

But a fish twists and flips,
Wriggles and writhes as it dies;
You look more like a frog
Laid out for dissection.
You sprawl on your back,
Motionless arms fanned out at your side,
Legs bent at the knee and open wide.

They’ve cut you and poked you
With needles and knives,
Zapped you with rays,
And threaded a tube into your heart;
You lack the strength to resist,
To have any say, or to insist
They stop the procedures they start.

Little Frog, Little Fish,
As you camp in your small misty tent,
Do you even know we are here?
Can you grasp our love and our fears?
Do you know how we yearn
To reel you into our arms
And baptize you with our tears?

KYLE KACIREK (POSTHUMOUSLY)

To Stop and Look Around

To wonder, of heaven,
and ponder its boundless joys,
is perhaps one of mankind's most common thoughts.
But did one ever stop in a lush green forest
of majestic oaks, modest pines and the
maze work of sporadic shrubs.
All five senses accounting every detail,
from the minutest scent of daisies to the vast
expanse of blue skies piercing the forest's canopy
like an unfinished puzzle.
A pure drop of dew slipping off the tip of a maple leaf
and moistening your lips ever so slightly.
How your tongue instinctively darts out to savor
the tiniest morsel of water.
The monarch butterfly instinctively headed south
to spend the winter months among its brethren
in a Garden of Eden.
Its whispering wings gently parting the air
on its perilous journey across the globe.
The touch of the meandering summer wind
immersing oneself among the pheromones of the forest.

JOSH ADAIR

Spam and the Self-Inflicted Gunshot

Dedicated to Aaron S. Morford 1974-2002

I wanted to construct a terrific metaphor—
There I was, dying to describe what happened.
There you were, dying so I could.
I wanted to depict your illness
so readers could understand.
Comprehend how it shot you
and maimed me.

Hardly a gift from the Muses,
what I conjured was Spam
And its similarity to mental illness
Go ahead and laugh, it is pretty funny—
it seems perfectly apropos though, and perhaps it is.

Spam, chock full
of perservatives,
stabilizing it, encased in tin prison.
Unquestionably safe and life preserving—
yet a stray puncture
rots the entire lot, spoiling for all

I know it's blasphemous, but you'd laugh,
so I'll continue—pumped full of Prozac,
Zoloft, Anafrenil, Paxil, Wellbutrin,
So many, names as long as the ingredients
On those Mardi Gras colored tins,
You were stable too.

Well, stabilized anyhow, your shelf life
extended by special ingredients.
Sustaining those of us depending on you
to keep us going, as greasy pig keeps so many
plodding on.

Just as swallowing greasy morsels doesn't
necessarily signal nourishment,
breathing and swallowing pills doesn't
automatically equal living.

JEREMY V. ADOLPHSON
Grandma Remembered

I used to call my great-grandmother every night,
I smiled because it made me happy.
Making her happy gave me joy,
Joy because her days were beginning to fade.
The disease grabbed her and she couldn't think.
Moments of clarity came and went.
Seeing her clear eyes made me smile.
Too often, her looks were clouded.
She stared.

Now the Alzheimer's worsens, and it's hard to smile.
She no longer stays alone, fearing all.
I cry.
She's brought to an institution to live.
It's a long way away; no phone calls tonight.

I pray to God that her mind will stay.
Please end the suffering that imprisons her.
Help me find peace; make her pain go away.
Again I cry.

JEREMY V. ADOLPHSON

Self

I'm famous--

At least in my mind anyway.

You've seen me strolling down the dark street alone,

Ignoring me as I try to speak to you.

Attention is all that I need.

Ah, but I am not as commercial as you want me to be,

Never part of the "in" crowd. You shun me.

My needs are secondary to the drama of your so-called life.

Pathetic, your phony facade doesn't fool me.

I am all knowing.

My talents are within; introversion is the key.

I am a starving artist.

Feed me.

JEREMY V. ADOLPHSON

Vipers

For the sake of argument, let's assume he is a Communications Major, a gifted scholar, attending a prestigious Midwestern University on a full scholarship. We assume he loves learning, as he arrives early to his classes, notebooks organized, the epitome of perfection. We assume he is a man because of the way he walks, the air surrounding him. He is popular, easy-going, and well-liked. Name recognition is commonplace; people long to interact with him.

A dreamer, he walks amongst the clouds, conjuring up associations among inanimate objects for a lively discussion. The whispering willows, their branches shying away from the dominant winds that thrashes them without remorse. He is one with nature in that he changes during the year and is always exposed to the elements. Naked. Engaging in rhetorical conversation with these objects proves the greatest of all audiences. The trees listen, confined by their rings, absorbing all, but constrained in terms of critique. The grass sways back and forth nodding their disapproval in repetitive motions. The shell hears all, calling upon pleasant times. The cheerful roar of the audience boosting the complacent morale of the boy. The concrete is cold, hard, and unmoving. Its permanence grounds the would-be-boy back into reality.

We know he's a she, not by choice, but by birth.

This warrants some mention, if brief or long depends upon the nature that I feel comfortable revealing my problems or issues to a larger audience. I, for one, find some solace in knowing that I will not be present upon the reading of said doctrine, for the pressure and nausea that sweeps over me imaging the crowd of people, all staring, eyes downcast, judging me, almost forces me to stop typing this. But I can and will continue, because by applying words to paper, it's a cathartic release that gives me comfort. If I'm able to express how I feel and release these impulses and urges that have been so long bottled up inside, then possibly in the future I can come to some realization that my fears are common, and undeniably human.

To communicate is to expel words from one's mouth and apply these words to form intelligible sentences and phrases to make sense out of the spoken word. Sometimes I find that when sitting in my room late at night, abstract ideas and concepts are clear in my head. They come out in thoughts like pulses, shooting off their imaginary neural charges at a rate of clarity. They make the sense all the more sensible, and create an air of familiarity that I forget upon waking in the morning. While the midnight oil burned, I could make out the problems in my life, and could come to some conclusion that the world is really there for me, I would no longer become an outsider seeing the world from someone else's shoulders. No, I would take control and be a leader and have my thoughts known. Such clarity shines down through the incandescence that I nearly have to shield my eyes from such knowledge. I now know what Newton and Einstein must have went through, able to make sense of abstract concepts, only to see their inventions turn around and make a mockery of the greater world. Without Einstein

there never would have been the A-bomb, and Newton was the precursor to everything. His *Principia*, probably the single most important piece of literature ever to spawn out of the Enlightenment, was a forebearer to the nuclear age of war and destruction of the masses. Surely my moment of epiphany would not lead to the destruction of anything, but my own fragile mind.

The question so weighing on my mind was essential: like an atom is to the universe, like a seed in a watermelon, like the cracks in the cold cement, who was I? Three words, one person, such confusion. What skills or talents did I possess that were worth mentioning in front of my peers (who never knew me anyway) to make me a unique individual? Uniqueness was never my strong suit, on second thought, fitting in never was there either. I could contemplate a vicarious story involving a romantic tryst in some exotic land, but it would only be a lie, and no one would buy into my feeble attempts to win appreciation from my classmates. Certainly no one would believe, let alone fathom, that any boy would be romantically involved with the likes of me. God always knew I was special; unfortunately She didn't bestow me with enough confidence in myself to make up for my shortcomings. Pock-marked face giving way to dimples, giving way to dry skin, giving way to black heads, giving way to indigestion, giving way to muscle cramps, giving way to menstrual cramps, giving way to bowleggedness, giving way to black shirts speckled with the white non-snow of adolescent dry scalp, giving way to grinning at my buck-toothed self in a pocket mirror purchased at Wal-Mart for one dollar, giving way to uncontrollable shakes in my hands, fingers, and thighs, giving way to red arms and red circles on the upper portions of my cheeks, giving way to bloodied noses, giving way to feminine problems, giving way to yeast infections, giving way to dry mouth, giving way to frizzled hair, giving way to leotards, giving way to hand-me-down clothes, giving way to a single parent home, giving way to poverty, giving way to a never-ending cycle of pain and familiarity associated with belonging to a particular class for the rest of your life, giving way to name calling, giving way to stigma acceptance, giving way to being in your place, giving way to ridicule, giving way to remarks made by your own constituents who are supposedly looking out for your best interest, giving way to broken promises, giving way to loss of love, giving way to pseudo-physical abnormalities, giving way to the vipers.

The vipers themselves are figurative representations of B—'s personality. They bring inanimate objects to life and help her deal with her anxiety. If one were to mark on a chalkboard, it would not be unconventional to draw a straight line between B—'s anxiety and the vipers. The vipers rose up in a mist and clouded B—'s thoughts, actions, and desires. They would not take her will, her word was one thing, the written will, her story, would not end up coiled around the bramble on a winter's night. If regulation guided B— in school, then it was the vipers that controlled her social life. Ever present in their wetness, the vipers emerged forth from the derma of B—'s body much like a snake shedding its skin. Adolf Hitler was once quoted as saying, "No one who has not been seized by the murderous jaws of the viper can know its poison fangs." This was true, many did not know what B— was going through; however, if a classmate were to ask her about it, they would

misdiagnose it as a common biological symptom associated with nervousness.

It wasn't so much the knowing as it was the cause that confused B—. It wasn't like this in every circumstance; by herself, B— was as carefree and creative as anyone, but placed in a situation around other people, the vipers came out to play. How, by chance did she come to call her ordeal by the name of the vipers? It was a chance encounter in the ladies' room between Biology and Economics in high school that B— was flustered and in shock at what she saw in the mirror. Accustomed to the cycle of female adulthood, seeing wet blotches underneath her arms initially shocked and dismayed her. It was damp and had a faint aroma of musk and Secret. Normally, she wouldn't have given it a second thought; however, it was in the middle of winter, and no one should sweat this profusely without something medically wrong. Attempting to conceal her findings went without avail as Allison, her classmate, stepped out of the stall to find B— with both arms outstretched sniffing her armpit. We all know how cruel kids can be, and certainly this was no exception.

Twisting, swirling, sliding, sweeping,
Come and see B—'s pits a weeping.
Though the stink is not so foul,
Drippy B— will make all howl.
Eyes glisten, cheeks are red,
You'll die from embarrassment the Vipers said.
Hiss-hiss flicker-flicker,
The stain is spreading, oh so much quicker!
You try to run but you can never hide,
For the Vipers are in for the long ride.
Pimple queen, haven's sister,
Calloused hands, crimson blister.
Truth be told you were never pretty,
Lone girl lost in life, what a pity.
You'll never fit in, so don't even try,
Face the facts, look me in the eye!
Baby cry, baby diapers,
Embrace the wetness, Viva La Vipers!

The poem, when sung by a group of girls, almost had an angelic quality to it. Of course every chance opportunity that B— wandered down the hall, they would always resort to the singing or the hissing. The worst would come during receptions in the auditorium, when the Principal would announce some fundraiser or important event. Children have a tendency to be rowdy and rambunctious and need to be quieted down. B— knew what was coming; from the back, one of the girls would start the "shhh" sound, when really it was the "hiss" sound. The cacophony would rise in pitch and flood the auditorium, bringing forth the mythical creatures that belonged solely to B—. Aside from the flushed cheeks, a passerby on the street

would suggest that the young girl suffered from dry skin, or it could easily be blamed for the bitter wind that went through Illinois during early winter, but the flush was ever present, and when the "hiss" chant began, the flush migrated down the length of her neck, turning it into a hot and sticky appendage. Next would come the slight trickles from underneath her arms; it would predominately infest her left armpit, and then magically switch over to the unattended side. Working in tandem, one would be amazed at the overall synchronicity exhibited by equal Rorschach blots coating her shirt. If she were to answer a question, individuals could try to decipher the meaning of the blots, but to B—, the ridicule only further ruined her sense of self-worth.

"B—, could you please come up and give your self-introduction speech."

The professor gazed back at B— to get her attention, but she avoided his eyes and looked down, faking fumbling through her note cards in hopes that her time could be pushed back, but this was not the case. It was now or never, like that famous Nickelodeon song said which the King sang, and B— came to the realization that to face her fears would be to accept who she really was.

Trepidation, rising in her throat, she coughed and could see the others in the room shift their attention towards her. This whole process took approximately ten seconds, but to B— it was a lifetime. With her nerves piqued, the vipers were ever attentive, watchful, and waiting to unleash their power in front of an audience waiting with bated breath. What is a show without a showstopper?

There were slight trembles in her hands, as she noticed the perspiration break over her forearms. B— wished for once that she had worn a long-sleeve shirt, but didn't because the weather was unusually warm for the time of year. She picked up her bundle of cards, and looking down at what she so long put off, was the realization that half of the cards were blank. It was an unwritten account for a life not worth mentioning. Others excelled in athletics, scholastics, and other hobbies, yet B— could not fill in the space of three to five minutes talking about her life.

At this time, the body begins to experience an increased heartrate, blood pressure rises, and the throat turns to a rough sandpaper purchased at Home Depot for \$.99. Cotton-mouth wouldn't fit the bill for B—'s mouth, it contained various morsels of spittle, but nothing for the explanation and history of her so-called life.

She is almost up to the podium now, but the five remaining steps are the hardest. Outward looking, she turns her head around, mistaking a student opening up a bag of chips for that fucking hissing sound. *God damn them, can't they just let this go?* B— thinks. But the reality of the matter is that the slippage of time between high school and college resulted in the moving of the fifteen hundred miles and ten states, and none of the individuals know what is within B—, in her mind, the ridicule and distrust remains. They did not know her, or of her condition. The vipers were strangers, living a life under fabric, occasionally showing their fangs, but for the most part keeping their distance. For the first presentation, they will perform brilliantly, showing off their feats and skills, as they dazzle an audience in hopes of returning day after day for an encore of shame, degradation, and hopelessness.

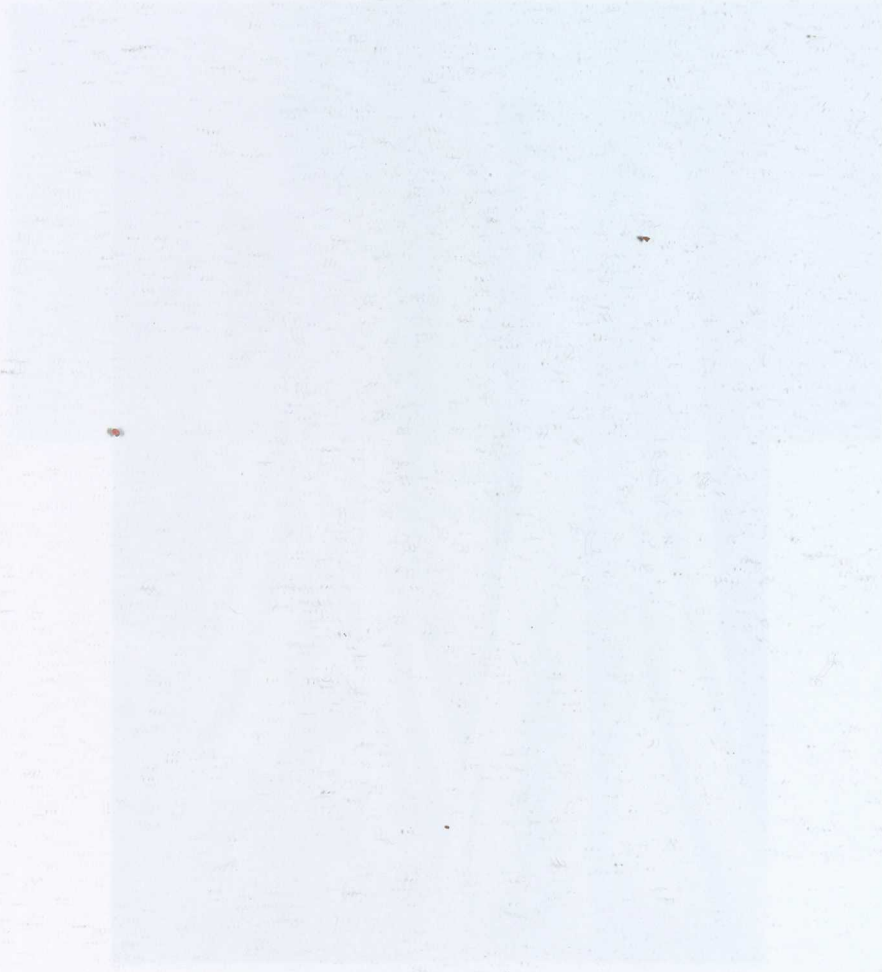
This was the turning point, the breaking point, and the climax. Staring down at the horizontal lines of the cards marred by nothing, B— clears her already raw throat, adding pain to a life already overflowing with it.

The bond breaks, time slips, and a lone eyelash curls inward into B—'s eye. Mere blinking will not remove this persistent problem, so calmly, B— puts down the note cards on the podium and watches them slide off onto the floor. She hears muffled noises coming from the audience. Is it laughter or just harmless banter? Regardless, B— bends to gather the cards and notices the cracks in the cement. Their origin, a mere pebble size oval, radiated outward into long jagged, serrated cracks that spawn into a multitude of interconnecting web-work. How something so small could impact the surrounding area fascinates and yet affirms B—'s place in life. One is judged for their misfortunes, their quirks, and their lack of confidence to deal with the larger world. The ripples and effects resulting from the initial act or discovery will stay with the person throughout their life. The cracks may be repaired but they never actually go away. They lie in wait just beneath the surface, and when favorable, they are unleashed and made visible. Weather. Pressure. Age. Nerves. They are catalysts to a process already in motion that can never be stopped.

The realization of knowing was only temporary, for B— diverted her attention back to the crooked eyelash. Still undercover behind the podium (contrary to B—'s belief, her hips were not in fact protruding from both edges like wings), B— inserted her finger into her right eye and grasped the broken lash, removing it. And just for good measure, she plucked out a half-dozen more. Already, she could see clearly, the moment of actualization was upon her, and she knew in her heart and in her mind that she could do this. A barrier to overcome, B— stood up, faced her audience and stepped over the cracked cement and engaged her professor with her newly found eyes. "You may begin," her professor said as he started the stopwatch.

Looking at her upside-down note card, B— wondered if she really was ready.

GALLERY II



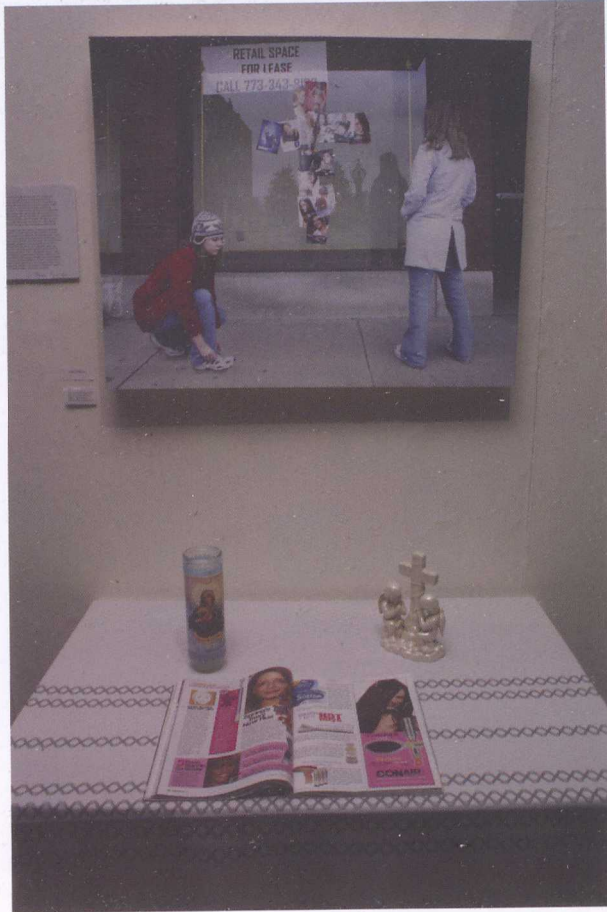
Untitled
Monika Wolarek





Untitled
Kimberly Strom

The Crucifixion
Alison Erazmus





Untitled
Kimberly Strom



Untitled
James Waynauskas

Untitled
Kimberly Strom



RYAN CATHERWOOD

My Immortal

He tiptoed down the stairs as quietly as he could, though he couldn't answer why. He couldn't even bring himself to ask. It was just one of a thousand habits he had formed and been so happy to form. He let his habits guide him from the foot of the stairs, let them guide him into the kitchen to make breakfast for her. Let them guide him to scramble the eggs the way they both liked. Let them guide him to pour her two cups; one orange juice, one milk, just a bit more in the latter than in the former. He smiled. He loved these habits. He clung to them, unwilling and probably unable to give them up, even though she was dead.

He sat down when he was finished. He wasn't smiling anymore; that was brief as all his smiles were. They were always unexpected, and almost gone before he could notice them. But they would always come with thoughts of her, thoughts of how things were before everything changed.

He closed his eyes to try to facilitate it, but that plan didn't make sense. Thoughts of her weren't just visions, they were moments, washes of sensation that could submerge his entire soul, bringing him in one beautiful memory her perfect legs, her wispy hair, her crystalline eyes, and from them, her sweet and magical tears.

And his words would come then, "There there my love, everything will be okay. You'll see, I'll make everything right."

He hadn't even realized he was speaking aloud until he stopped himself. As he quieted again, he noticed the sound above him. The presence was up there, awakening. Whatever it was doing, it was doing it quickly. He didn't care much. He lowered his head and returned to floating in a lukewarm pool of apathetic lament.

Whatever else he did when he thought of her, he didn't cry. Smiles may have been infrequent, but he never cried. Even if he'd wanted or needed to, he knew he couldn't. But it didn't matter, because he didn't want or need to. He was alone, yes, but he was accustomed to being alone. He told himself so every day, that it wasn't so bad, he was used to being alone.

It was different, though, since meeting her, since things changed. When he had her, everything was perfect. In her, he had found everything he had ever searched for. Not someone who he needed, for he needed nothing. He found someone who needed him.

The noises upstairs surged and ebbed in tides of clutter from the closet, and for a time, he listened to the presence there. Soon it would come downstairs.

His thoughts remained focused on his dead love. They always did.

It was raining the night they met. Driving home from work, he knew that God himself in all his benevolence had thrown some bit of metal in the road sharp enough to blow out his tire. Changing the tire with the rain pouring down was long, slippery, tiresome work. With the roar of the storm in his ears, he almost didn't hear it. But he did. He heard her cries.

Turning slowly, he dropped the iron. She was sitting on the park bench and

crying. She wore a rosy strapless dress that in the best of circumstances would have been beautiful on her, but she sat soaked with rain, and the ugliness that had become of her gown made the beauty of her tearful face all the better. He stood and stared at her, sitting and crying as if she did not notice the rain. In that moment, he forgot about it entirely as well. The droplets of water were meaningless, dull, and invisible before the singing, beaming tears streaming down her face.

She only stopped crying when he sat next to her, slipped his coat over her, and said the words. "There there, everything will be okay. You'll see, I'll make everything right." She told him everything. She sat on the park bench because, as of the previous day, penniless, she had no home. She wore her prom dress because she could take so little when she left, and wanted to take what was best. Somehow, it made sense at the time, she told him, and they laughed together.

He took her home with him that night, and they never parted.

The days passed. The weeks passed. The years passed. And they were happy. Before they had met, she had had a dozen jobs, but could keep none. With him, he told her, she wouldn't have to. She had had a dozen lovers, but *would* keep none. Now, she had him. She had needed something but she never knew what it was. He knew, and told her, it was him. And so long as she needed him, he was happy.

He was everything she needed. He would care for her, he would show her the love she hadn't had elsewhere. He would tell her jokes and he would shower her with gifts and he would make her breakfast. She would make love to him. She would laugh at his jokes, and she would sit with him and receive anything and everything gratefully.

She would cry.

It didn't require a reason. In a life where so much had gone wrong, so many dreams unrealized, so many fears fed, she had a well of tears to release one by agonizing one. He loved them all. Each teardrop was a glistening plea for his love and for his care, and he would always answer. He would always take her in his arms and tell her there was nothing to be afraid of. He would wipe away her tears and he would tell her, "There there, my love, everything will be okay. You'll see, I'll make everything right."

Why did she have to die? Why did everything have to change?

But he didn't cry. He never did.

He was in the middle of not-crying when he heard the high heels clicking on the stairs. He decided he wouldn't interrupt his not-crying even as those heels clattered across the hardwood floors of the house he had bought for them, or even as he looked up to her standing, smiling, in the doorway.

She said something to him, probably "good morning", but he only watched her shoving papers into her briefcase, then smoothing the wrinkles in the coat and skirt of the expensive suit she had bought. Despite everything, he couldn't help but smile a little.

"I made you breakfast," he said, hopeful. His voice caught meekly in his throat.

With a voice that resonated more than it ever seemed to before, and with a touch of sympathy, she said, "Honey, why do you do that? You know I don't have time in the mornings."

He nodded in quiet understanding and looked down at the table. Once she

left, he would eat the eggs before they were too cold. Perhaps for his benefit, she picked up the juice and guzzled half. She never used to drink that quickly.

"It's Friday," he reminded her. "We're going to have dinner together tonight, and then we'll make love." He slid his hand across the table toward hers, but she didn't seem to notice, and she went to look for her keys.

"No, honey, remember, I'm having dinner with the partners tonight." She stopped and took a breath, calming and softer, "You know, you could come if you wanted to." The offer was more politeness than anything else. Just as politely, he declined.

Once she found her keys, he drank his milk, and her juice, and then her milk. He cleared the table and washed the dishes with a mechanical indifference. Alone in the silent house, he longed for some semblance of humanity there.

He turned on the TV, and sat before it, changing the channel. The news, talk shows, even soap operas. He saw these women everywhere. Strong women. That was what she was, a strong woman. He supposed he was proud of her. She had done well. And yet...

For so long, he held her while she cried. He dried her tears, little droplets of pure unfathomable need. He savored them, savored the powerlessness they indicated, the necessity for his love. Eventually, though, something became clear. She was happy. He made her happy, and though he loved to do it, gradually, he began to understand that all of the tears she had accumulated in that reservoir of sorrow were only there from a lifetime of the lack of love. Now, with his love, the tears dried up.

He gave her strength that she never had, and she loved him for it. But in his eyes, slowly, she began to die then. She cried less and less, and she was dying. She died as she made friends. She died as she found work. She died as she was promoted and bought a car and a house for them both and started dressing in suits. He was losing her fast, and he felt he could do nothing about it. He was right.

With the realization striking him again, he almost doubled over, emptiness filling him. *What is this? What is this I feel and why?* He was fooling himself even to ask. He knew what it was, but he wouldn't admit it. It was want. It was need. He wanted. He needed. And he hated it, but he couldn't stop it. He wanted her. He wanted her to want him. He needed her. He needed her to need him.

And she didn't. Not anymore.

It had always been this way, he knew. He was the one to throw a lavish party which no one would attend. He was the one to buy expensive gifts which no one would open. He was the one to give everything and have no one to receive it.

He didn't cry, though. He never did. His own tears would solve nothing. He wanted hers.

"Baby?" She whispered from the doorway, plucking the remote from the table and turning the TV off. He jerked out of a half-sleep. It was night out, somehow. He had fallen asleep on the sofa. He didn't even remember falling asleep. He looked about, disoriented. It must have been very late; she always came home very late. Looking at her, though, he found a smile coming over him, then it faded quickly. She was so beautiful.

She came to him and knelt in front of him, looking into his eyes. Her counte-

nance was soft. There was love in it like he hadn't seen in a long time. It wasn't need, but it was love.

"How was your dinner?" he asked her. She must have known he didn't really care about that very much, because she didn't bother answering.

She merely put her hands on his knees and told him, "I'm so sorry for the way I've been lately." He didn't say anything. "You know work has been crazy, but I don't mean to ignore you like I do."

It felt like something was climbing from the horrible emptiness in his stomach to his chest, catching in his throat, making speech almost impossible. *What is this?* "It's okay," he managed.

"No," she said. "It isn't okay. I love you. I want you to know how thankful I am for your support." She took his hand and held it tightly. "I want to make love to you."

He couldn't breathe. He knew what this was now, and he couldn't stop it.

The tears came with a release that even an orgasm couldn't rival. Instantly, her arms were around him and he wailed. She asked him what was wrong over and over again, but he had no chance of answering, save with tears. They were soaking her shoulder.

She had done it. She had done it all. She had danced with him at parties. She had opened his gifts and her face lit up with joy. She had taken everything he could give and loved him for it.

Before everything changed.

He couldn't stop. If she had once had a reservoir, he clearly had been keeping a river dammed, and now the dam was broken by his own need, and her answer to it. She held him tightly and he cried.

He tried to tell himself that she was gone. The woman he had met in the rain in her prom dress in the park that night was dead and gone, replaced by a better one, a stronger one. But one who did not need him. It was true, he knew it, and yet now her mere presence was torture, dead and yet alive, never to leave him in peace. Never needing him.

Nothing made him feel so alone, even as she held him, rocking. Even as finally, she spoke, and told him, "There there, baby, everything will be okay. You'll see, I'll make everything right."

No. This couldn't be happening. He couldn't have this. He wouldn't be this. He would have her back or he would be rid of this immortal sadist forever.

Her tender hold of him was gone as soon as his cries turned to screams, and then he saw her, falling back on the floor, terror in her eyes. She must have seen something in him he didn't even know was there, for she tried to escape.

He was too quick. He had her in his arms in an instant, lovingly holding her as he always had, always in love.

His hands wrapped around her throat. She made a sound of fright.

"Yes. Come back to me, need me." She squirmed, but he only held tighter, held her to him, his hands clenching, his eyes wincing, removing even the bleary vision he had after crying.

When he opened his eyes, she was crying. Tears flooded down her cheeks,

beautiful and sweet. He crushed her to his chest as he kept his grip.

“Yes, yes!” He wailed as she cried those beautiful tears. They sang to him with a brilliant resonance, glowing love and need. He knew she needed him now more than ever. And he could accept now, he needed her. He needed her.

Finally, she was still in his arms. She wasn’t crying anymore; he supposed she had cried enough. He sat on floor and held her. He smiled a smile of childish gaiety that didn’t vanish from his face even as she hung limp in his arms. He looked down at her eyes, still watery.

“There there, my love, everything will be okay. You’ll see, I’ll make everything right.”

CHRISTINA GILLERAN

Clothes-lined

When I was about thirteen years old, I went through what the adults in my family called a growth spurt, causing my dwarfishly short Italian relatives to marvel at the length of my arms and legs and my lanky Irish relatives to breathe a sigh of relief as I passed the five foot mark and beyond. Like them, I now would be able to use the upper shelves of cabinets and drive a car without requiring an issue of the Yellow Pages be kept on the driver's side for use as a booster seat.

My bones elongated so rapidly that I became clumsy, my shins were peppered with black-yellow bruises from the constant misjudging of distances between furniture. This accelerated lurch into the five foot and above crowd coupled with my distracted book-wormish tendencies soon placed me in harm's way, and while sullenly (sullen was a personality trait I was perfecting in that thirteenth year of life), following my parents through a crowded parking lot into the Full House restaurant, I walked, or rather smacked right into the side view mirror of a rusty pick up truck: A mirror that weeks before I would have passed under completely unscathed.

White sparklers flamed behind my eyeballs during the frozen seconds when my skull met harshly with hard metal resulting in my rear hitting the hot asphalt. My parents, unaware that I had been dropped like a clay pigeon, sauntered towards the door. The pain was spectacularly blinding, even nauseating, but strangely I did not call out for help, instead I looked quickly around the hot parking lot to ensure that no one had seen me crash and fall. I was more concerned about avoiding humiliation than in assessing my wounds.

Dad swung the heavy lobby door open, and noticed one child was missing. Raising a hand to shield his eyes from the evening sun, he scanned the parking lot. He couldn't see me there on the ground between that truck and its brethren. Irritated, perhaps suspecting that I was still in the car reading, Dad headed into the lot with a scowl and a set jaw. He almost stepped on me in between those vehicles, trying to pull myself up, grabbing the metal side of the truck. My father yanked me the rest of the way to my feet and led me into the restaurant, where he held a glass of ice water to my forehead. He never asked me what happened, thought he related the basic details he had gathered from an inspection of the scene and his daughter to Mom, advising her not to "make a big deal of it."

My father is the type of man who seeks medical assistance only when he is certain that without it, he will die. As an ex-marine who had functioned as a search and destroy infantryman, crawling through the jungles of Vietnam, ignoring foot rot and insects, hunger and pain, Dad had overcome natural tendencies and needs relating to comfort and care. I admired this about him, perceived it as a great strength. His pain was so secret and silent that my brother and I were only aware of his experiences because our mother had told us. She had no choice when we overheard Dad's terrors, which had clung to him like dark leeches, hitching a ride to

a new life in the good old U.S.A.; terrors that he forgot during the day, but that would creep back into him while he slept, causing him to thrash about in his bed and shout orders. Dad had decided not to “re-up” after I was born, and though I was already thirteen, that war still permeated his subconscious, and kept him sour company some nights. Dad did not know that we were aware of his Vietnam experiences and he would have been embarrassed by any attention to the issue, so we didn’t ask any questions, and only held our father in higher esteem for the fact that he did not brag or complain in our presence. Ever.

Since I was a girl and a member of a family not far removed from such traditions as male birthright and primogeniture, I latched onto this seemingly heroic trait of my father’s for replication in myself. I saw pride, or imagined I saw it anyway, in my father’s eyes as I stoically munched on my Reuben sandwich and fries that day.

“Can I have another Coke, please?”

I pushed my mother’s hand away when she dipped a napkin in cold water to dab at the bit of blood that had dried on my forehead. “I’m fine, it’s no big deal.” My brother, Nick, was never able to master this great level of self control, this denial of pain, and continued to run to my mother for comfort for each skinned knee and splintered finger he experienced. I carefully weighed and valued his responses against mine. I *wanted* him to whine and run for Mommy when he was hurt, and I wanted Dad to notice that *I* did not.

In my bed later that night, I listened in on my parents’ conversation in the kitchen.

“Ginger, I’m tellin’ you the kid was *clothes-lined*, she must not have been watching where she was going.”

“I still think that we should have taken her to Dr. Carbon—she could have a concussion, you know.”

“She’s fine, she just needs to open her eyes and look ahead of her feet.”

Clothes-lined—that was the sudden stupor I felt at the moment of impact with the mirror, that dumb-amazed-wonder-pain-disbelief is the last thing we feel before we die—what sixty-year-old men feel when they fall to the linoleum with a sudden heart attack, what passengers in a car feel when a massive semi tanker flattens them against the interstate, what soldiers feel when after months of near misses, one bullet finally pierces the back of a green-gray helmet. It was a disturbing, errant connection, a half-formed metaphor that I puzzled over from that point forward. Puzzled privately, that is.

I spent the entire evening sitting on the curved painted steps that led up to my attic bedroom. The staircase was directly off the kitchen, but hidden near the back door and the curving of the steps granted me invisibility from below. I was listening to my mother wail and sob into the mustard yellow phone that hung on the kitchen wall. I could hear the phone cord, stretched out, making zipping noises against the door jams as she paced from one room to the other.

“Oh, Sandy, what are we going to do?...I know, I know...SHE’S ONLY JUST SIXTEEN...I don’t know, about six weeks I think...no, I haven’t told him yet, he’s at

work...no don't say anything to the kids yet...no, she says absolutely not...no abortion, but we'll see what happens...I know, she's stubborn."

And so it went, for hour upon hour, my mother divulged to her sister (Auntie Sandy) the tragic developments of which she had lately been made aware: my teenage pregnancy. When I told her of the situation, she had shrieked and cried until she choked on her own saliva. She demanded to know what type of a pregnancy test (if any) I had used and whether I was aware that I had just ruined my life, unless I decided to "terminate" then and only then could I avoid a life of abject poverty and dismal horror.

I thought she was nuts: I had it all figured out. I would finish school, get a great job, a new car (a Trans-Am or Corvette), a house, and probably marry my boyfriend. I had the goals set, and that was what was important—goal setting, right? Upon hearing my plan, Mom only reached for more kleenex. I informed her that I had actually gone to the county health department, that the pregnancy was confirmed by a doctor, and that abortion was out of the question. I had *selflessly* determined that my life was less important than that of the unborn child, and besides, I should take on my responsibility and not show weakness. Abortion or adoption indicated weakness; either option would show that perhaps I did not have what it took. Unable to experience a productive conversation with me, Mom called her sister and I crept to the top of the stairs to listen, to pray that she did not call my father at work. He was at the fire department, and would not be home until after I left for school in the morning, which meant that I would not have to face him until after school the next day.

At the bus stop the next morning, my best friend Karen, tapping a fresh box of Marlboros, handed me one, and asked, "What happened? Did you tell her? Did she freak out?"

"Yeah, she freaked, I knew she would, she *is* a freak-out, she's probably telling my dad right now."

"Do you still want me to come home with you, you know...for protection?"

"Yeah, you better, he might kill me."

Karen did come home with me after school. We walked mously into the sunny living room. Mom and Nick were nowhere to be seen. A great old mahogany piano sat in the corner of the room. Dad had brought it home one day years before, after he had been given it as payment for cleaning out the basement of a very old man. Dad had gathered some side jobs that year which involved clearing out estates and transporting the items to a local auction house. He brought home a large collection of castoff things, but the piano was certainly the best. I had many sullen hours of many days picking out "Chopsticks," "Greensleeves," and the theme from *The Godfather* on its chipped keys. Nick and I had often forced the family cat into the small doors that accessed the hammers, locked her in, and played the piano, the hammers lifting the poor cat up and down. Mom spent hours stretching the phone cord taught as she employed Murphy's Oil Soap, lemon oil, and elbow grease in the care of the piano. But Dad never had time for the piano he had brought home. He talked about having it properly tuned, about buying lesson books, and even (when he was feeling very generous) about hiring a piano teacher to come and teach us all.

But he never had the time. He was always either working at the fire department, or finishing concrete, or shoveling out basements.

Dad sat at the piano now, staring at the braided rug that lay in the center of the oak plank floor

“Karen, I think you need to go home,” he said.

“O.K., Mr. Marrocco.”

A lot of good *she* was doing.

“I’ll walk her home.

“No, you won’t. You stay right here.”

Karen didn’t even glance backwards; she held her books to her chest and scampered out the door.

Would he kill me? Throw me out? Murder my stupid boyfriend? Humiliate me? Yell? Scream? Rant? Rave? Fall through the floor like Rumpelstiltskin? The possibilities both paralyzed and frightened me, as if some sinister needle were injecting me with morphine and caffeine simultaneously. I waited for the action to begin.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Dad was still staring at the mute, braided rug, neck bent, shoulders slumped. He had not taken off his fireman’s uniform yet, though it was well after noon. And then my father did the most horrific thing possible: his shoulders began to shake, and my father put his head down on the row of chipped piano keys and cried. He didn’t cry with words and questions and demands as my mother had, his crying was wordless and wrenching. Rather than the rage I expected to encounter, I was faced with the immense guilt of making my father cry, and was sure it was humiliation and disappointment in me that had reduced my father to such a state. It never entered my mind that the man was *crying* not because of me, but *for* me. I knew in my gut that I had clothes-lined him, but good, and I could not look at his eyes.

After some time, he raised his head from the keys, pulled his shoulders back, and lifted himself from the piano bench. He hugged me close, his metal fireman’s badge digging into my cheek.

“It’ll be O.K. Everything will be O.K. You’ll be fine.”

I struggled through the following years with a stoicism that would have warmed the heart of any Spartan father. But I was *not* fine.

She was nearly five months old the first time I heard the word “Bilateral-Retino-Blastoma.” I was twenty, the mother of two, and married to a chronically unemployed young man, when her left eye was removed later that same week. Radiation, cobalt-plaquin and cryotherapy were subjects I was studying, though I had never attended college, and indeed, had dropped out of high school to take care of my first child four years earlier. My daughter’s diagnosis, cancer, had been a numbing experience. My incompetent husband cried and wailed when the curly haired pediatric ophthalmologist quietly announced that one eye would be “enucleated” (removed) and the other treated to prevent the cancer from spreading to the

brain. I might have liked to cry, but someone had to sign the paperwork.

The marriage did not survive Tiffany's illness, but Tiffany did. She received a prosthetic eye, finished her radiation treatments and went into remission. She grew from a baby to a toddler to a preschooler, and I, a single mother, paid the bills and did my best to let my daughter know that she would be okay.

She was four years old when I first heard the term "recurrent primitive cell cancer." I sat alone in the cheerfully wallpapered waiting room while the same pediatric ophthalmologist, now accompanied by a pediatric oncologist and pediatric ENT, explained to me exactly how primitive cancer cells, possibly related to the original cancer, possibly not, had taken up residence in my daughter's lymph nodes and nasal passages. My oldest child was at my mother's house, being babysat, and my daughter sat in a plastic chair next to me, swinging her small feet back and forth in the free air that separated them from the floor. She was busy drawing a herd of pigs on manila paper as the probable protocol for aggressive cancer forms was laid out before me.

"Vincristine, Cysplatinum, Adriamycin...side effects will include permanent loss of bone density, loss of heart muscle strength, loss of high tone hearing, temporary loss of hair, bladder and bowel control—possible infertility—death. The option—non treatment and certain death."

At four Tiffany weighed forty-five pounds, and other than her loss of depth perception related to having only one eye, was happy and healthy. At five, after a full year of chemotherapy, Tiffany weighed twenty-eight pounds, had no hair, no eyelashes, sores in her mouth, cracking skin, vomited constantly, and slept eighteen hours a day. She had hemorrhaged twice from the nose and a code had been called on her both times. She lived on ice cream and *The Little Mermaid* on VHS.

My oldest child, Chris who was seven, saw me in between doctor appointments, hospital visits and work. His third grade class went on six field trips that year, and he asked me to be a room mother for each. I was a room mother for zero. He went to school in ugly clothes on picture day because I forgot to dress him for it. He asked regularly if his sister would die. I told him no, that she would be fine.

Every weekday I went to work, it was imperative that I keep my medical insurance. Every evening I drove forty miles to Children's Memorial Hospital with my seven-year-old son to see Tiffany. On weekends, Christopher stayed with my parents and I spent Friday night through Monday morning on a chair in Tiffany's room. I would hold her emesis (vomit) basin, change the diapers she had to wear, clean her central line, and lose all sense of time until Monday morning when I would head back to my telemarketing job at Household Finance. When Tiffany's hair began to fall out like cotton candy from a paper stick, I collected it and tied it into sections with pink ribbon. I squirreled it away into the slick plastic hospital drawer, so that I would have something to keep if my daughter did not live.

My ex-husband visited Tiffany only twice during that year of hospitalization. I was not in the room either time—I was at work. The second time he came, he happened upon my packets of hair and took them to pass out to his family. When I found that the locks of hair were missing, I cried. It was the only time I had cried that year. No, that's not accurate, it's the only time I could remember crying since

childhood. It was a cry of rage. I may have threatened to kill him. If I had had the opportunity I might have carried that threat out. I felt that his stealing the locks of hair was as if he had stolen Tiffany. What if she died and I had nothing left of her? What if she was lost to me completely? I cried alone in the parents' bathroom shower stall of Children's Memorial Hospital. I cried until another parent, who needed to use the shower, knocked on the door.

My daughter did survive—again. I should have been relieved when she went into remission the second time, I should have been thankful. But I wasn't. I did not trust that word "remission." I was not going to be clothes-lined, and fully expected the cancer to resurface again, and again until it killed her. I took good care of my daughter, but I was prepared to lose her, and in that preparation I distanced myself. Other women (never men for some reason) would ask me often, "How do you do it, how have you survived?" I wanted to take them by the throat and shake them shrieking:

"I did it because I had no choice, what else could I do? I had no choice, but to stagger though my life you stupid thing."

But instead, I would say something insipid like, "Oh, I just take one day at a time, I'm just glad that she is doing well, you know, other families at the hospital have lost their children, how can I feel bad?"

But I did feel bad, I felt selfishly bad in spite of the fact that Tiffany's roommate, Juliana, had recently hemorrhaged on the hospital's faded linoleum playroom floor; her cancer diagnosed, but still undefined, in spite of the fact that Juliana's parents had been building a Lego castle with her when blood erupted from her mouth and nose and she wilted to the floor. I was ashamed that I still felt bad for myself and my child, which only made me feel worse. When Tiffany asked where Juliana had gone, I told her that she had gotten better and gone home to stay.

I wondered how and what age I would need to inform my only daughter that she would probably never be able to have children. I agonized over how to help her when the first schoolyard bully pointed out her sunken lymph nodes, her misshaped forehead (an effect of infant cranial radiation), and her glass eye. I set my jaw and determined that the worst thing for Tiffany would be to allow her to feel sorry for herself. I told myself that everything would be fine and she would be okay. But I began to understand that this is what some parents say to their children when they are truly scared, when they are petrified into stoicism, when the admittance of fear could send everything toppling into chaos. It may be what these parents say when they want to cry not *because* of their children, but *for* them.

ROBYN SCHURICHT

I am Weasel

I wait until I hear HIM go,
Hiding against the dirt wall.
He moves away, and does not know.
Slinking around corners, I hear her call,

My lay of the day.
At least until I'm done.

She lies there;
Fluffing her brown tail,
Wrapped around her in care.
She lets out a quiet wail,
Coily unwraps herself, issuing a dare.

No foreplay.
No communication.
Just sex.

I'm done and get off her back.
She lifts her small head, twitching her ears.
HE's back, sensing my tracks.
I slink out, hiding my fears.

I am what some would call a rake.
For I lie in wait,
Always on the make,
For another mate.

My lay of the day.
At least I'm done.

I am Weasel.

NATHAN A. SCHROLL

There is a hole the size of Kansas

I am the half-price lunch
dropped in three-ply plastic wrap "get-a-way"
served to a man-made hole
the size of Kansas
in northern Alaska
where shit freezes
rather than poisoning
those on its fringes.

I am the nibbles and leaf-ends
offered by obesity,
collecting dust and mirth
in a pile of cubic miles
along a stretch of road
where our consumers cannot file.
Machines, cold with moon and warm with sun,
carry the caloric load.

I am the backwash of beers
dribbled by a billion slobs
into rivers of unavailability,
failing to quench the thirst of a single seed.
In rivers of wasted beer-water,
dribbled from a stream
oceans wide and valleys deep—
there is a flowing nowhere.

The form of us circles around
this circus, built of unused tickets
and broken gift-grabbing machines.
Alarm clocks that hesitate awakenings,
these spaces of sleep are evolving.
The dove flies about a great green cove,
fashioned in slimy turkey waste,
waiting to become human oil.

KELLY RETZ

Page -1-

It's been happening more and more lately
It's near the end of the semester
My eyes are wide
open, without blinking
Wide open allows the cool air to dry moisture
Dryness prevents movement

The screen, with only one hundred and forty-two words
Dries my eyes wide open
Dryness fixates my focus on the page number, -1-
Thirteen weeks of dryness and page numbers
Dryness prevents movement

NATHAN SCHROLL

Inherence in Signs

Inherent in signs.
the twelve pack
the butter knife
a shotgun
ducktape
variations in which life is handled
while trees root construction
wind minds the task of obstruction
and rare leaves fall this way.

Who lies by the stream in Spring
to wait their time on better things?
the sparrow
the wrench
a hug
ducktape
elbows through which life is opened
throw open your windows—
please, let the air through
brush, then settle, rearrangement, continuance.

When did "road" speak of travel so
that rock was moved to lessen man's burden?
the roadmap
the flare
a fireside chat
ducktape
flies aren't concerned, life is unavoidable
Brush, fire, smokejumper—human bandaids,
human study indeed.

Since when did work meet toil, at the dry hardened
earth where upside-down oil drips?
the beret
the bridge
a button

ducktape
helping to seal angry mouths, weather-beaten, overdried
misunderstood languages, hopeless senior citizen elections.

Wherefore the apparition unseen does a
poet's administrative allotment fail,
or is it just encampment?

the boy scouts

Phillip Morris

a will

duct tape

When worker bees give life for life

a subtle sacrifice, a setting sun, please milk the blood,

Mrs. Plath—well done.

How many laceless shoes hope to play again with gravity?

cicadas with one flapping tongue

the when

the then

the now

clear are the fields of concepts. The long endless string,

now dead shoes, the fly's dream, an empty closet, no discernable order.

Cigarette teeth and laundry mats, years from purity, move...move..move...

ROBYN SCHURICHT

Bobby

I peek my head around the classroom door,
Hearing people yell, 'No, Bobby, No.'
I smack my lips together, letting him know I'm there.

He looks up, finds me and smacks back.
He runs toward me, with his uneven gait,
Yelling, 'Done—go—going' and reaches for my keys.

I hold out my hand, waiting until I feel
His small, scarred one grasp my fingers and pull—
Pull towards the door—freedom.

We race to the car, 'beep, beeping' the entire way.
He always fits the right key into the lock;
Smarter than anyone gives him credit for.

As I buckle him tightly into the backseat,
He smiles, laughs and gently pets my hand.
He shows his love in small, quiet ways.

We have smack-offs and staring contests
At each red light. He always wins. He tells
Me when the light turns green. "Go. Go."

ANGELA CARTER

heartache

ride it out
like cold cold on cavities
wave acute wash over you
it'll pass
just wait it out
it hurts
just wait it out

you look easy to love
like you'd smell like
steam showers and gentle touch
all the time
good good love
a laugh that surrounds
blankets to feel safe and attractive
solid laughter frozen against the windows
light fog cover
no one can see in
that bolt across your face
you can't hide
lift up up excite
just happy to hear me
the perfect spark of delight

my cheek nestled on your neck
flat hand across your chest
throb constant into my palm
simple rhythm like maybe
this will never break away

radio glow
lime green light envelopes
everything feeling surreal
move-like and not ours
little flash of time
7:18 wait now 9:20
you are the song i will fight
to hear through static
i will miss that about us
the connection

all of it now
just straining swimming common
just something breaking soft away

ELENA HALICZER

October

For you the moon
is a peeled apricot
I hold high in my hands

Querida
do you know
butterflies have come
to my ears in the night
as it pulls the shutters
to my eyes

Mine pale
and yours darken
in my memory

Oh sweetness
that you could
taste this moon

Tonight you must be menstruating
or I would not be thinking your hair is curled
it is straight I know

This is the time
when we should be talking
about intercourse, mating
not destiny or fate
but red earth
hilltops, cycling
crying over bruises

Little one, bird
you complicate me

It's true
I relish my sleep
but it's you who must be coaxed awake

You are the dark bird
calling irresponsibly

loud with hungers
love antics

I see your eyes now
where darkness pulls apart

They are golden
and hold the edge of shadow

ELENA HALICZER

Unknow

You fall through us
in our questioning

the smattering of detail
which must become a life

You emerge in us
as egotism—naming of the self

in the display of love at the outset

but formlessness overcomes sense

where does this body fold, where can it go

and when it fears is it not also curious
to the end of enclosure

the ribs, toe bones
crease below the breast
the timing of breath

all that risks breaking
refusing to bend

ELENA HALICZER

Paint

We must become
of sullenness
divine

nude and quiet
full and rounded
pared of our sins

your
molten iris
where swirls
desire reclining

on a fabric
the bared wending
of your hairy sex

you're dressed of
love, fine intelligence

oil in the name
of deliberation
has curved the angles
of your actual body
and it is still wet

the stem, flute, and
sit of blood aflush
is on your skin

where you lie this afternoon
my heart is split
for your wetness, dew
will never dry

it will
promise

infinite

