This representative collection of writing by Notre Dame students is published through the Creative Writing Program in the Department of English. Each year, a new editorial board consisting of graduate students solicits and selects manuscripts & oversees the production of the journal in order to encourage creativity & recognize student writing of notable quality.

Managing Editor: Dev Varma
Prose Editor: Garret Travis
Poetry Editor: Rachel Zavecz
Editors: Jace Brittain, Paul Cunningham, Ae Hee Lee, Thirii Myint, Nichole Riggs, Sarah Roth, Alethea Tusher
Assistant Editors: Trini Bui, Charlie Ducey, Jacqueline Cassidy, Natalie Kim, Megan McCormack, Robert Ryan
Design & Layout: Chris Holdaway
Copyediting: Paul Cunningham, Nichole Riggs, Sarah Roth, Garret Travis
Cover Artwork: Garret Travis, Chris Holdaway


Copyright 2015 by Re:Visions
Dear Readers,

This year’s submissions displayed a range of talent and verve for literary and visual art of all shapes and sizes. We are honored to curate for you an enthralling experience that will likely change the way you see the world both on campus and off. We hope you enjoy.

Thanks for picking up Re:Visions.

Sincerely,

The Editors
CONTENTS

ART

GINGER BROSTOWSKI

Donkey 17

JACQUELINE CASSIDY

General Confederation of Labour Protest Musée de l'Armée Paris 38

ANN MANGANO

The Depression 83

POETRY

LUCAS GARCIA

manifesto 11

KEITH LOH

In September 13

MARY GRACE MANGANO

Quasi-Haiku: Blue Night (La Notte Azzurro) 14

DIEGO LOPEZ

Mission Statement 15

Numerical Self-Portrait 16
VIENNA WAGNER

The New Year 22
Aphasia’s Odyssey 23

JORDAN DORNEY

O Rotten Michigan 35

ROBERT DORENBUSCH

When Will They Scratch the Sky? 36

JACQUELINE CASSIDY

Toasted 50
Hero of Newerth 51
El Jako (Manu Chao) 52

ALLISON GRIFFITH

Postcard 58
McDonald’s Menu 59
A Short Film 60

NATALIE KIM

Carnivalesque 64
Automatons, Electric Flux & Owl-Eyes 65

ARIEL CLARK-SEMYCK

Music Boxed 76
To the white boys 77

JACK PIETROWICZ

Renaissance 80

LAURA GRUSZKA

Another Goodbye to Elisa 81
GERARD LEDLEY
Lament 90
El Peligro de Cejas 91

TESS GUNTY
Rosary Stew 103
Growing Up 105
Millennial Pen Pal 107

SINEAD O’DONOVAN
Delft School 128

MCKENZIE HIGHTOWER
Dissonance 129

JULIA ROSE LEWIS
Dear Biologist, 130
Re: Where Are Your Dreams Turtle? 131

PROSE

CHARLIE DUCEY
The Death of Moths 18
Organized Chaos as Philosophy 40

DAKOTA CONNELL-LEDWON
It Became a Thing 25

GREGORY DUFFY
Salt 28
TESS GUNTY
   Cartoon Wounds  54

LUCAS GARCIA
   Novena  61

MALAVIKA PRASEED
   Hoops  67

MIRANDA HERRERA
   Another Place  84

MONICA GORMAN
   Fever Dream  92

ROBERT RYAN
   Big Enough for Two  109

MEGAN MCCORMACK
   To Find a Fox  118

CONTRIBUTORS  133
whether art must do anything is a question for philosophers
artists know what art can do and must answer the question:
what will your art do?

this is my manifesto
i will listen to the rumblings from beneath power structures, canon-tyrants
and from beneath ivory towers
i will go and exhume the voices being silenced
i will cherish the question, i will not trust certainty
i will wrap the double helix of the story around myself as an inheritance
i will take these reminders and tack them up in my mind, and connect them
with red string so that they are not forgotten:

originality is variation and variation is evolution and
evolution is reiteration and it is a constant student
the constant student is one whose compassion can learn from
itself, and can scream and weep and roar
the constant student must stand up and sit-in and walk-out and
keep their eyes open when the world around them shakes
the constant student must learn from the wounds of
others
must ask permission to enter them
must never think that the wound is theirs
because they are inhabiting it.
a wound must be given the opportunity to heal
do not carve a wound your characters must
claw themselves out of
war is a wound that cannot be written
war is not a question
war must be answered even if the answer is impossible
the constant student must see that the body is at war with power
must be awake
must dream
must use the point of their pen lightly so as to avoid turning ink
into blood

art is
the artist extrapolates upon this existence, elucidates shivering
bones and glowing skulls, falls face first into a flower and breathes in ocean
water
an artist shows contrast and sameness and holds a
mirror to themselves holding a mirror to the world
an artist embraces imperfection but never mediocrity
an artist knows that value can be a trap
an artist is the red string that winds around tacked reminders in
their heads, is the bridge between the mind and the body of one person and
the mind and body of another
this manifesto is not art nor a promise nor a threat it is a voice and like all
voices, it needs only an opportunity to be heard
In September I saw orchids standing in water. Their stems were gorged, warped, and pulping. Their keeper – I passed him, but only when I called to him did I see the red under his fingernails. Only then did he see the tomato hidden in my palm.

The trees rattled up their anxieties then shuddered and shed them.

My tomato grew cold and the keeper opened his mouth but did not speak. As I pushed the hard rosy orb between his lips I remembered a small town and my pride.

At the first, he only brushed my elbow with his fingertips but soon his wiry hands are gripping my shoulders and it is my blood under his fingernails and his teeth around my forearm. And my tomato down his throat.

We fall together and when we hit the water the orchids dissolve like they are made of sugar. They dissolve apathetically, unapologetically. I feel my bones exhale and the bubbles crawl under my skin. I rise and rinse myself in a chewy mixture of sugar, blood, and discarded anxieties.
QUASI-HAIKU:

Mary Grace Mangano

Blue Night (La Notte Azzurro)

after Andrea Zanzotto

I woke in blue abundance
blu abbondanza
drop of night
a million wisps of dusk
ciuffi di crepuscolo

Mi sono svegliata in
goccia di notte
un milione di

Around voices ebullient
esprime esuberante
I lilt in the light-fall
caduta
brimming ineffable-full
ineffabile-pieno

Intorno
cadenza nella luce-
traboccante
The following is a work of montage; I do not own any rights to the words included – they are words from the University of Notre Dame Mission Statement, and posts on the website Yik Yak.

The University prides itself on being an environment of teaching and learning / “I refuse to be told that I am racist just because of the color of skin that I was born with”/ that fosters the development in its students of those disciplined habits of mind/ “How ‘bout a black privilege seminar? Some neighborhoods I can’t walk around in without getting mugged.”/, body / “Girls are great and all… but put sex and ass/tits aside and imagine how chill the world would be if they dropped all the fuckin drama”/, and spirit that characterize educated/ “Feminism has literally scared me from having sex with women out of fear of gettin’ brought up on an assault charge after consent was given and then taken away the next day”/ skilled, and free human beings/ “Some people complain about how some yaks are racist and insensitive. Yes there are racist yaks and theyre terrible, but come on. Callin something insensitive just means u dont like someone bein objective”/

In addition, the University seeks to cultivate in its students not only an appreciation/ “I want a wife that cooks cleans and sucks this diiiick”/ for the great achievements of human beings/ “We don’t have huge problems with diversity, gender relations, etc. We have an absolutely massive complaining problem though”/ but also a disciplined sensibility to the poverty/ “I like my men like I like my milk. White and %1”/injustice/ “If the whole point of equality is that we’re all equal, why is diversity such a big thing?”/ and oppression/ “I dislike when people try to make me feel guilty for my parent’s professional success”/ that burden the lives of so many.

The aim is to create a sense of human solidarity/ “Gay people don’t belong here”/ and concern for the common good/ “Black privilege- affirmative action”/ that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice/ “The Ferguson case was 100% the right call”/
NUMERICAL SELF-PORTRAIT

It took no more than 6 dollars to discover we meant nothing to each other/
It took 10 drinks to tell you the truth – I still don’t remember it/ I only hurt
myself 1 time, just to make sure I was still alive/ We told each other 2 lies
as the house burned down around us/ We listened to 4 songs by The Smiths
on the ride back/ December 16th, 8:42pm was the day and time you found
me/ 60 seconds was all it took to break down your walls/ 1 time. 1 time was
enough to make me realize that I was worthless/ It took 18 years until you
ever trusted me/ I told you to be more selfish, so you dug 1 grave/ It took 3
hours to undo 21 years/ You kept count of every lie I ever told you: 5/ We
counted the stars: there are roughly 300,000/ A 5 dollar bus ride was the
best investment I ever made/ I listened for 3 minutes as you died a little
more in the other room/ It took 250,000 dollars to lose your trust/ You
thought you had 5 tumors – the truth was much worse/ All it took was 8
seconds/ I walked 120 steps to freedom/ I have 15 functioning hearts
DONKEY

by Ginger Brostowski
“He’s dead.”
“No. He can’t be.”
“He’s definitely dead.”
“How do you know he’s a he?”
“Whatever. It’s dead. Deader than a Jawa crushed by a Sandcrawler.”
“I dunno, I think he’s just. . . sleeping, er.”
“Spit on it.”
“What?”
“On him. Spit on him. See if he moves.”
“No. C’mon. I’m not gonna. . . He’s sleeping.”
“Fine. I’ll do it.”
“No!”
“Boys!” It was their father who yelled. “Stop fighting. Come on over here. Look at the waterfall.” The two boys clad in rain jackets, oversized and colored like regurgitated rainbows, joined their father by the edge of the murmuring pool into which the cascade of water tumbled, the thin torrent of it rushing down the cliff face like a strand of vaporous rope. The smaller boy tugged at the sleeve of his father’s poncho.
“Dad, Dyer tried to make me spit on a bird.”
“Ignore him, remember? Now, just look at that thing. Pure snowmelt. D’ya know how long it musta taken for the water to carve out that rock there? See it. Do you see what I’m talking about? Coen?”
Coen had wandered back to where the bird lay rigidly just off the asphalt path. He looked at its gray, supine body, its neck curled slightly, the eyes closed. Something about the bird recalled a figure shaped of clay, a smooth malleable statue, the feathers of the wing fluttering a little as the vapor filled air moved over the ground. He thought he saw it shiver. His father had whistled. He found his way back to the water’s edge. Rounded gulps broke
through the breeze-blown rustling of fir trees as the pool swallowed the fist-sized rocks that Dyer tossed into its black surface.

He stared into the blackness. Beneath the glassy surface he saw the dust of disturbed sediments billowing across the shallows like the wave of a sandstorm. In the murkiness he found a pebble with his eye and stared at it until the sound and the substance around it disappeared and the world was a single pebble, simple and serene.

The image of his small round face melted in the distortion of ripples on the water’s mirrored plane as his brother landed another rock into the waterfall’s resting place. He turned his hooded head to his brother. Dyer smiled. He retrieved another stone.

“That’s enough, Dyer,” their father said. He was a tall slim man with binoculars strung around his neck. He looked at his young sons. “Are you ready to head up?”

Dyer took off up the asphalt path, the ruffled soles of his shoes flashing in the light. Their father followed with heavy steps, Coen trailing behind. Stepping hurt his shins. He was growing. In two months’ time he would join his brother in the 6th through 8th junior high on Everest Street.

At the gnarled cedar trunk at the corner of the first turn, Dyer stopped. He waved to his father and younger brother. There was a man at the trunk when they stopped beside him.

“He says we can’t go up,” Dyer said. Their father looked at the man. He had a thick stomach. His face was flecked with moles and sunspots. His moustache was curled and misshapen. He wore glasses and a State Park employee badge.

“What’s going on here?” Their father asked.

“Can’t let anybody up. There’s been an accident. We’re having everyone come down from the top,” the man said.

“Well, will we be able to go up later, then? We’ve driven a long way and my kids here really want to see the view from the top.” Coen looked down at his shoelaces.

“Can’t say, yet.”

“Just what’s goin’ on here?” their father continued. The man glanced at
the children. He seemed to be biting his tongue.

“There’s been an accident,” the man repeated. “We need to clear the trails.” Their father sighed. He patted Dyer’s shoulder. A few hikers hurried past them on the way down.

From that first turn Coen could see the joint rangers’ station and gift shop lodge beside the parking lot not too far away. A crowd was beginning to congregate near the pool where State Park rangers detained them.

“I’m going to need you to head back down,” the man said. Dyer challenged his brother to race, but Coen opted to walk. He was thinking about the bird.

There were moths in these woods: little white ones and brown ones falling like pine needles and large squat ones with fur on their backs and animal eyes on their wings that watched the boys as they wandered down the asphalt. A little white moth fluttered in erratic loops like the orbits of distant moons before Coen’s eyes.

He recalled the moths and butterflies he had seen at the nature museum, pegged to a board behind glass for observation. He asked his father if they were real. Yes, they were real, his father had said.

“So are they dead?” The boy asked. “Well, I don’t see them moving,” his father said. “Do they find them dead?” The boy asked. “What do you mean?” his father replied. “Do the museum people find them dead, or do they have to kill them to put them on the board?” The boy continued. “I think they must probably kill them.” “Why?” “So we can look at them, Coen. Aren’t they pretty? Look at this one with the blue and orange on it.” He hadn’t looked at one in particular. He just stared at the pinned up animals, focused on the nails driven through their thoraxes and thought about wolves and bears and household pets being pinned up on a wall for all to see.

They had been waiting for some ten minutes when they first saw him through the tree line. He was being carried by two paramedics on a stretcher down the hitch-back trails, having a third administer CPR when the trio paused at regular intervals until he was brought down to the ambulance in the parking lot of the combination rangers’ station and gift store (including a concessions’ stand called ‘Roaring Waters Snack Shack,’ where Dyer begged
to buy a vanilla and chocolate swirl soft served as they waited). Their father
rested his hands on a shoulder of each of the boys as the paramedics reached
the ambulance. His grip was tight. In the stretcher the man’s face was ob-
curred, only the wide inverted parabola of his chest visible as it shot upward
from the stretcher, pale as a newborn beluga whale after the shock delivered
by the defibrillator patches placed below his left nipple and right rib cage,
v vanishing then beneath the stretcher’s side, and the hand hanging out from
the edge limp but possibly still alive, Dyer’s face horrified and pale as the
body was jostled into the back of the ambulance, the doors closing, paramed-
ics in tow, the vehicle driving away in a miasma of dust and yellow-red light,
the whirling blare of sirens rising and falling like a child’s whine, stretching
out into the waterfall moistened air until its sound faded away into nothing.

The whole crowd resumed their walk up to the waterfall’s precipice.
Actual groans were audible, the incident having stalled the hikers for some
thirty minutes all told.

For the first time in months it began to rain. Their father smiled to
himself in light of his prudential foresight with the jackets and poncho. Dyer
began asking about the man in the ambulance and what had happened. Coen
was silent. He traced his steps slowly to the pool. There the bird lay, the feath-
ers dampened by each falling drop. He thought of covering the bird with a
leaf. He thought of taking it home and caging it and nursing it back to life.
He thought of a shoebox. He thought of laying the bird in the shoebox and
burying it in their backyard by the tree that he and Dyer had climbed when
they were younger. He thought of its gray-white form pinned to a wall.

Colored and wet, the masses streamed up the thin path of asphalt, and
their father handed Coen a crinkled five dollar bill where he stood beside
Dyer, telling his elder son that, yes, now you may go with your brother to buy
a chocolate-vanilla swirl ice cream cone from the snack shack for the hike up.
You gave me a painted heron
for our New Year’s anniversary
when we ate bargain pizza – Supreme
with green olives, H-E-R-O-N sounds
like H-E-R-R-E-N, “gentlemen”
in German, and I suppose you are gentle
when your hands rub every muscle
on my aching back until I twist
catlike away from your grasp and my spine
cracks like a leather-coated whip.
I am Austrian, Vienna Marie Wagner,
named for the hometown of Hitler, Freud,
and Maria Von Trapp.

You are from Die Schwiez, Switzerland,
the land of milk chocolate and secret accounts,
where wealthy men bury cash and children
still flee the holocaust, ghostlike in the Alpine
fog. We watched The Sound of Music,
and I sang, “The Hills Are Alive!” I waved
my arms like a heron or a singing nun.
After the Von Trapp Family Singers
left their convent to climb every mountain,
we embraced, and I stumbled into the white
world like a berry picking, Nazi-fearing,
curtain wearing orphan lost
in the gentle night.
It begins with birthday
cards – the forgetting – first
the fifty year-old son in law
she always despised. One Sunday,
Aphasia speeds past her exit
for the United Church of Christ.
She leaves Arizona and loses
herself in Las Vegas, surrounded
by bikini-clad women and flashing
palm trees. She plays Texas Hold ‘em
at the Bellagio and collects all the chips
but forgets to cash them in for a free
night’s stay.

She can’t remember where she parked
her Silver Thunderbird, so she wanders
down the Strip to the Little White Chapel
where she tries to marry the plump Justice
of the Peace because his Boston accent
reminds her of someone she once loved,
a husband whose memory dangles
like an overripe fruit from the far branches
of her hollowed-out mind.

Aphasia returns from the neon-lit
desert and tries to list her grandchildren’s
names: Mary or Marie, Joy, and maybe
a Dawn. Each rosy-fingered morning,
she rises at 6am with the brimstone sun
and sits under the saguaros to sip her black
pomegranate tea. Aphasia waters
her rhododendrons, until – neglecting
them, too – she wonders why
their white heads wither
in the Tucson heat.
The cramped single smells of sex and death, and looks about as bad as you’d guess. Purple curtains drawn haphazardly across the window. A shred of light glinting off a belt buckle. Spider plant drooping in a corner. Comforter hanging off the bed, frayed edge brushing the cold floor. And lastly, the lifeless body of last night’s hookup sprawled awkwardly across the mattress.

Now, when we say lifeless, you might chuckle and think something along the lines of “Ha, the poor boy was just so tired after all that activity. Orgasms make you sleepy, right?” but you would be incredibly mistaken. When we say lifeless, we mean literally dead. Goodbye. Gone. Bereft of breath. And due to this being the second unfortunate instance of death-by-sex, Liz is beginning to think that her vagina may or may not be extremely cursed.

It’s one thing for your first hookup to drop dead on top of you right after doing the do – he had a weak heart, at least he got to come once before he bit the dust – but for the same thing to happen to the next guy you sleep with… that has to be a little more than a coincidence. Death is not so neat as to strike in the same way twice, after all.

But it must be, or Liz wouldn’t be slowly nudging a guy’s corpse towards the edge of the bed. It lands on the floor with a thunk, the pooling fluids making an incredibly unappetizing sound. Had this cold hunk of meat really made Liz see stars a mere eight hours ago?

The sophomore curls up in the corner of her bed, as if she can escape from this unfortunate phenomenon that seems to have afflicted her and her nether regions. If this is going to become a thing, she should really start going to the boys’ dorms instead of bringing them back to hers.

~*~

Today Liz’s blonde hair is dry and damaged. Her skin is pale and flakey.
A big toenail falls off in the shower. It’s time for another feeding, then. It’s only been a week this time.

Layers of makeup to hide the places where her skin is coming apart, a tight skirt, a crop top, and she’s off, recently-acquired fake tucked into her pushup bra. No money, because it’s not like she’s going to be the one buying drinks.

Liz picks a new bar this time, one that college kids don’t frequent. It’s better to keep the feeding off campus, she’s found. Easier to avoid the innocent majority of students. This bar is ideal – just the right amount of seedy to attract mostly assholes. She leans against the wall, her face randomly illuminated by flashes like lightning – countless selfies taken by girls who are already almost too drunk to hold their phones straight. Stupid stupid twenty-somethings don’t know they’re about to be saved from at least one asshole tonight. Maybe more, since Liz really needs to recharge.

She begins her surveillance. That one isn’t going to try anything worse than a kiss tonight. Bald guy’s just here to look and that in itself is not quite deserving of death. Greasy hair…he looks dangerous. Good. In the end, Liz doesn’t have to do anything to get her mark and her spying is more to make sure that the nice ones stay away. The dangerous ones come to her. Because she’s alone. Young. “Defenseless.”

Greasy Hair saunters up, so close to taking the bait. He opens his mouth – it’s going to be an awful pickup line probably, something like “Baby, did you fall from heaven?” or “That skirt would look way better on my floor” or even “Wanna fuck?” She’s heard them all by now. But before any of a million crude attempts to get into her pants can begin, he’s interrupted.

“Liz! Hey, Liz. What are you doing in a skeezy place like this?”

A tousled head of dark hair blocks part of her vision; Caleb’s not very tall. But good for him, he gets to check “groddy shithole” off his list. It’s scavenger hunt night for the sci fi club, apparently. She vaguely remembers him prattling about it to her in class, although she tried not to listen. Better to limit interaction with the opposite sex to, well, sex.

“Not in the mood, Caleb.” Liz spits out the shortest words possible, trying to keep the wantneedtake out of her voice. But it’s too late, it bleeds
through and she should have more control by now but she is so hungry and she feels her stomach trying to digest itself and her lungs shredding as she breathes. She sees it in his eyes – the slightly glassy stare that she didn’t notice in the first few guys. Boys. They were just college boys. She should really be over that by now.

“Liz, can I give you a ride somewhere? This really isn’t the safest place to hang around. Forget sci-fi, it’s not like I was going to win the hunt.”

Liz isn’t going to win her hunt unless Caleb leaves her alone. A twinge of regret that he won’t realize that she’s actually being nice. And kind of saving his life. Because if she lets him get her anywhere alone, there won’t be a lot left of him.

“I’m good, actually. I was about to leave.” And she jerks her head at Greasy Hair. The proximity of her voice was enough to reel him in minutes ago and he’s sporting that glassy gaze too. He’s still coherent enough to shoot a nasty sneer at a crestfallen Caleb as he follows her out of the bar. Liz never enjoys feeding, but she’s not going to hate this one.
Winter 1

Wake up. Freezing. Groggy eyes. Roll over. A fog of ice crystal formed on the window last night. It is wide open. Shiver. Something is wrong. I can’t remember what, but the pit in my stomach pulls. I reach for the fleece blanket but it is across the room. The sheets are no longer on the bed. I roll off the side and fall to the floor. You moan. You fell off before me in some shared nightmare. The sheet is wrapped across the lower half of your body. I trace the goose bumps across your torso. The white smoke of my exhale clouds your face. I stare through you, my naked body draped over yours. You lean in for a kiss and your sandpaper tongue wraps itself around mine. I explore the caverns of your mouth tasting last night’s cigarettes and stale beer. Everything is so dry. Your fingernail drags from the small of my back all the way to the top of my spine. I can’t feel it, but I used to, and we never change. I can’t feel you under me.

Spring 1

If I have to listen to your brother’s band’s song one more time I will chuck the speaker system out the window. You say it makes you happy, but when I feel sad I put it on just so I can feel worse. Bathe in it. Soak it up. Feel so satisfyingly unhappy that I play it again. I lie on the hardwood floor and make myself as small as I possibly can and shut my eyes tight and feel every corner of sadness. One day I think I’ll drown in it. Just dissolve.

Whitney Houston died so young. She just up and died, maybe because she wanted to. Did she think about me when she died? They said it was the drugs but I think she was just sad. Did anybody ever dance with her? Would I be happy if someone danced with me? Would you dance with me? I don’t like to dance. I think dancing to this damn song would make me die on the spot. Let’s try it, let’s see. You could murder me just by dancing. Maybe that’s
how Whitney Houston died, death by dance partner. Would they arrest you? Would you go to jail? You told me no, you wouldn’t go to jail. You would be sad though. If you were sad, maybe then someone play a song so sickeningly happy and twirl you in circles until you were drowning in sadness. Maybe that’s how everyone dies. We dance and we dance and we die.

I don’t like to dance, but maybe I could learn.

**Summer 1**

Ocean storm. Every time you dip below the surface you make the choice to live or die. I descend and open my eyes to the opaque green nothing. Salt burns them but I keep them open. Heavy rain penetrates the water like tiny bullet holes. I surface and stare at you. Your hair is glued to your face in rivulets. You pull it out of your eyes and mouth and smile. Kiss me, you say, and I do. Salt fills my mouth. Your seaweed tongue finds its way to mine. They intertwine and I worry they might get stuck. A wave crashes over our heads but our mouths remain attached. I can’t breathe but it doesn’t matter. We’ll create an underwater world where no one can find us.

**Fall 1**

Standing behind you, I trace the lines of your sweater and say something that makes you laugh. You sink deep into the fleece fabric. You put your index fingers in my belt loops and pull me toward you. I brush a stray hair behind your ear and wrap my arms around your lower back. I kiss your cheek. Your eyes plead with me.

**Winter 2**


**Spring 2**

Sunrise. We lie in the grass behind your mother’s house. We confess our sins, even though we’ll never change. I feel every blade of grass softly stabbing
my bare back. Your head is on my chest. Every breath I take I watch your head rise and fall so I hold my breath for as long as I can. I am acutely aware of my own heartbeat and wonder if it is pounding in your ears. One last star disappears from existence.

You ask if I would ever run away. Through the thicket beyond the grass, past Mitch’s Corner Café, across the interstate, and into the nothingness. I tell you I already have. Rolling over onto your back you shut your eyes as tight as you can and begin to glow.

Summer 2

I forgot your birthday.

Fall 2

Every night I reach for your hand. I tell you not to pity me but you do anyway. We sit by the fire pit near the lake and you pull your rain jacket tight across your shoulders. The fire dances in your eyes as I inhale you. I swallow the rest of my beer in one swig and pull you to your feet. You scream in feigned distress. We dance and we dance and we dance. In this moment we are gods. We own everything that ever was.

The skies open and torrents drown us. I pull off your jacket and you tear away my shirt. The fire flickers. Steam rises above the shrinking flames. I can’t see you anymore but I feel every inch of your being. Thunder cracks and I push the hair out of your eyes. Your whole body glows. You are our only light as the dying fire breathes its last breath. I slowly pull your shirt over your shoulders and you stare into me. Every inch of you emits light. It engulfs us. We stand naked facing each other. I feel every raindrop bullet puncturing my skin and start to wonder if you see every color I do and if you feel lonely on Sundays and if you know that 107 people die every minute.

You take my hand and lead me to the edge of the water and pull me to the dirt. You glue your lips to mine. I let the lake blanket engulf us and we sink into the depths. I breathe through your lungs and you breathe through mine and we fall asleep in the dark abyss in sheets of dead leaves.
Winter 3

We drive to your father’s house upstate. It’s 6 in the morning and I sit in your passenger seat exploring every bump of your scalp with my fingertips. Your heat broke last week so we shiver together under a fleece blanket. You tell me it’s hard to drive because you only want to look at me. I clutch your knee, sending tremors up your spine. Miles of interstate stretch before us.

“Have you ever thought about dying?” you ask me. I tell you yes, everyday. You ask me what I think it is. I say I think it is like falling asleep forever. Everyone spends life awake, hustling, bustling, pushing, pulling, growing, shrinking, breathing, drowning. Death frees you. Everything becomes nothing. Or, nothing is everything. You shiver.

We arrive in Poughkeepsie at 11am. You pull into the short driveway and we sit next to your Dad’s split-level for an hour before going inside. The windows fog and we only talk about how cold it is outside and how anybody really knows if every snowflake is unique. You take a deep breath and without a word open the car door. As we step toward the front door, I pull you into me, tripping over a chunk of cardboard along the walkway. I’ve never met your father. He probably won’t like me but I don’t care. Standing in front of the door, you take a deep breath and kiss me, hard. Your tongue is made of ice, and I worry I might get frostbite. I pull but my tongue is stuck. The door swings open and you rip it from mine, taking a piece of me with you. Standing at the threshold is a woman who must have dumped an entire bottle of bleach into her parched fray of hair. She either lives in a Pilate’s class or doesn’t eat. She seems a little put out by the situation but her face quickly morphs into feigned excitement. Pushing past me, she puts her hands around your cheeks and shouts in an ungodly pitch about how grown up you look. You push past her. I follow.

Inside I see the man who must be your father. He’s slouched drunk in a lumpy green armchair. His gray pajama suit hugs every protrusion of his louvered body. He gives you a surprised smile. You don’t return it but grasp an empty wine bottle from the shelf. You feel it in your hands and look up from it and stare at the alcoholic in the chair. Your eyes narrow and you lift your arm. The bottle whizzes by me toward his head. It narrowly misses and
smashes against the fireplace, shattering into kaleidoscope pieces that scatter, shining and beautiful in the light of early afternoon. Someone shrieks. You walk out. I follow.

**Spring 3**

We stay in bed for 3 days. You say you don’t need to eat because I am everything you need. A diet of kisses and saltwater. We lie in our own filth of yellowed sheets and morning breath. You pick my brain about the meaning of life. You ask if anyone can really be sure the earth isn’t flat. I say people have seen it from space. But how can we know? I tell you I don’t know.

**Summer 3**


I had a dream that I was inside your ribcage. I swam in your blood and climbed the inside of your skin. I watched your heart beat. I tell you hearts don’t look like we think. They are green and they glow.

**Fall 3**

Ripped jeans, cable sweaters, salty tears.

In October I ask you if it’s possible to miss someone even if you are with them in that moment. You tell me yes, that every moment we spend together makes you miss me more.

**Winter 4**

I am writing you a letter. In it I ask if you think fire could ever be made of ice. Then if you think heaven is real. And what your first memory is. And can anyone really know anyone else? Do you remember the color of the walls in your childhood room? Do you believe in love at first sight? When did you first realize you were going to die? When is the most you have ever cried? Do you want to dance? What did you dream about last night? What are you most afraid of? Then I ask if you want to drive to the convenience store to pick up Q-tips and cigarettes. You tell me how romantic that sounds.
**Spring 4**

I wonder if love can run out. We light a match and it burns and burns but one day we’ll wake up and realize it went out. You don’t even notice it is burning low in its last moments of warmth and light and intensity. Then darkness. The only trace is a smoke trail but even that disappears. You’re left with the charred remains of something that used to be beautiful but is now unrecognizable, useless, sad.

You tell me love is an ocean. You drink and drink from the salty fabric of the sea but never get enough. You don’t realize it is dehydrating you, you just realize you’re thirstier and thirstier so you keep drinking to satisfy the need. But you could never drink the whole ocean, you say. You die before that. You inhale the ocean and it slowly kills you. That’s love, you say. Drowning.

**Summer 4**

We sit at the crest of Rosemont Cliff overlooking the stretching cityscape. Our feet hang over the edge and I wonder if a strong gust of wind could carry us over. I wonder if dying would be worth a moment of flying.

You ask if people know how small they are. They look like worker ants pushing along, covered in suits and paperwork. The sun slowly submerges into the ocean on the canvas horizon. You pull me to my feet. You interlock each of your fingers with mine and squeeze tightly. We dance and we dance and for a moment I think we could fly.

**Fall 4**

We walk under canopies of twisted branches and I hear you breathing. I stop and, for a moment, take you in. You give me a shy smile and I keep staring. You brush a stray strand of hair behind your ear self-consciously. I see every freckle across the bridge of your nose, the tip of every eyelash as they flutter up and down, the tiny wrinkles that will be deep crevasses when you smile that smile in fifty years, your fingertips poking out of my sweatshirt that is two sizes too big for you, every indented line of thread down your corduroy pants. I pull you into me but I don’t kiss you. I want to see you up
close. My eyes wide, I notice each hair of your eyebrow, each pore of your skin, your cinnamon breath. You rest your cheek on my chest, and I rest my chin on your head. We inhale the warm unspoken finality of the moment. I wonder if we are the only two people in the universe to ever experience it. Right now, I miss you most. I slip my hand from behind your back and rest it on the side of your neck and pull your face to mine. I kiss you with the weight of the world, with every sadness, every cry, every question, every happiness, every whisper, every answer. You pull away and touch your lips, as though you felt something different this time. You stare at me and a tear begins to form in your eye. You pull me toward you and hug me harder than you ever have. The rhythm of our breathing matches pace and I smell leaves and dirt and salt and air.

When you let go we stare into each other. You drag my arm around your shoulder and we continue walking, through the thicket beyond the grass, past Mitch’s Corner Café, across the interstate, and into the nothingness.
Country matters, says the siren of the Midwest:
It’s all lakes and horses and indienne songs,
places you didn’t think anybody lived anymore
any more than castles and keeps. So let’s
be rid of apples for pie and strange berries,
for pie. And your grandmother, she wasn’t
in the war, but she knew of a boy who played piano,
little-fingered, who played piano, and then she didn’t
and married grampy. In her attic, or her basement –
who knows your people well enough to know –
it’s still there. But he, to repeat: not.
Snowfall and evenfall and plain old fall infest you.
Oh sing us of trappers and trappists, missions
of Sundays and not on Sundays;
oh sing us rolling hills and rakish lakes and
the quint-essential experience of man!

(and I swear if you bring up cows or tulips or thunder in the summer air
or the wholesome and secretly perverse among you
I shall write your editors a strongly worded letter made of
gravel and subway cars and the world’s biggest rat –
then Gotham herself shall teach you to hear such tired old things)
When will they see them scratch the sky?
Tethered styles with their antique interiors.
Glass bodies home to money-making-metal.
When did the mountains become so straight? And how deep

Must they dig for them today?
Why stand your guard when you cannot grow taller?

Freeze in the fog and keep the hot from rising. But you all were always frozen – doomed and decaying in your desperate rigid space.

There’s always just one other.
There’s always just one higher.

There’s always one that gawks as the other wafts above your planar face. Kiss the cloud and it will spit on the Top-of-your-head-wipe-down-your-stony-face. You must stand silent as they peddle on inside you. Wait as they must do your reaching for you. Bounded by the tension of your three dimensions that give you only inches as you bake away the day. I see them standing there.
GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR
PROTEST MUSÉE DE L’ARMÉE PARIS
The “Problems of our Times: Belief, Superstition and Opposition to Scientific Progress” discussion of the local chapter of Atheists, Agnostics, and Skeptics was set to convene at 7:30 p.m. in the Jewish Community Center rec room nearby Sophia Julian-Tromps’ duplex on W 32nd Street. Ms. Julian-Tromps had reserved the room a month in advance, covered the cost of promotional flyers out of pocket, and sent emails to those members who had provided active email addresses, Microsoft-Publisher©-made informational pamphlets to those who had not. The first and last names, preferred “atheist / agnostic / skeptic, etc.” designation, and small group discussion number for each registered member was included on a sheet of strip-off nametags, which matched the contact information sheet, pamphlets, and promotional flyers in color scheme and font. The budget had not quite allowed for full-on catering, but Ms. Julian-Tromps had scavenged some vegetable trays with predictably inedible broccoli spears and assorted peppers from her side of the duplex several hours prior. Presently, she was sitting in a folding chair before a plastic prop-up table, tapping the fingers of her left hand in rapid succession, back and forth, in anticipation of the guests’ arrival.

Dr. Larsson was the first to arrive. He came in through the side door in a cardigan and quarter-tucked oxford shirt, glasses firm on his pallid face. The expanse of the exclusively tan-colored rec room rendered him figurine-like from where Ms. Sophia Julian-Tromps sat.

“Why, hello, Ms. Julian!” She turned in her chair to face him, stood, and shook his hand.

“Professor Larsson, thank you so much for agreeing to speak today. I expect a thoroughly interesting testimony. I’m sure all of us will –”

He leaned in several inches from Ms. Julian-Tromps face. “Yes. I feel it necessary to inform you … I am incredibly hung over. The philosophy faculty had a few rounds of drinks after our recent merger with the religious studies
department, in celebration, really.” It was a Wednesday evening.

“Oh. Well, glad to have you here in any state, Professor Larsson.”

“Ms. Julian, call me Doctor Larsson. Please.” He smiled. “Professor is too non-specific, no?”

“Of course. I went ahead and included your proceeding professional title on your nametag.” She stooped, peeled off the nametag and handed it to him. It read:

**William Earl Larsson, Ph.D.**

**Guest Speaker**

**“Atheist”**

**Group B**

“Ms. Julian,” William Earl Larsson, Ph.D.,’s eyes were flickering side to side. He seemed to be performing some kind of top-to-bottom scan, a close-reading (if you will), of the person in front of him.

“Yes, Dr. Larsson?”

“Have you ever been told that you look like a young Jodi Foster?”

Ms. Sophia Julian-Tromps blinked. “Um … no. No, I don’t believe so.”

“Well, you *do*!” He chuckled and walked toward the stage on the east-side of the rather open Jewish Community Center rec room, empty save for the prop-up tables in the room’s middle where Ms. Sophia Julian-Tromps had positioned herself, what appeared to be four blue beverage coolers, such as one might find at a tailgate or outdoor barbeque brisket feed, on the far side of the room’s (west-facing) walls, a stage (made from wooden, two-seater classroom desks), and nine rows of folding chairs (each row consisting of 10 chairs each, except for the front row which was missing one, each row divided along the middle to provide room for an aisle between the 5th and 6th [and in the case of the first row, 4th and 5th] chairs).

As the clock on the west wall continued to tick past the 7:21 position, William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., seated himself, one leg crossed over the opposite thigh, in one of the reserved chairs on the makeshift stage near the podium, withdrew a cigarette from some hidden compartment in his trousers, and proceeded to light up. Ms. Julian-Tromps glanced in his direction, glanced at the sheet of members’ names she had been studying, and glanced back at the
now wafting smoke.

“Dr. Larsson?”

“Hmm?” He took another drag.

“Dr. Larsson, I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but the terms of the Jewish Community Center group reservation agreement, not to mention local city ordinances, stipulate that smoking is not permitted in –”

“Well, I know that Ms. Julian.” He exhaled, smiled, and stubbed out the cigarette on the sole of the loafer crossed over his lap.

The main doors opened. In entered two black-clad figures, one with a bag strapped over shoulder, chin-strap beard, dark-eyes hidden behind rectangular lenses, the other with what can only be described as a goofy, slack-jawed mouth, more teeth than gums, curls of jet-black hair, skinny jeans, and a Grateful Dead Tee. Ms. Julian scanned the list as they approached and prepared a proper hello.

“Eyyyy, Doc Larsson!” It was the slack-jawed one who said this, though both of the newcomers looked stageward. William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., waved obligingly, adjusting his glasses to appraise the young men.

“Christ. Is that Granger and Roth? I didn’t expect you two to actually attend one of my lectures. Christ. You haven’t happened to have done the reading for Thursday yet, have you? Sartre. Existentialism as a Humanism?”

“I have. He hasn’t.” It was the chin-strap bearded one who said this. Granger and Roth walked toward the stage.

“Excuse me, excuse me just a moment,” Ms. Julian-Tromps said. “Would you two just mind telling me who’s who? I actually have nametags for the registered guests, that is, if you did register, which I suppose is rather presumptuous of me to –”

“Rick Granger,” the chin-strapped, at-second-glance-slightly-overweight one said, pointing to his chest. “And this cringy bastard is Tony Roth,” he added, pointing to the slack-jawed one, who gave his cohort a retributive jab in the ribs and advised him to perform, unto himself, a crude anatomical impossibility (i.e., go fuck yourself). She handed them their nametags, which read:
Rick Granger
“Atheist”
Group A

and,

Tony Roth
“Nihilist”
Group E

Granger applied the adhesive band to his chest as Roth eyed his own dubiously.

“Um, Ms.?” he asked.

“Yes? It’s Julian-Tromps, by the way – Ms. Julian-Tromps. You may call me Sophia, if you prefer.”

“Yeah, so, I think there’s a problem here. My ‘ontological designation’ says I’m a nihilist?”

“Yes. That’s what you entered into the online spreadsheet, isn’t it?”

“No. No. I’m a mereological nihilist.”

“Right. Well, my apologies. It was probably truncated due to lack of space.” Ms. Julian-Tromps laughed a laugh that was mostly breath. She grabbed at her chin and began either to claw at or stroke the region near her mouth.

“Yeah, yeah. It’s a big distinction, though. I need that adjectival modifier there.” Roth paused as if expecting to be pressed for an explanation. “You see, a nihilist is just any old asshole who claims he can do whatever he wants because life has no meaning, yada yada, whereas a mereological nihilist, such as myself, holds an actual philosophical position regarding the state of reality, i.e. that simples, i.e. basic, indivisible subatomic particle – quarks, leptons, neutrinos – are the only things that exist and that anything that has parts doesn’t actually exist per se. I mean, a table doesn’t actually exist. It’s just a collection of simples arranged table-wise. But don’t get me wrong. I also hold that objective meaning is falla –”

“Just a moment, please.” Ms. Julian-Tromps turned to address a pair of men who’d entered the rec room. She stooped and turned back to Roth. “Here.” She handed Roth a felt-tipped marker, removed from a children’s
Tupperware utensil box in her official AA&S custom-made tote bag. “Please, adjust as needed.” As the other guests received nametags and cordial welcomes, Roth corrected his nametag and promptly stuck it to his forehead.

By 7:37 a congregation of some 20-25 guests from the ninety-person list serve ranging all across the spectrum from skeptic to convinced atheist had seated themselves in the Jewish Community Center’s rec room’s folding chairs as Ms. Julian-Tromps introduced the time table and guest speaker for the first installment of the AA&S Problems of our Times “Spring into Science” lecture series.

After a round of discordant applause, William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., walked to the podium and took the mic. He coughed. He unfolded a sheet of notes, wiped his brow, folded the sheet of notes, and smiled.

“Hello, fellow unbelievers.” He smiled. The crowd was silent. “I jest, I jest. We need not define ourselves by what we are not. But no, really, glad to be here. A real important topic today – belief, superstition, and, let’s not forget, opposition to my second favorite field after philosophy, science and the progress thereof.” The clock on the west wall ticked. “At any rate, I’d like first to thank Ms. Julian for organizing the event and all of you for attending, including a number of students of mine –”

Tony Roth discharged a shout from his spot next to Granger in the all but vacant back row.

“And of course my colleagues Jeremiah and Leopold Stout, who not only hold concurrent professorships in my department of philosophy, but are themselves rather accomplished in the fields of mathematics and chemistry, respectively.”

The two men of receding and graying hairline collectively known as the Brothers Stout, who sat third and fourth from the left in the first row, supplemented the remark with pattering golf claps.

“On to the main course. As we all know, the world consists of a great many people of varying intellectual capacities and disparate points of view regarding life and the universe, views that often conflict and disagree. For instance, a great many of us here, I suspect, know that the world is round.” Ms. Julian-Tromps clicked her pen. Agnostic Henry Elroy, third row fifth
from right, scratched his temple. “Whereas others may think that the world is a flat plane upon the back of an elephant standing atop an infinite stack of gargantuan turtles. The point here is that truth cannot conflict with truth. The world cannot be both round and flat, nor can it be both 4 billion and only 4000 years old. These are logical contradictions, like a circular square. By definition, holding both views as true is logically inconsistent. Only one can stand.”

“What I am proposing to you tonight is that two worldviews are in conflict, and one alone will triumph, burying the other in the graveyard of discarded and outdated views to which the flatness of the earth and the existence of giant turtles already belong. These two views are quite simple. In many ways, you are all familiar with both of them. On the one hand, there is the worldview of science and knowledge, which seeks to investigate and understand the observable, testable processes of the universe to advance human life and learning. On the other hand is the worldview of the mystic and the witchdoctor, which founds itself on superstition and unproven beliefs, which seeks to stagnate human progress under the yoke of supernatural deities. I propose that the first of these views is the truth, supported by scientific findings and the logic of well-reasoned philosophy, and the second is absolutely false, lacking any empirical evidence or sound arguments in its favor.”

Sitting in the leftmost seat of the front row, Ms. Julian Tromps had written the following evenly spaced, 1” by 1.25” margins notes on yellow stationary:

**SUBJ:** Prof. William Earl Larson, Ph.D., “Spring into Science” Lect. 1,


I. Slightly humorous opening (falls flat)

-EX: round v. flat world

POINT: truth CANNOT ≠ truth

II. THESIS: 2 World Views

(1) Scientific Knowledge (henceforth SK)
(2) Religious Superstitious (henceforth RS)

- SK true, RS false (apparent)

William Earl Larsson, Ph.D. coughed.

“First, I’d like to touch on the notion of belief. It can be said that any proposition about the nature of reality is a belief: that the sky is blue, that the moon is made of gelatin.” He paused in expectation of something. “After all, any standard philosophical encyclopedia defines knowledge as true, justified belief. However, when I speak of belief, I mean propositions that have not transmuted, so to speak, into knowledge through proper justification and demonstration of truth. For example, an ancient tribesman might hold the belief that splitting an infant’s head open will produce clean water.” William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., squinted. He fixed his glasses, pulled at his collar. “This belief, of course, flies in the face of our experience. What’s more, he has no reason to think a baby’s head is any kind of canteen. When he goes to swing his club, he will tragically find his belief to be wrong – unjustified and untrue. But let’s say that this voodoo shaman or what have you has smacked some other round objects – melons or whatever the hell bushmen eat – and found that they produce water. Seeing that the harmless infant’s dome resembles the curvature of said melon, the tribesman actually has a reason to crush the child’s cranium. But, again, he will find that experience will prove him wrong. His belief is justified, but untrue.

“When we examine beliefs from our first worldview of science and knowledge, we see that they are justified – we have theoretical reasons to believe, say, that the earth is round, from the shifting of constellations and so forth – and these beliefs are true; they correspond to evidence in the world around us. When we look at the beliefs of the second worldview, however, we see that they tend more towards those of the infanticidal shaman. Take, for example, the circus act that is the Catholic Eucharist. Despite evidence to the contrary, Catholics contend that thin wafers of bread transubstantiate into the literal flesh of a first century Palestinian.” Atheist Cheryl Immingten, second row far right, guffawed. “Not only are they wrong, the vast majority have no reason to believe in this Eucharistic transformation – only the clergy
know the absurd theology behind it.” William Earl Larsson, Ph.D. coughed. “Hell, even I don’t know the theology behind it. Does anyone happen to know?” Leopold Stout had fashioned a moustache for himself out of his left hand’s pinky finger. “Of course not. Because there’s nothing to know about it. Such beliefs are without justification or truth. That’s why we ought not to subscribe to religion’s bare beliefs and the notion of God. It’s sloppy reasoning. As educated people, we wouldn’t be justified in living our lives by it.”

“Now, the foolish aspect I’ve observed in a number of these examples of bold, unproven belief pertains to their substance. They are, above all, superstitious. Superstition leaves …” William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., gestured at the far wall. “I’m sorry. Could someone please remove that Star of David over there? Sorry, I’ve been staring at it the whole duration of this speech. It’s incredibly distracting.” He waited for Leopold to walk the length of the rec room. “God, it’s like I’m being watched.”

Leopold, struggling at first to reach the Jewish emblem, removed the thorny, contorted star and walked it over to what appeared to the set of blue beverage coolers against the far wall upon which he set down the relic. William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., cleared his throat. “Ooo. Some kind of black magic is amuck. Make sure the front door is smeared with the blood of a yearling lamb, eh?” The Brothers Stout and a few stray skeptics supplied suppressed laughter. Sophia Julian-Tromps forced a breathy laugh. Once he collected himself, Dr. Larsson resumed his speech.

“Now, superstition leaves us defenseless in the world of fact. It foregoes reason, draws assumptions, and commits contradictions without reservation. To place trust in a being unknown and unproven, to expect an infant’s head to produce water – these beliefs go against reason and experience. They are … irrational, comprende?” William Earl Larsson rubbed his forehead. “Well, I had something else to say about that … moving on.” Ms. Julian-Tromps observed that the philosophy chair’s notes had slid to the desktops on which he was standing, right below the podium but not quite directly behind such that a quick stoop would not allow for their discrete retrieval.

“Now, beliefs without justification, superstitions among them, pervade the second worldview I’ve mentioned, rendering it incompatible with reason
and truth. What’s more, this same worldview impinges on the progress of the first, truthful worldview of science and knowledge. We see this all the time: the Christian-spearheaded opposition to the teaching of Darwin’s brilliant theory of evolution, picket lines protesting stem-cell research, and religious invalids refusing medical treatment to their dying children because they just know that their God – who sees fit to permit genocide, war, typhoons and forest fires – will intervene on their behalf to save his pious adherents.

“The truth, my friends, is that the first of these worldviews delivers to us the true nature of existence through experimental evidence – evidence!” Jeremiah Stout flinched fractionally in response. “The second, as the fine British atheistic poet Philip Larkin once wrote, is but a quote ‘vast moth-eaten musical brocade created to pretend we never die.’ End quote. Yes, there is indeed a cost of throwing off the garb of superstition. As Nietzsche writes, and we of all people must not forget, ‘God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him, et cetera, et cetera, Who will wipe the blood off of us?’ Well, I propose that we will. We do not need the laws inscribed on stone tablets – which did not exist, of course – to guide our actions. We do not need God’s wrath to deter evil acts, nor do we need his eternal reward to promote good. We have goodness. It’s inside us all. And it’s up to us, people of reason and intellect, to lead the way. Goodness for its own sake – that will be our rallying call. Under the auspices of reason and knowledge, we can confront a world lacking any apparent meaning, and transform it into a place of goodness and joy.”

Dr. Larsson looked at his scattered audience. Their eyes were bright. He coughed. He scanned their faces. “Thank you.”

Roth stood and clapped. Agnostic Henry Elroy stood and clapped. Skeptic John “Try Me” Clay stood and clapped. Granger hooted and pulled Roth by his shirt sleeve back to his seat. The Brothers Stout added to the crescendo with sputtering golf claps. Atheist Paul Jacobson removed his glasses and wiped the corner of his eye. And Ms. Julian-Tromps dotted the last “i” on her fifth page of notes.

At 8:00 on the dot, Ms. Julian-Tromps stood, commended the much-applauded Dr. Larsson, and began announcing the order for small groups, inviting the guests to venture to the prop-up table for refreshments during
the five minute window between the keynote speech and session one of small group discussion.

Roth had walked over to the strange blue beverage coolers to search for a drink. He knelt, unlatched the cooler top and peered in. Looking back at William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., mouth agape, he beckoned.

“What is it? What is it, Roth?”

“Doc Larsson … it’s wine. And hard liquor.”

The discovery of the Champagne and wine bottles left over from a recent bar- or bat mitzvah quickly escalated into a full-scale mixer, the conviviality and debauch of which lay somewhere between that of an upper-middle-class open bar wedding reception and a post-midterm’s Alpha Tau Omega frat-house party. For wont of glasses, the AA&S members sipped their spirits directly from the bottles, handing them off by their long necks as if they were water fowl shot dead and raised in triumph. They toasted to humanity and wisdom and scientific progress, and William Earl Larsson, Ph.D., proposed a toast to memorialize the death of the Holy Ghost and commemorate this congregation, and the Brothers Stout began pouring blood red Cabernet Sauvignon into the empty vegetable trays and drinking from it sideways and supine on the prop-up table, which collapsed after the first round, and skeptic John “Try Me” Clay stood calmly in the rec room’s middle leading conversation on manifold topics of public controversy, and Cheryl Immington found out how to operate the rec room’s speakers which spouted first recitations in Hebrew and then top 40 hits when tuned to local FM radio, while Granger and Roth ran down to the corner minimart for Dixie cups used to dole out the last of the bar- or bat mitzvah liquor, and before they knew it Roth was on all fours challenged Granger and whoever else damn-well pleased to a bear crawl race, a challenge which William Earl Larsson, Ph.D. readily accepted, (Granger jeering and commenting on the apparent ridiculousness of it). And Ms. Sophia Julian-Tromps stood in the middle of it all trying to keep the wine from spilling on the $45 per hour rented floor space but ultimately resolved to sit in her folding chair, arms crossed, looking at the fluorescent ceiling lights and whistling Bruce Springsteen songs as the lecture entered its second unplanned hour.
it’s nothing personal.
the Tara Lipinski – the Keith Haring body
sooner of later – 3D piles
if toes pick lands – basically slashed
rubbing face with chiken Nuggets  I drool deadmau5  curled with a snuggie w/out arms  but he’ll make it with his sword and his headset and his nuggets  the black surgical fish with a gun in his hand
EL JAKO
(MANU CHAO)

child child
the thing goes most wrong
you have toquao ill luck
that carries you toward death

because I am el pajaro jako
when I want I kill jaibo y you I will kill

avenue a: voici le jour
avenue b: va ici la junky
avenue c: no hay sauver
death avenue waits for you

chaval child
tu will be grabbed
I see you hang out
y I will make of you a bastard

because I am el pajaro jako
when I want I kill jaibo y you mataré

you echo a ruina
desperate waiting in la corner
i am tu vitamin
stand up! pay, y walk
avenue a: aquí viene la journée
avenue b: aquí va la addict
avenue c: it’s an emergencia
O.D.O.D. in alphabet city

I am el pajaro jako when i want i kill

Killit al ancient
rob him al brother
come! that I give you the hand
In a back room of a third story apartment, cartoon wounds bleed pink. His are the wrong hands, so she lets orange pith white the blacks of her eyes as she closes them like Spanish shutters, like waning salesmen. They were strangers before that night, he and she. Strangers still. The party has ended and she has stayed. Tonight, he is a television character, a serial killer – a heroic one. A Good Guy Despite the Odds. She is a slutty zombie. After smoking some of Amy’s strong stuff, high as helicopters, they stared at each other, terrified. They have since sunk calm (still drunk). Things percolate back to lucid pixels, hour by hour, breath by blink.

They have let Things happen, alone in a dark room. With him she has a moth mouth, fluttering and fragile, too dry. His mouth is fished. He gifts her the belly-up, shore-washed result. She is his egg to crack. He is her sand bucket of arsenic. So on and so forth. Two and a half decades old, they were nursed on televised terror and imported magic. They have impractical degrees. They are not soldiers. They are not Oprah. They live inside bright glass. One day, they will have arthritis.

If I Googled you, streams her neon whisper, what pictures would show up? What a question. His words nest in a mouthful of her hair, dyed blue. The acrid taste of hairspray.

For me, she says, it would be all birds and butterflies and shit. Delicate, migratory things – you know?

Mm. He doesn’t. He’s starting to regret this.

In the dark, she moves. Darkness mixed with alcohol is like bathwater. It renders bodies slow and warm, slippery and agreeable. She wants something else, something other than the wrong, fished mouth, so she conjures memory-chocolate. A disc of Guajilo Chili chocolate she bought with another someone, the right someone, east from here. Everyone calls me Blue, buds a fraught whisper from her throat. No one calls her Blue. Her name is Jane.
He is tall. Her neck hurts. It is a hot room, it is a broken lock. Outside, two stories down, flower beds and pigeons shiver against wintered pavement.

*I go by J,* he replies. He does. They have been through this. *You’ve got a color, I’ve got a letter.*

*It’s a recession,* she says. She counts sheep while he unzips her dress, her torn dress, stained with homemade blood (a WikiHow recipe). His hands are cold, and she thinks of refrigerated chicken. Raw. *But I’m still in the market for a broken heart,* she whispers. Her sounds fuzz static.

Now his hands recoil from her bare back, as if he has encountered scales. Behind his closed eyes, things drown and bloom and pool. Fragments unfragment; there is a thawing geometry of frozen lust. He pictures a melting ice sculpture – of a deer, maybe. No. A bear. A swan? He turns from her and opens a window. Cold coils around their flesh. She is not what he wants. She is bitter and sharp. Melodramatic. Pointy. The next day, in the shower, he will articulate to himself the problem: *she’s got a complicated face, but she’s just a bad finger painting in the Louvre, somebody’s mistake, misplaced.*

Now, he can’t think of anything besides the fact that she is not Leah Thompson.

In the ghost breath of the open window, eyes fixed on J’s bony wrists, Jane comes to the sudden conclusion that J is not man enough, not monster enough, to kindle within her the stylish melancholy she so deserves. She notices a glass-encased baseball on a shelf. Zoolander, Sports Illustrated, and Hangover posters on the wall. Now, her suspicions are confirmed. Now she knows he will never tear poetry or paintings or avant-garde films from her guts. He will not make her a millennial martyr. He will not sink her eyes or starve the lipid from her thighs. He won’t do.¹

Outside, down the street from Jane and J, a telephone line snakes from the apartment, beyond the train tracks, to a factory. Inside, a man leans against a cold machine after hours. Doug. He is alone. He has broken a window to enter. His knuckles bleed. He trembles; it is the factory where he

1 The room belonged to J’s out of town roommate, not J himself.
works. He has come to light it on fire. He has come to die. He wanted an
important death. Doug has sent a Facebook message to a cousin a few hours
prior, as written confirmation.

Back inside the small apartment, in the far back room, J stands silent,
bound in a slippery fish-skin malaise. He coughs.

*I’m in the market for a broken heart*, Jane repeats.

*There’s gonna be a war*, replies J. He tosses the words out the open win-
dow like paper airplanes.

She giggles, he frowns. Giggling was the wrong move, he thinks.

*Besides*, J says. He zips her dress again, undoes what he undid. *I’m no
good at breaking things I’m allowed to break, anyway*. They both feel awfully
poetic tonight.

*What?* She notices his nose freckles in a splinter of white light. His face
is splotched red and black and white by her zombie makeup.

*There’s no fun in that. It’s un-American*, he says.

Behind the factory, a dog laps from a foamy river. Under the bridge, he
sniffs for garbage, licks dead cigarettes, and discovers a carton of rain-soaked
fries.

*You’d be a shitty assassin*, says Jane.

*Yes*, J inhales. A strangled silence.

A woman one floor above fluffs her wedding gown. The ceremony is the
following morning, she swallows white wine, she cannot sleep.

Jane gores the boy dressed as a serial killer with brimming, dark eyes.
Ink wells. Beetles. You don’t want…? she begins, eyebrows raised in offended
disbelief.

*I…* J pockets his cold hands. *Sorry.*

*What? Is it because – is it because I’m too fat?*

*What? No, you’re –*
Don’t give me that bullshit!
Really, I – I’m just tired. I’m really tired.
She tilts her head, softens. You think I’m wounded. Her teeth glow in the moon light, in the street lights from the window; she smiles, pulls him by his belt. I’m not. Not yet.
Her clowned smile pulls the pores from his skin. You’ll have to find somebody else for the job, he says, pulling away.

Doug makes his final decision in a feverish prayer. He shivers a tail of gasoline across the floor, over the pipes, the metal innards, the machines. Produces a match from a shaking box. Strikes it once, twice, three times. Throws it on the gasoline trail. Eyes ignited, heart swelling. In his last, he is important. His dream come true.

Jane prepares to leave.
Are you hungry? asks J. There’s breadsticks.
Are you fucking kidding me.
A beat.
It’s cold outside, he says. Here, at least take my coat or something.
I don’t want your coat. I don’t want your anything.
Jane leaves his room, exits the apartment, and he watches. He listens to her heels clatter down iron stairs. From his open window, he sees her push open the glass door and breathe into the night, dark blue hair twisted on top of her head like a hurricane.

A factory burns. A man dies. A dog runs while a bride bites her nails. A young woman whispers the word Bluejay in a hushed elegy to no one but herself, and a young man falls asleep on a pile of dirty sheets, boots on.
Where I am is a place
Where lemon water tributaries
Empty into ethylamine oceans.
I bought a new scarf today
(it is below zero, where I am)
and I tied it tight around my
bedpost and ankles.
The Andes are at my left, los
Ojos del Salado seething at me,
Waiting to projectile vomit lava
Onto my pillow.
To my right, the peak of Chimborazo,
I feel so far away from the world.
I got that no-shoe rainbow playplace thing that you like. 
Something about having colorful blood vessels that you could quite possibly 
get lost in 
Love’s a game wanna pay 
For my McFlurry? 
Nice to meet you, 
I’ve been here in line, waiting waiting 
On the world to change, excuse me sir 
But they don’t sell Frosty’s here 
Only “McFlurry, McFlurry!” hurry up 
McWrap me up, McChicken me down, McGriddle my fiddle 
Daily Double! What is, love? 
McKenna, Mackenzie, Michaela. 
Big Mackelmore, can we go thrift shopping for 
Crispy grilled Premium (with cheese)? 
Let’s play a love game play a love game 
And when we get to the slide 
We crawl down it sloooowww just enough 
To feel the Egg White Delight then spin around and 
Crawl back up it 
Every. Time. 
We touch 
I get 
This craving.
A SHORT FILM

“Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all.” – André Breton

I had screwed together my mangled flesh in cold sweat panic.
Knowing my it would melt if I only stopped twisting.
Index finger and thumb miming the Modern Times factory scene,
orchestrated workers,
Back and forth and back and forth, spastic Charlie Chaplins.

But I was no CO and the screws were no soldiers. Not mine to order, would
not guard my body with bayonets in hand, would not kill for my existence.

They were ballerinas. Twirling whirling out of control, spinning spiraling
dancing twisting unraveling.
And with each leap and twirl of the screws, my skin flapped.
Air came at me throwing ninja knives, slicing and dicing my raw innards.
My arms, mushy pink cotton candy tendons.
Flesh was dripping off me in slow, slipping hot fudge drolls.
Flopping to the ground in peach folds.
Clink, clink, clink.
Screws fell to the ground, I watched them skitter away,
And kneeled to the ground, gathering my skin in bundles.
Mesquite Smoke

The Zozobra’s limbs are listless, his empty head staring out above the mass of people. Lorena pulls Christine through the crowd away from the smell of the mesquite pyre. Wait, I want to see it, Christine protests. Lorena’s grip tightens but Christine slips away. Lorena follows her thunderhead of brown hair move closer to the wood and cloth giant, loses her as cheers rise around them. Flames eat their way up the gloomy figure, the smell of smoke like bitter herbs. Christine has long black smears on her cheeks when she slips her hand back into Lorena’s. When they are home, Lorena finds ash when she runs her fingers through Christine’s hair.

Golden Brown

The dough puffs up like the Zozobra’s head after the fire died. Christine knows Lorena prefers the crispy ones. The oil chatters when she pulls the sopapilla out and slips in a pale new square. Christine remembers a story about three men who go into a furnace but she can’t remember how it ends. The dough grumbles a little when she flips it.

Romans 1:26-27

There is a scandal when Lorena and Christine move in together. Children make a wide circle around their house, toe the barrier to see who is the bravest and most disobedient. Lorena gets more attention than Christine, especially when she is nose deep in a combustion engine. Her hair tied up in a black bandana, she tells the customer that her brake fluid is a little low and the woman tells Lorena that she and Christine are living in sin.

“And what sin would that be?” Lorena cannot keep herself from asking. The customer raps her checkbook against her hand, punctuates her recitation. As the woman leaves the garage she tries to fix Lorena with a stare,
but Lorena closes her eyes and smiles with all her teeth, wipes her hand on a soiled chamois.

**Winter Coat**

They sleep heavily beneath an electric blanket. Christine wakes up drenched in sweat, gently peels herself out of the bed. She sits at the kitchen table while she cuts out paper figurines in long chains. That day the grocer had refused the money that Lorena had handed him, refused it from Christine as well. She stands and slips the figures one by one into the wood stove at the back of the house.

**Expectations**

Their announcement inconveniences everyone. They throw a party and are left with a small mountain of miniature gifts. Shoes, blankets, clothes, all far too small for either of them. Christine stops working as her belly expands and disappears almost entirely until mid-April.

How did they do it? the neighbors ask around a diner table. We know how they did it, one of them says, the question is who’s the one they did it with? The neighbors open their eyes wide and stir their coffee and drink it as though they have someone in mind.

Lorena can hear them through the vinyl screen that separates one diner seat from another. She dips her finger into her hot chocolate, picks a bloated marshmallow and pops it into her mouth. It isn’t anyone they know. She stirs the remaining lumps of sugar fluff with her finger and listens to their speculations.

**Congratulations**

Immediate family only, miss. Visitors may take a seat in the waiting room.

**Daughter**

New things appear on the concrete outside their house as the years pass. Loud plastic tricycles, a plastic workbench with plastic hammers and
plastic saws. Laughter, crocodile tears and scraped knees. The neighbors stop by to say hello, to check to see that the little girl is alright, inspecting her for blemishes or spots. They worry for her, growing up in a house like that. She smiles a lot. She is polite. She knows how to tie her tennis shoes. She always shakes their hands goodbye.

**Kindergarten**

Her mothers talk in whispers. Marisa can hear them. She is five years old. She knows how to read; how to count to fifteen. Why can’t we just teach her? She deserves a chance. At what? Never leaving the kitchen and having babies until her teeth fall out? A chance to make her own choice. Her mothers’ voices wrap her in a scratchy blanket and she tells them that they are making her itchy. Lorena comes to pick her up so that Christine can pinch her cheeks and tell her not to worry.

“Don’t let anyone make you cry mi’ja.”

**Babysitter**

I miss how it used to be.
How it used to be was us having sex all the time, Christine.
I can’t miss that?
Lorena’s hand comes up to her cheek. There were problems too, remem-
ber?

Christine bites at Lorena’s fingers, softly, just nipping. Yes, she admits, but we got through them. Lorena passes her thumb over Christine’s lips. We’ll get through this like we did those other things: with patience. Lorena looks Christine in the eyes. Together.
We must scratch, shudder & shed the bones of the decrepit.

The Moon bathes us in her lagoons of crisp incandescence, each of us a naked anomaly. The craters bow before us. We bow back, draped in the universe’s debris of broken stars & spiraling gas and dust.

Can you see us through your kaleidoscope, 3000 miles out?

Make way for our convulsing caravan-parade of sisters, brothers & cousins. We discard our membranes & shiver-dance our way across the moon-weeds, reminding the fluffy dandelions that Lust is a virtue.
AUTOMATONS, ELECTRIC FLUX & OWL-EYES

My owl-eyes say I want some more paisley-printed upholstered seats. Because? Your rabbit-nose twitches. My owl-eyes respond: they work well with the widgets you found the other day.

“The Inevitable Extinction of the Mind” Reads the headline. I’m alive/dead. You’re dead/alive. A vegetative status. The lights flick, tick, tick, flicker. 8 the wall says.

Our eyes meet within the confines of the infinite empty space of—sub species aeternitiatis. Not even God could bake this up on a cookie sheet, wearing his red apron in the little-kitchen he calls the Universe.

Pinkies up & out, we shout the opening statement of the Credo: “In Automatons we trust!”

You’ve actually been dead.

We need to take the electric flux: 
ΦE = EA cos θ

Phi.
Check.
& White-splattered lab coats.
Check.
& I read the list—diagonal.

Input your gray irises.
Check.
& My hangnail from a week ago
Check.
& Now just a pinch of your eyelashes.
Check.

I’ve actually been dead.

Within the meticulous &
spasmodic intervals of our lives,
We conceived of the automatons
that would exist to shepherd us.

The automatons rampage through the fields
uprooting weightless dirt and
trampling over the silence.
The sky struck twilight and bugs swooped in like stars. In the morning there’d be hot, sticky welts on Reva’s face and elbows, as sure as the sun setting fire to her back tomorrow afternoon. Two miles up, two miles back. Her bike still with its rusted chain from February.

He stood in the pocket of the driveway with the basketball under his heel and he asked if she wanted to play.

Again, the same thought crept in: Dad, I’m tired.

And she was tired. Five AM swim practices, sneaking bites of a jam sandwich on her way to Science because she didn’t have a Lunch, tutoring sessions so she’d be first-not-second at Math, violin rehearsals until the strings sliced her fingers. What awaited her – homework, a hasty dinner, and basketball.

Dad, I’m tired.

Three simple words. But he had a way of standing in the shadows, beneath the crepe myrtle blooming pink and white this time of year, letting the leaves cross his face. His feet kept apart, in those high socks he changed into when he saw her coming up the road.

He could always see her, he had eyes that stared through trees.

From inside the house her mother watched, her gaze peeking over slats in the blinds. She saw the way Revathi’s back curved beneath the threadbare backpack, the way her feet shuffled along the sidewalk on her way home from school. She thought about running a bath with scented oils and candles, making fresh cookies swirled with cinnamon, preparing pillows on the couch for Revathi to rest. But she saw her husband standing in the shadows and knew this was not her choice to make. She stepped away from the blinds and started dinner in a dark, quiet house.

Outside in the half-light Reva closed her eyes and hoped for disappearance, but everything remained. Her father with the same brow-raised
grin. The drumbeat began – ball on pavement – peppered with the squeak-scratch of worn tennis shoes. Her father stomped, thundered, danced on his makeshift court bordered by shrubbery and a calm suburban road. The ball swished from hand to hand, through reaching fingers and low branches. Through net.

“Come on, yaar. You can do better than that!” he cried, swooping a hook shot over her head.

As she moved she noticed a crack in her knees. Bending sounded a bowl of Rice Krispies in milk. That’s new. How did – and the ball raced by.

“You’ve gotta pay attention!”

She ran into the shrubbery to find the ball and saw little Elodie Green toddling up the street. She probably hasn’t seen her dad in weeks. Months, maybe.

“Come on, I wanna see ten baskets before it gets dark!”

My dad spends time with me every night.

She scavenged the ball from a bur patch and returned.

* * *

Sweat had a way of congealing on her father’s upper lip. He used to wear a moustache but like the weather, like the color of the sky, like Arjun, that changed every now and then. When Arjun died the moustache sprawled all over his chin and tangled into a grisly black knot, sprinkled with silver. When life caught up the moustache came clean off and her father wouldn’t grieve anymore. And over time the moustache came and went, shaved with the understanding of reality, grown in its ignorance. Today there was nothing but prickled shadow beneath his long, broken nose. The sweat stuck together in rank dewdrops.

The hoop creaked with each basket, groaned as the ball hit backboard. It was older than her, bought for Arjun’s fourth birthday. Her earliest memory was her father raising the hoop as Arjun turned nine. Where other fathers measured their children with pencil marks on a stucco wall, her father used the basketball hoop. Now the hoop stood at full height, it had for five years,
since her brother’s thirteenth birthday.

When Arjun died, Reva’s games began.

She caught her face in a trickle of gutter water and stood aghast at her eyes – heavy, dark, and sunken. They’d gotten worse. When she was twelve a boy in her homeroom told her she looked tired – there were bags under her eyes. That night she crept into her mother’s makeup bag and tried an under-eye concealer. It came out in white paste from a small, squeezy tube, and did nothing. She could have predicted this, her eyes were her mother’s. To be tired and sunken was a family trait. She wondered what her father used, for his eyes glowed as they always did, without the slightest pouch or crease. Always alive.

“Come on, pick it up! You’re Larry Bird, remember? Larry Bird!”

Dad, I’m tired.

* * *

They lived on a street that stretched three miles and ended in cul-de-sacs and petunia patches. Their house was the largest on the block, stark white with a front porch and three stories for just three people. Her father had a good job, a solid job, a job that kept him home and not gallivanting all over the world, as many fathers did. They had enough for vacations and three cars and new clothes whenever she needed, wanted.

She had never been to a thrift shop. Her friends came to school in patchwork skirts and woven blouses, bought from thrift shops and tailored at their mother’s hands. Shopping to them was a grand treasure hunt, a creative endeavor that she longed to know. So late one Saturday, when she was eleven, she rode her bike to the Goodwill with Katherine and Mary Alice. They were blonde girls that wore their hair long and loose, so it fluttered like flags as they rode bikes. Reva’s hair was curly and dark, shorn close to her head. When the helmet came off it stuck to her skull like a matted bowl, and she never had much free time, but Katherine and Mary Alice liked her all the same.

The Goodwill was a warehouse stocked floor to ceiling with card tables and cardboard boxes, hungry shoppers sifting and weighing. Katherine’s
shoes clicked on the grubby tile floors – she led the way. They stood gazing at endless racks of clothes marked WOMEN.

“Come on,” she said. “Let’s take a look around.”

WOMEN. It was a new sight for Reva, whose mother shrugged at even juniors clothing at the department store. She ran her fingers over boat neck sweaters, leather gloves, and leopard print leggings. Secondhand, of course, but she saw stories in the loose threads and missing rhinestones. Where had they been a year ago, two years, five? Would she continue the story?

She came in with birthday money and left with three bags that you needed both hands to lift. Bags you had to hold at the bottom or the plastic straps would break.

“That pink sweater with the fake fur trim will look amazing on you, Reva. You should wear it to school tomorrow,” said Mary Alice.

The next morning Reva woke very early, before the streaks of early dawn, without an alarm clock. She gazed at the pale pink sweater, how the fur tickled her throat and wrists. It was much too large, hanging like a dress on her thin, knobby body.

“It’s supposed to fit like that,” Katherine had said. “That’s why you wear leggings.”

Leggings! Reva looked at them, sleek and black, her very first pair. They hid her scabbed knees and the patches of hair just beginning to grow. Boys wouldn’t make fun of it anymore, they wouldn’t call her Yeti and Sasquatch. She’d be beautiful.

In her ears she hung large, silver hoops that caught the light from the window. Borrowed from Mary Alice – “They’re perfect for you, return ‘em whenever.” She stayed in the mirror for five minutes or two hours, she couldn’t tell.

WOMEN.

She ran downstairs for breakfast, to show her mother.

“What are you wearing?” she said, looking up from the pot of oatmeal she stirred at the gas-burning stove.

“Mary Alice and Katherine took me to the Goodwill, I brought my birthday money.”
“You went to the Goodwill?”

All at once her stomach twisted and ached. She watched as her mother turned off the stove and took everything in – the giant pink sweater with the corner tear and faded white fur, the frayed black leggings, the beaded brooch.

“We are not poor, Revathi. We do not wear secondhand clothing from the Goodwill. There is no need for such things, do you understand?”

“But Mary Alice and Katherine aren’t poor, and they –”

“I don’t care about Mary Alice and Katherine. They are not my daughters. I will not have you wearing someone else’s rags, not now, not ever. And this...what is this?” She plucked an earring and threw it on the floor.

“That’s Mary Alice’s, Mom! She let me borrow them for –”

“You do not borrow anything! I have raised you better than this, Revathi! If you want things, you ask!”

“But you wouldn’t have –”

“No buts!”

It was the first time she’d ever seen her mother this angry. Her mother, always floating in and out and never saying anything with her mouth, only with her sad, sunken eyes. What lit the flame in her today? It terrified Reva, but she stood also transfixed. Fear indeed, but a strange, warped happiness.

“To borrow from the greengrocer’s daughter. God forbid... We have money. We will always, always have money, if nothing else, and you must respect that. You must!”

These last words were a mutter, spoken not to Reva but to the space around them both, to tears that wouldn’t fall. As she trembled over oatmeal, her daughter hid the sweater and leggings, returned the brooch, never wearing them again.

* * *

Dinner wouldn’t last forever. Eventually she’d have to take it off the burners and it would grow cold, very cold. Brown rice, eggplant sabji, and okra sambar. Crispy fried papadum now soggy from the wait. She stood in the doorway and saw how night had swept in, how you needed the streetlights
to see them play, and she knew her husband wouldn’t stop. He’d never stop.

She sank into a chair and closed her eyes – seeing what always came to her, always the same face.

Arjun had been a beautiful child. He had his father’s height and his firm chin, his skin fair like milky tea, a brightness in his smile that she carried in her pocket. She lost it some years ago, lost him. She held the memories to her chest, in case she’d lose them too.

She looked out the window again, her husband’s laughter ringing through the glass. Revathi pushing stray pieces of hair from her red, damp face. A dark, thin face – not beautiful, already etched with deep thought. Her own face, her own plight.

Marry him, Padma. He is a good man. You will never be without. You will have money, as much as you will ever need. It’s all you can hope for, these days.

She decided to keep dinner on the burners, however long it took. She’d wait.

* * *

Reva couldn’t breathe. Shallow, wheezing exhales were all she could muster.

“Take five, then,” said her father. “I’m surprised you’re so tired. Girls these days have no stamina anymore. You still have recess, right?”

I’m thirteen, Dad.

“Well, I can’t have you in this sort of shape for our games. Maybe you should stop walking to school – why don’t you take your bike? Don’t all the kids ride bikes around here?”

Fix it, then. Please.

A car roared into the driveway next door, headlights spattered on the closed garage. A young man walked out.

“Daddy, Daddy!” Elodie Green scrambled from her mother’s arms and to her father’s. Soon she was aloft, flying high over dandelions and pavement and the whole world – as she saw it. The family held each other for a long,
long time. It would’ve made Reva smile the day before.

“I’ll bet he hasn’t been home since July, June maybe. If you can’t be there for your kid you’re too damn young to have one,” her father said.

He passed her the ball, knocking the feeble air from her chest.

“Game on!”

Dad, I’m tired.

* * *

In the days after Arjun no one cried but Reva. She let the tears pass through her and in time she came to know and love the brother watching unseen. She liked to think he was everywhere – in dandelion seeds, in quiet buildings, in warm patches of sunlight streaming from windows. They were small, happy things the two of them shared. He’d always be there.

She tried to tell her mother and father but they wouldn’t listen. Her father spent long hours at work, letting his moustache spiral down his face. Her mother let the tears well up inside her until the heaviness rooted her to a single chair in the living room. They lived off takeout for two and a half weeks. Reva hated the taste of lo mein after that.

“Padma,” her father said one night. “This isn’t cheap.”

She nodded.

Reva thought she’d help. Eight years old – she knew where all the pots and pans were kept, how to tell cardamom from cinnamon, how much water to soak the lentils in. In time she had a little dish of daal all her own, without mustard seeds or jeerakum, but daal all the same.

She couldn’t lift it off the stove.

“Mommy, can you help me with something?”

No answer.

“Mommy, please help!”

A vague sniffling from the other room, then nothing.

She tried to do it herself, and the daal hurtled off the stove and onto the floor, splattering all over the tile and on her bare, scabby knees.

“Mommy, Mommy!”
Her cries echoed in what could have been an empty house.
She cleaned the daal from the floor with a rag and rinsed her feet in cold water, carefully swabbing the bright, burned skin.
Her father had been kinder. Coming home from work he saw her scarred legs. She was trying to cook, she explained, because Mommy was sad.
“Well, look at that, such a big helper. I’m sure the daal would’ve been delicious.”
“But I couldn’t reach the jeerakum.”
“I’ll put the jeerakum on a lower shelf, just for you. Until then, what do you say we go play outside? How about a little basketball?”
Her eyes widened. For years she’d watched Arjun and her father on the court, sweating and yelling and laughing. When they came in the house they spoke to each other as if they’d just returned from a long, long trip. And all Reva had was a cheap souvenir.
“Sure, let’s go!”

***

Chechi, who lived in Texas now, used to faint from time to time. She said the eyesight goes first – shapes lose their form and colors blend into glinting, motionless squares. Then the horizon shifts and the world shifts with it, taking you off balance. Your head throbs and your arms ache and then the world blackens for some time – a minute or two. And then the colors return little by little, and then the shapes.
Reva wasn’t there yet but she feared it. The ball seemed weightless as did her feet, if she moved it was not of her accord. Something moved her. Something brought her arms and legs together in perfect synchronicity. Something saw the basket, fixated on it, knew it.
“There you go, yaar! Come on, I want five more! Gotta get past the defense!”
My name is Reva.
Arjun had been Arjun and her mother was her mother but she was always yaar – what you’d call a neighbor or mailman or a stray dog down the
road.

My name is Reva...

She was a dying star. She saw her father – his scraggy moustache and glistening forehead and half-drawn smile – and knew she couldn’t go on.

Dad, I’m tired.

The thought grew louder and louder with the passing seconds, it pounded at the edges of her heart, her face, her mind.

Dad, I’m tired.

She couldn’t feel the ground anymore. She could have been floating. She saw her mother hovering at the window again, for a moment or two.

Dad, I’m tired.

If she said it everything would shatter, this pieced-up haphazard thing they called a relationship, their coexistence, everything was built upon this – the daily ritual, the test of mettle and will. She couldn’t do it. She couldn’t wipe the manic smile from his face, she couldn’t knock the wind from his chest the way he knocked hers.

But if I don’t say anything I become my mother.

If I don’t say anything I become my mother…

The moon laid a blanket over them as it coasted higher in the sky.

“Dad, I’m tired.”

He stopped moving, lowered his arms. “What?”

“Nothing.”

She sank a layup over his head.
Lapping at that microphone like  
A quick-drip ice cream cone  
I swear you’ve got me  
Wearing waterproof pants  

I don’t care about the girl in your song  

She can get spliced by the spin  
Of my scratched vinyl psyche  
Always skipping at the same  
Point in orbit  
Missing the part  

Where I  
Scribble on your tongue  
With splattered ink pen  
Your voice is mine  

Instead I  
Take to my notebook  
Drill into paper  
With a 10-millimeter screwdriver
TO THE WHITE BOYS

to the white boys
who

saw me (a girl
alone at 2 a.m. walking across campus in
falling snow) and

thought it would be a bit of fun to
scare me
tell me
to go long

pelt!
snowballs!
at my body!
and

whore!
fuck!
you!
bitch!

call me

i just wanted to let you know that

i am

thinking of you

alongside the thought of
a dog eating its own vomit or flies swarming around garbage or a forgotten
piece of shit floating in a public toilet but

i am not

thinking of you

at night because
i am busy thinking of men

in this world

who

are not like you

i am busy thinking of men

who

see me as something more than target practice
cherish me as a companion
ask me before they lay a hand on my body and when

i say yes

kiss oh neck oh grasp oh waist oh weave oh fingers oh hair
got me like
damn
oh my god
wow
and

i just wanted to let you know that
perhaps when you
are older (much older) and you
stop
strangling your feelings
singing lullabies to your biceps
you may
start

thinking of me (a girl
alone at 2 a.m. walking across

campus in

falling snow)
alongside the thought of flowers you never planted or pictures you never painted or rhymes you never wrote or your wife who fakes her orgasms or your daughters who resent your ignorance or your sons who grew into swaggering hunks of meat and each one will be a

snowball!
thrown!
back!
in!
your!
dumb!
struck!
face!
But you will surely kill me,
Sitting spritely sucking sprigs
Of mint and sage on flowery
Days of rest. You romp with pigs
In filthy alcoves wearing saris
Bearing your midriff; so inviting,
It seems to me. The royal we
Would say to thee in dimmer lighting,
“What art thou doing?” Or not to be
that is the question whether or not
to suffer in your orisons. We will see
With open eyes what hearts begot.
You and Bacchus give your toasts:
I am he who with you roasts.
As i showered last week, someone played ‘blue jean
Night’ and ‘god gave me you’ and
A
i
didn’t cry hyperventilate panic break,
Only thought of you. thought of you when i read
The great gatsby because i once gatsbied:
Hoping to dig to a moment, reclaim it, ignore the displaced
Earth in between then and now. fitzgerald says you
can never
Reclaim the past without the dirt that separates.

Gatsby died to know. i knew in a multi-mind pile up—you were in
One of them. (i was too.) we crashed rolled burned stopped
Overlooking goodbye. you insisted i initiated
Destruction and your injuries were worse than mine. i told myself that until i
Bled. i believed for
Years, only now i see we were differently but
Equally injured. suffered

Through a few years and scars but i found help, and i wonder if you moved
On or found help (different help than mine, but

Equally important). now i live move breathe
but will never forget the green light,
Lurid, that throbbed after impact, the country music tinny as we
Ignited. do you swallow
Scorn or reconciliation when you hear
my name? i shower and listen
And sometimes think
the help i hope you found.
THE DEPRESSION
Ann Mangano
Firenze (Cirrus)

The heat of the sun reflects off the pavement. The smell of leather saturates the air. She walks in tennis shoes for her feet are tired and worn. One day was all she was given to explore the city. Women walk the cobblestones in heels and men in dress pants. The stores were beyond the price of her plane ticket and the hopes of her wallet. Window shopping is the remedy. The farther she walks, the more she feels inadequate. She makes a turn and stumbles upon a huge marketplace with rows and rows that go off into the horizon. Sounds of merchants and music fill the air as she walks under the tents, each one trying to win over the passers-by. Shouts and sales were tossed around before her. The magic of the place surrounds her, but the price tags nip and nag. One can only walk so long before the threat of purchase arises. The path narrows before her and it all begins to close in. The lovely music turns to a rhythmic drone. The shouts become yells, and the men become wolves. She runs. The booths on both sides blur as the tunnel constricts. She makes it out onto the street and stops, panting, out of breath. She looks back, and the quaint market buzzes as before. She continues to walk and nears the end the road which opens to a large piazza. Mostly open space, she is surprised to see a large carousel. It at first seemed out of place with the large buildings, busy streets, and fancy shops. She walks toward it. The ride is ornate and beautiful like the rest of the city, but has an innocent charm that is unique to itself. Gold painted trim and colorful portraits grace the outside while the gleaming lights illuminate the riders underneath its top. The porcelain-like horses with red and white feathered hats dance in circles. She cannot look away. Her fingers scour her pockets for change. The horses begin to slow their trot. The coins fall quickly out of her hand into the operator’s. She frolics like a child and hops on the first empty seat she finds. The carousel sets into motion as she grips the bar with both hands. It goes slow at first and then faster and faster.
The whirlwind of lights and colors consume her. The sounds become songs and the lights become hazy orbs chasing her around and around. Everything around her blurs but this time she is not scared. She is rich. The wolves could not catch her, and the money didn’t matter. She is free.

_Five Lands (Black Sands)_

Now she ventures away. Arriving by train but travelling by foot, these lands would be a challenge. To see beauty, she must go through the pain. It was all foreign to her though the pain was not. The journey began with one step. She does not travel alone, but her heart feels alone in the struggle. She looks up at the path before her and cannot seem to grasp its intensity. One step, two, three, up, up, up. Her shoes attempt to grip the rocky beige ground below her as her hands hold on to anything in front. She is out of breath. The air is thick, warm, suffocating. But she needs it. They trudge on with no end in sight. She looks up at the girl in front of her. The girl’s shoes are made for this—tough grip, durable, and comfortable. Hers are not, she is not—made for this. Dust engulfs her body, chokes her soul. The path ahead is so steep she cannot see in front of her. Vertical. Vertical stairs is what she was climbing. Will this ladder reach heaven? As her thoughts elevate, her spirits do too. One more step. One last push. One more reason to keep going. She falls to the ground. Breathing heavily, she looks up from the dust. As it clears, beauty reveals itself before her eyes. What color is it? Blue with more blue and all the colors in between. The heavens touch the earth from dark to light and light to dark. It is one large canvas with all shades painted with delicate brushstrokes. She sits up. All of the colors around her seem to burst to life. The lands of beige and green rise into the blue as if to try and touch its hue. They, as she, are trying to taste its soothing nectar. She lies down again outstretched staring into its depth. Inhale. Exhale. She hears the train in the distance.

_Peter’s Place (Bowspirit)_

Her eyes rise to the ceiling. They fall slowly to the ground. Her head
turns from left to right, right to left, scanning the walls. She examines every inch of the space trying not to miss any minor feature. But there is too much to see all at once. When she turns back, the walls have changed. There is something new to admire. She goes in circles. How does one come to know this place when it transforms with every glance? She closes her eyes, if but a moment, to clear her mind to prepare for the plethora of new stimulating sights. She opens them again. It’s like seeing for the first time. The massive walls rising up from the marble floor focuses her view upwards. The extravagant paintings are heavenly canvas illuminating the walls. The statues tower like marble gods. Her eyes are blinded by the beams of light pouring in through the glass in the dome above. She basks in the glow. She rests in the warmth. Her footsteps become like clouds and her breath like mist. The place makes her light and she does not want to leave. She begins to go in circles because circles never end. She breathes in the incense and it rises within her. The light bathes her in grace. It burns from the inside out but it does not harm her. She comes alive. Her heart is engulfed in flames. For once, she understands. Overwhelming calm drowns the heart. Soft breath. Clear thoughts. Her eyes rise to the ceiling. They fall slowly to the ground. She goes in circles because circles never end.

**Pomp and Vestige (Reach for the Dead)**

Everyone knows the story. Volcano erupts, people die. She sits in her history class with her head resting on her hands as she fights slumber. She wonders what it was like during those times. Would getting devoured by lava be less tortuous than being here right now? She thinks about it. The cobblestone roads hazily lie out before her, and she begins to walk. The smell of baking bread captures her nose and the sound of dogs barking catches her ears. It seems like a normal day, everyone going about their own business. She feels like it’s history, but present. The language is different, the culture is odd. She takes a step slowly and carefully because she feels almost dizzy. Then she feels a tremor. The whole ground shakes beneath her, and she falls to the ground. Loud explosions follow. She looks up and sees a fire mountain.
It is rumbling, hissing, roaring. Panic ensues. All the people around her run. She gets up and runs, but she does not know where to go. She does not know where she is. The fire roars on the mountain, spewing lava rain to the ground. A large plume of dust and ash propels into the sky. Then like a tsunami with all its force rushes towards the town, engulfing all in its path. It comes closer and closer. The screams turn to silence. The rumbling gets louder and louder. The people fall before her eyes. She runs. White. She falls. Grey. She screams. Black. She’s silent.

She opens her eyes. Her teacher stands over her now with a concerned look on his face. She sits up and decides it’d be better to listen.

**Assistance (Ambre)**

It was the most modest extravagant thing she had ever seen. They say you go to find your faith. They say you go on pilgrimage. They say you go for peace. She goes because she loves the countryside and wants to get away for a while. The rolling hills and brisk air soothe her aching soul. She looks out at the tiny town and wonders who chose the color. All of the buildings were made of the same rustic, light tan stone. The green surrounding it seems to swallow it up into the ground. But she loves it anyway. She wanders the brick roads to pass the time. There are many little shops and churches that have been there forever. Why not? She walks into one. As she sits down, she cannot help but be in awe of her surroundings. It is not like any other church she had been in before. It does not have gold spires reaching up to heaven or marble statues adorning the altar. It has beautiful frescoes on the walls all in earthy tones depicting the history of the church and its founder. It is breathtaking, but not overwhelming. Music begins to play and she realizes a mass is about to start. She gets up quickly, not wanting to take part. She wanders to a set of stairs and decides to go down to avoid the procession. The smaller chapel downstairs is quiet and only a few people were sitting in the wooden pews. The silence sinks into her soul. She sits. Only then does she realize where she is. A tomb rests before her. A saint rests before her. Here lies St. Francis.
engraved on a plaque. She does not know what to do. She did not mean to walk into a grave, but what could she do now? She remains seated. Thoughts rush through her mind—memories of the day, the trip, her life. Why is she here? Why does she always run from her problems? Why is she on earth? Why does he have to—suddenly, they all stop. Time stops. Her heart stops but a moment. She looks up at the tomb and it seems to have a slight glow. She is overcome with tears, and she begins to feel a sense of warmth consume her body. Peace. The calmness surrounds her heart and soul. Peace. She is immersed in stillness. Peace. She inhales and exhales. Peace. She can feel. Peace. She finds. Peace. Finally, peace.

**Ancient Aesthetics (Time)**

They were thousands of years old. It is not surprising to see them in such disarray. She sees the ruins as merely fragments of once magnificent works of architecture. But what if they are the essence of the feats? The things left behind define what they mean to us now. The rest is speculation. She stands on top of a collapsed column. She stands atop a fallen dream. The fact that it is still here makes it magnificent in and of itself. Will she be here in a thousand years or even a hundred? She continues to peruse the piles of seemingly meaningless stone. That was a house, a bath, a market, a temple, a school. She encounters these things every day. Does she think about what they will look like when the people are gone and all that remains are the empty vessels? Will a girl much like herself glance upon the remnants and not see what she sees? Her foot trips on a rock and she tumbles to the ground, gets up, shakes off the dust, and continues to walk. Don’t we all? She looks around some more and it all looks the same—rubble of a fallen civilization. What’s the point of this? That’s exactly the point. Does she not see the frailty of humanity? Does she not see that we are rubble too? Living, breathing remnants. Yet, she thinks about her family back at home. Though broken, they are not leftover pieces. They are whole. She is whole. Maybe these ruins are whole too. She gazes out on the city she had travelled so far to see. We have come so far, yet we are still here. The history becomes the present and the present, the future, and
the future the history. It either all matters or nothing matters at all. Living, breathing remnants.

*Thira (...Passing By)*

She feels the wind in her hair. The air is infused with salt and sunshine. The road winds across the land with the water chasing it on all sides. Four wheels grip the asphalt as she holds on to her friend in front of her. The lane bends and she bends with it. Reds, blacks, blues, and greens cover the scenery. Paradise, one of many in the ocean. Blue roofs on white stucco buildings dot the landscape. She and her friends ride with no purpose in mind. They ride to explore, to feel, to experience. She slowly loosens her grip on her friend’s waist. This time she would let go. Her arms rise above her head as she takes a deep breath in. The wind presses up against her flesh, resisting her victory. She screams at the top of her lungs as the wheels spin fast underneath her. The sun rays cascade down her skin. She feels herself expand. She is a bird. Limitless, liberated, she soars. Infinite. This day is infinite. This experience is infinite. “A girl cries out infinite.” “This is the greatest moment of my life.” “How do I even begin to tell you?” Words are finite. She soars.

*Précis. (another place)*

The train in Cinque Terre goes in circles. The blur of wolves and horses in Florence. Peter’s place is the holiest of Rome when Vesuvius erupts again. But saints reside in the countryside too. The ruins lie in Greece. The drive was ten miles on an island off the coast where the beaches were red, white, and black. She is a living, breathing, infinite remnant of her experiences. Words do not suffice. She goes in circles because circles never end. Maybe one day. another place.
Who the hell gave this kid a pencil
Oh great now he’s got a Mac computer
and he’s waxing poetic about death
Goddammit.
EL PELIGRO DE CEJAS

The arch of the eyebrows
a downturn of the lips
the folding of the arms
warn me to find cover

Hay una tormenta
and I’m standing right in the way

El viento y la lluvia son vestidos para matar
and I forgot my umbrella

Mi alegría y mi desastre
the warm blanket and the shattered glass

Mi razón y mi ritmo
the untied shoes and the melted candle

El veneno que a mí me gusta comer
El fiebre que necesito sudar
La pesadilla en la cual yo quiero caer
Las mentiras que no puedo dudar

And so the arched eyebrow
or the pursed lips
or the folded arms
Avisáme a encontrar refugio
The telephone wires are going by woop, woop, woop like in a train and then they slow down and the train turns onto a street with trees on both sides. Jaden’s driving but he’s not wearing his train driver hat. Jaden, why aren’t you wearing your hat?

What hat?

Your train driver hat.

Mariah, what are you talking about?

I’m talking about his train driver hat. He’s driving a train. Why is this so hard for him to understand?

***

I lost my shoes. Jaden, I lost my shoes.

He shushes me and puts something in my mouth. Hold this under your tongue.

I lost my shoes.

I put them on the shelf in the hall for you. Put this under your tongue and close your mouth.

I do. The fire alarm goes off, very very quietly. Jaden, the fire alarm is going off.

He takes the stick out of my mouth. No kidding. You’re over a hundred. Over a hundred? Do I get extra credit?

He laughs. Yes, Mariah, you get extra credit. But only if you get into bed.

***

I’m under a mountain of blankets, a huge mountain, all the way up to
the ceiling and it’s too hot and too heavy and I’m being buried alive so I push them away but now I’m so cold I can’t move. My bed starts to float up and it tips and I can’t do anything about it because I can’t move. It floats up and up and up and then it jerks and I’m falling down. I land in the middle of a pile of blankets and break into a million pieces. I can move now and I dig myself into the blankets like a duck swimming under the water. I dig dig dig way down and the water closes over my head black and hot.

* * *

I’m so, so hot but I can’t stop shivering. There are people walking back and forth and I can hear their voices but they’re not saying words. They’re bad people and they’re looking at me, looking me over, walking back and forth and talking about me without saying words. I can’t get away and I’m so, so cold.

* * *

The robots who live in my closet are sitting in a circle around me, having a book club and discussing intersectionality. I’m sitting in the middle and I keep trying to say something but they keep discussing without me. One of them is shaking my arm.

Mariah, Mariah, Mariah, wake up, the army’s here.
The army. What are you talking about?
There’s an army man here and he says we have fifteen minutes to e-vack-you-ate.
E-vack-you-ate. Evacuate. Why?
He didn’t say. But Jaden left us a note that said you’re having fever dreams.
Army men. Fever dreams. It all makes sense now.
Mariah, I read the whole note and Andre only had to help me with two words!
I sit up. That’s swell, Jasmine. Get your backpack.
** * * * **

There are little green army men in the hallway, except big. Ma’am, you and your children have to evacuate. We’ll be back in ten minutes. Try to pack two changes of clothes and some water, but bring only what you can carry.

They’re not my children, they’re my siblings. Where are my parents?
They’ll be evacuated from their places of employment. We’ll get you all reunited as soon as you’re in a safe place. Please gather your things. Don’t under any circumstances pack any weapons.

* * * *

I have weird fever dreams. The robots don’t answer. I dump my school things out of my backpack and grab two changes of clothes and a water bottle, and then I fill up all the extra space with socks so I’ll be prepared for anything. The robots don’t say anything; they’re still discussing intersectionality. Jasmine and Andre have come in, carrying their backpacks. Did you pack your socks?

Mariah, I could only fit one outfit, says Jasmine. My backpack’s too small.

Give it to me, I say. She gives it to me and I put it in my backpack. Some of the socks have to come out but I put them in my jacket pockets.

Why are you bringing so many socks?
I have to be prepared to take care of you, I say. The socks make my jacket thicker which is good because I’m so cold.

* * * *

Hurry up, Andre.
The army men said I should give you ibuprofen, he says, handing me the bottle. I’m seventeen so I count out seventeen little pills and start eating them. I’ve only gotten to five when I can’t find the other ten. There’s a bunch
of little rocks under my feet, and I have to stop and put on my shoes. I’m so hot but I can’t take off my jacket ‘cause I’m still wearing my backpack.

* * *

We go outside and the army men are gone.
Mariah, what do we do?
The army men said they were taking us to higher ground.
Higher ground. Good. I can take them there. Come on, this way.
We’re walking along the street and I think we’re walking uphill but I’m not sure which way is up. When we pass the park Andre picks up a stick. Here, lean on this. Jesus Christ, help me keep it together.

* * *

Do you have any money?
No, I don’t have any money.
Give it to me!
I don’t have any money.
Mariah, who’s that?
Shh, honey, I don’t know.
Mariah, I don’t like him.
I don’t like you, you little bitch!
We have to run. Andre, Jasmine, come on.
The man is running after us. COME BACK HERE YOU BITCH!
Guys, keep running! I turn around and he runs into me with his monster hands. He’s pulling my head off and someone’s screaming. I lift up my stick to push him away and it hits him in the face but then the ground shifts and I fall down. He’s running towards me and I scramble away and my stick comes up and hits him in the head as hard as I can. He stumbles and I hit him again and he falls over and I run after Jasmine and Andre. We run and run and run and then there are people everywhere.
People are pushing and shoving and trying to pull Jasmine and Andre away from me. Some of the people have blue faces and they want to take Jasmine and Andre away forever so I have to hold on to them in the crowd. The army men are shouting at everyone but no one’s listening. There’s a siren blaring and another alarm beeping. After a little bit it stops and then it starts again.

Your phone’s ringing.
I take my phone out of my jacket pocket and answer it. Hi?
Are you okay?
Yeah, I’m okay. I have Jasmine and Andre and I won’t let the people with blue faces take them.
Blue faces?
They want to kill Jasmine and Andre.
You’re delirious. Where are you?
We’re downtown but we have to get up to higher ground. Down is bad. Damn, downtown is crazy right now. Where are you? I’ll come and find you.
No, you’ll miss class.
Class is canceled. The damn –
It’s okay, the army’s here.
Which army?
Don’t worry, it’s just a fever dream. But it’s okay, I took seventeen ibuprofen.
Seventeen?
That’s how old I am. Where’s Andre? The blue people!
There are no blue people!
I don’t have Andre! I hold Jasmine tighter and look around. Andre’s standing on a post outside the store and people are rushing out with bags and bags of food. I have to push against them and they’re trying to take Jasmine. Andre, come down, stay with me.
Someone stepped on me!
Who was it? I’ll kill them!
No, don’t! They’re gone anyway.
Mariah, I’m scared.
I’m taking you to higher ground. I think I used to be talking on the phone but I don’t know where it is anymore. I have to get Jasmine and Andre out of the crowd and away from the blue people.

* * *

The birds are following us. They’ll protect us. I look up at the birds overhead, red and blue and green and yellow.
Mariah, what are you looking at?
I’m looking at the birds.
What birds?
Of course. They can’t see the birds because it’s a fever dream. But I have to get them to higher ground so I can win the dream. We keep running uphill, I think.

* * *

There’s a tank in the street, a big army tank, and a lot of trucks. And a helicopter in the sky. And a man lying on the sidewalk bleeding. And someone screaming.
Ma’am, what are you doing on the street? There are army men all around, pushing me. I hold on to Jasmine and Andre because the army men have enormous boots and I don’t Jasmine and Andre to get stepped on.
Why is he bleeding?
No one’s bleeding.
I saw a man bleeding and
There’s nothing to see here.
But I
Get in the truck, quickly.
There are a lot of people in the truck. I have to sit very still because if I
don’t then they might realize I know it’s a fever dream and then they’ll kill
Jasmine and Andre. The problem is that there are flies crawling all over my
face and I can’t brush them away without moving. They’re crawling all over
me, under my clothes and into my nose, but I can’t brush them away because
if I do then they’ll kill Jasmine and Andre. O Lord, help me.

***

The army men are talking to me but I don’t know what they’re saying
because all their words are in bubbles and the bubbles are floating far away.
All I can hear is the echoes but I can’t tell what the real words are. We’re
standing in line, on a white line on the concrete, and I’m trying not to fall
off. It’s hard because I have to keep Jasmine and Andre from falling off, too,
and the ground won’t stay still. Jasmine pulls away from me and steps off the
line. I pull her back.

Mariah, don’t scream at me!
Ma’am, do you need help?

The sun is so bright but I’m so cold. Jasmine, you have to stay on the
line.

Why?
Why doesn’t she understand? You have to!
Okay, okay.
You’re shaking. Are you okay?
I’m just cold.
No you’re not, you’re burning hot. And you’re all red.

Mariah, why do we have to wait in line?

Suddenly I know why we have to wait in line. It scares me but I can’t
remember what it’s called so I can’t tell Jasmine. It’s something scary and it’s
so scary I forgot its name.

***
The army men are looking through our backpacks and Jasmine’s pulling on the edge of my shirt. Mariah, why are they looking in my backpack? I packed my yellow panties and I don’t want them to see.

Jasmine, honey, security has to look before we get on the plane.
Mariah, what plane?
We’re not even at the airport.

Guys, don’t be silly, of course we’re getting on a plane. I can hear the plane and then people are so excited the plane’s coming that they all start screaming. My head hurts. The army men put a hand on my head and push me down. GET DOWN GET DOWN GET DOWN! I realize the plane noise is too loud, it must be about to fly over us, and I push Jasmine and Andre onto the ground and lie down on top of them to protect them. After a while all the planes are gone but the wind they made is still here. Jasmine’s crying and Andre’s shaking.

Who’s shooting?
Mariah, what’s going on?
I’m having a fever dream, silly.
What’s a fever dream?
I don’t know, ask Jaden.
Jaden isn’t here.
Mariah, you’re scaring me.

***

The sky is green instead of purple and it scares me. The ants are still crawling all over my face but my arms are so heavy I can’t wipe them off. Maybe the wind will blow them away.

Mariah, stand up.
Are you okay?
I am standing. Look, I’m standing up straight.
No you’re not, you’re lying down.
Andre, you’re funny.
You’re lying down and we have to move.
No, you’re lying down.
No I’m not.
I have to pretend that I’m the one lying down because I’m having a fever
dream but Jasmine and Andre think it’s real and I don’t want to spoil their
fun. I lie down next to them. Lying down makes me dizzy but I hold onto
them and we start walking. The wind is pushing us around and so are the
army men.
We’re taking you to higher ground.
Why?
It’s going to flood.
Like Noah’s Ark?
Just wait here.
Mariah, I don’t want it to flood.
Honey, it won’t, it’s just a fever dream.
Ma’am, you have to move.
The ants are cold now and they’re falling out of the sky. I’m so hot and
they feel good crawling down through my hair. I don’t want them to stop.

***

We’re in the gym and we’re all dripping wet. The army men are pointing,
telling people where to go. They give us a water bottle and a piece of floor.
What’s going on? I saw a guy bleeding.
Ma’am, just go over there and sit down.
Wait, she looks febrile.
Be quiet, haven’t you learned anything today?
Let me look at her. It’s that cute paramedic who’s always at the VFD
fundraisers, only in my dream he’s all worried and he has a black eye. He feels
my forehead. His hand is nice and cool. She’s running a really high fever. The
army men pull him back and he flinches away from them.

It’s the wrong army. It’s the wrong army. O Lord, help me, it’s the wrong
army.
When I wake up, my nose hurts and there’s something stiff all over my face. I reach up and feel: my nose is swollen, with tape on it, and there’s a gauze pad taped over one of my eyebrows. I open my eyes and try to sit up.

“Easy, easy, don’t hurt yourself,” says someone. He lifts me up so I’m sitting and props up the pillow behind me. It’s the cute paramedic again. He’s wearing short sleeves now. I’m lying under a scratchy green blanket on a cot in the corner of what looks like one of the dance studios at the gym, and someone’s tied my hair back. There’s a cup of water on an overturned crate next to the cot and a mismatched collection of sheets hanging from the ceiling, tucked under the edges of the tiles, to divide the room up. I’m still a little bit dizzy.

“What happened?”

“You passed out. I’m sorry I didn’t catch you.”

“That’s okay,” I say, feeling my nose gingerly.

“I had to sew up your forehead.” He grins apologetically, and the corners of his eyes crinkle up.

I laugh. Laughing hurts my nose. “I don’t even know your name.”

“I’m Jung-Hee,” he says. “Jasmine told me you’re her favorite Mariah and I should take good care of you. It was kind of a rush job, but it shouldn’t scar. Unless you want it to. That would look pretty badass.”

I laugh again. “Thanks.”

“And you had a febrile seizure. Two, actually. I was pretty worried about you.” He crosses one leg across the other and grins at me. “I talked to your siblings, and it sounds like you had quite the afternoon yesterday.”

I reach for the water. My hands are shaking, and he helps me, holding one hand behind my head to steady me. “Yesterday?”

“You’ve been out for a while.”

“What time is it?”

He checks his watch. “Nine-thirty at night. You came in around one in the afternoon, delirious and running a hundred and five, and you’ve been out like a light since then. But the fever finally broke, and you’re okay now. Just
“I feel really weak,” I say. “And I don’t know how much of yesterday actually happened.”

“You evacuated with your siblings, but you missed your ride,” he says. “I’m not really sure how that happened. But then you walked a mile or two, half out of your senses, and you clubbed a looter with a big stick.”

“Did I really lose Andre?”

“Only for a minute. But you must have dropped your phone while you were talking to Jaden, so he was imagining the worst.”

“The blue people?”

“That was just the fever.”

“What about the man lying on the sidewalk bleeding?”

He looks uncomfortable. “I don’t know. Jasmine and Andre didn’t see, so it might have been real and it might not. Look, you should get some rest.”

“I just slept for a day and a half,” I protest. Ignoring me, he rearranges my pillow and makes me lie down again, and I don’t actually mind. I’m less dizzy that way.

“You were passed out. Get some real sleep.”

“Wait.” I grab his hand. “Where’s my family?”

“Get some real sleep, and when you wake up again I’ll bring Jaden and Jasmine and Andre to see you.”

“Okay,” I mumble, suddenly tired again.

He stops at the door. “I have to go take care of some stuff but I’ll keep checking on you. Scout’s honor.”

“The army,” I say.

“What about it?”

“Is it the right army?”

He hesitates. “What?”

“That’s the last thing I thought before I passed out. That it was the wrong army and I’d been too delirious to notice until then.”

He bites his lip. “No, it’s the right army.”

“Scout’s honor?” I ask, but I’m asleep before he answers.
Dawn wheezed, dank with garden ghosts, 
and Sunday shivered in Santa Rosa rain. 
Houses hatched, unsnugged by wicks unlit.

I boiled my grandmother’s rosary 
on an heirloom iron stove. 
Watched the water huff vexed, 
seethe blue and splutter holy.

I added olive oil, because 
that’s what you do with spaghetti and 
I’d never made Rosary Stew before.

Unsure, I uncobwebbed the recipe book, 
but Granny’s writing flecked like Pollock 
on the patchwork pages, blotted by 
rose water and war blood and baby vomit.

I sliced and ground a few bible passages – 
just the good ones – into a mildew powder, 
sprinkled it over the pot and sneezed.

Plunked three cloves of garlic, five dandelion heads, 
and a handful of hair. 
Uncorked a bottle of Irish Exile (smells like vinegar), 
and poured half into the stew, now simmering pubescent.

In the cupboard, tear-vials rang
like stillborn babies.
I chose August 1945, for penance.
Steam mushroomed like a nightmare
with just two drops.

Last, feathers from a finch I found dead
on my doormat, shredded red by my calico.

I stirred and coughed and waited,
and hoped it would turn out like Granny’s,
and wondered if I had to eat it.

All the while trembling
with a sacred suspicion,

that I did not.
Could you feel it?
The warm indigo death
slipping like a blind lover’s
tongue from my neck to my navel?
The Samaritan wasp poised, still as virtue,
on my twitching eyelid shut in sweating prayer?

Could you hear it?
Powdered voices
hushed and rouge
like babies forgotten
in snow-stuck cradles?
The elastic cries of some
breathless asylums stretching
across bridges, over gardens, into
beige foyers, glittering suburban throats?

Did you know?
That splinters still wedge
beneath well-trimmed fingernails?
That some were born to suckle barbers’ combs,
ever honeycombs, never persimmons or paint or passion?

I did not.
Not until a suited tiger
clawing his tie, chewing his cigar,
roaring at clocks and strangling poetry,
swept me onto his rough orange back and ran.
Flung me into a cubicle, 
cut my hair, bleached my mouth, 
wrung my heavy, soaking mind into a 
cocktail shaker—shook and shook and shook and 
finally poured the liquor back into my chattering skull.

Why?
I asked.
He answered.
“Too many questions.”
And wished me a happy birthday.
I wrung his liquid shadow into a sand bucket. Googled: “Prevent evaporation?” (No results.)

Now my whole apartment smells like Richmond. Like that bamboo gazebo from China, marinated in rain. Boston, too. Dead puritans. Rock-climbing chalk and gin.

I don’t know. I’ll revise this in March.

Sometimes it sounds like – the thock thock of a Two Hearted Ping-Pong tournament.


Okay. One time I did.

It tasted like that French Press coffee in River North, but psychedelic periwinkle prophecies – little white winks – fuddled my brain for days.

Kid-words in Ukrainian. (Baklazhan!)
Moleskine musings of a cabin in Maine.

I watch the shadow juice to see him.
But when I do, he’s
a pixilated screen,
a call
dropped.

   Always obscured
   by my own reflection.
A shot rang out somewhere nearby. And another. She didn’t know where. All she knew was that lying in this ditch was a bad idea. A very bad idea. But where could she go? She was disoriented. The woman attempted a deep breath of the cold night air. Immense pain shook her body into uncontrollable spasms. She coughed silently, sputtering blood on the ground where her face lay. She remained on the freezing ground, watching the steam from her breath rise in billows. She felt like dying. She might as well give up and die right now. Embrace this earthen grave.

But she couldn’t do that. Not after what happened. Not after her promise. She had gotten this far. She had survived two wars already, and she’d be damned if she couldn’t survive another.

Slow movements. From lying to sitting to crouching. Reversing nature’s transformation of life to death.

The woman listened to the pre-dawn stillness. The ditch she was in measured close to a half a meter deep. About fifteen meters away, one end of the ditch concluded in a mangled heap of metal and scrap. Parts of it were still glowing from the incendiaries dropped the night before. The other end was five meters away and terminated in a small drainage tunnel that ran to God knows where.

She looked around and spotted the bundle. It was still lying there where she’d laid it. She crawled over to check on it.

She peered over the edge of the ditch and past the burnt grass. The woman turned her head to the left. Nothing. She turned to the right. Another shot rang out. She hit the dirt. Hard. She was able to muffle her instinct to cry out but not the vomiting that came a second later.

She poked her head out once more from the ditch. She looked to the right again. There was the church. If it could be called that.
What remained of man’s holiest sanctuary now looked less a royal king and more a whipped servant. The majestic spire that once dominated the skyline and drew all eyes to its heavenly loft was now subjected to gravity. Half of it lay strewn across the nearby graveyard, joining those that came before. The other half still stood, wounded and humbled.

The woman lowered herself into the trench once more. God. She breathed the word. Little comfort came from it. Just wasted breath.

The woman decided to make headway towards the church.

The pain she had previously felt in her side began to wake again as she hobbled over the wrecked field with the bundle in one arm. She had fallen on a vertical metal barb that gouged her side. She clutched the bleeding wound with her free hand as she stumbled forward. She thought how stupid it would be to die from something like tetanus. After all she’d seen.

She approached the church from its eastern side. The beautiful stained glass windows that she had adored so many a Sunday service were nearly all obliterated. The only piece that remained fixed in its former place was a scene from story of Noah’s ark. It depicted the ending. Noah and the dove. The olive branch. The landing on top of Mt. Ararat. But something wasn’t quite right. As the woman approached, she saw what she thought was a red sheen. A sanguine film over the watery blue. From a few meters away she realized it was blood.

It was at that moment that dawn’s rosy fingers unfurled across the land. Light penetrated the still night air, striking the glass. The cool ocean waves of the glass suddenly became a swell of flames, and the whole world was on fire.

II

What was that woman doing? Why is she staring at that window, the man thought. He was watching her from his perch on the third story rafters.

She’s hurt and wouldn’t put up much of a fight. What’s that in her arms? Maybe it’s valuable. Or food. Damn. How long has it been since I’ve eaten? How long…

The man pricked his ears. A noise. It wasn’t a gunshot. He had heard those a few minutes before. That’s why he was holed up in this place anyway.
But those shots had faced away from him. And he judged that whoever was shooting was traveling farther away.

The man listened against the support beam near his spot at the back of the church. He caught the faintest rumbling. It was growing. A vehicle. He’d be safe in here. The man could stay undetected even if their men entered the church. So long as he had the height advantage. You’d be amazed how many people don’t even bother to look up.

The man took a sharp intake of breath. That damned woman was still outside. They’ll search the whole place if they see her. She must be dealt with. He decided not to take her alive.

Too much of a liability, the man thought.

The man descended from his perch softly onto the second-story support beams. The woman still stood outside the church gawking at something. The noise from the vehicle was getting much louder now. The smell of diesel was in the air. It was apparent that its sound was now plainly audible as the woman began to panic and look for an entrance. She thrust her bundle into the nearby bushes.

The man decided now was the time to strike as the woman was huddled over. He grabbed the sackcloth bag close at hand and stepped lightly out of the broken hole near the top of the church wall. The man bounded forward as he hit the ground and swung the bag over the woman’s head. She howled and lashed out hard against her unknown assailant. She was stronger than she looked.

They struggled for a few seconds. She had managed to grab hold of his left arm and prevented him from reaching for his knife. He threw his free arm around her neck in desperation and flexed. She began to flail even more. But soon her flailing weakened and stopped altogether.

She was also heavier than she looked. The man quickly dragged the woman towards the back of the church. He deposited her in the nearby shrubs.

The fight took less than fifteen seconds.

The man ran over to the bushes, grabbed the bundle, and scrambled up the wall into the smashed entrance just as the vehicle arrived.
The vehicle slowed to a halt in front of the church’s broad oak doors. They had somehow remained intact despite the bombings. They looked as brand new as the day they were fashioned save a thin layer of ash. This could be attributed to the dutiful maintenance of the former priest. The man knew the priest well. He was pious and had taken care of the church day and night. He even chose to sleep on the pews so as to always be close to God. The man missed him.

The man was tense. There was no easy entrance into the church. He had made sure of that. But that wouldn’t stop them. He had heard the stories. They found a grotesque pleasure in destroying anything beautiful. Rape and massacre were as common to them as breathing. There were even whispers of cannibalism. And a few barred doors wouldn’t stop them from pillaging. Even a maimed giant such as the church would prove fair game.

Men had already poured out of the vehicle and were inspecting the church from the outside. About half a dozen overall. Too many to take on alone, the man thought. All he could hope for now was their lack of interest. Or a quick getaway.

The man was in a rather exposed position. He was near the back of the church. It was the highest perch available and gave him the best view of the surrounding area. It also gave the surrounding area the best view of him. But no one would see him. So long as they didn’t look up.

The men walked around the church a few times inspecting it. The man heard them speak. Their thick Slavic drawl echoed in the still morning. It was beginning to grow hot. Sweat formed on the man’s face. When would they leave?

Gunshots. The man tensed even more. He looked around attempting to determine which side of the church they were assaulting. If it was the east side he’d be able to dash out the west and head for the nearby forest. If it was the west he could head to the nearby ditch. If it was the north he could climb through the back. If it was the south…

Laughter. But it wasn’t the cheery laughter of happier times. This was a cruel, grating laugh. One of the men who held a gun was laughing as he kicked the nearby debris. The last stained glass window was gone.
The man realized that that was the first time he had heard laughter in over three years. He shuddered.

III

The men decided to enter the church. They cut through the bars on the front windows and squeezed through. The day was growing hotter.

The leader signaled for the men to be on guard. The dogs could be heard whimpering in the back of the truck. A bad sign. They smelled something. He sent the younger ones forward first. The older men carried guns and stood ready towards the back. The young men carried clubs or bats or tools. Anything that could bludgeon and kill. It wasn’t so bad if they lost one of the young ones. Besides, it meant more food for the rest.

The young men signaled that the coast was clear.

The men let down their guard and began inspecting the church. Not much to see. An altar, a few overturned pews, dusty pillars. It didn’t look like they’d be getting much loot from this place.

They had heard rumors of this part of the countryside. Freaky shit, as one of them had put it. They had sent out a ten-man patrol to this area before. Those men never reported back. They were found later, though. But not whole. Just their heads. Mouths stuffed with their own genitalia. But nobody believed those stories.

Or nobody admitted to believing them.

* * *

The man was still hidden by shadows. The men could have a clear view of him if they were to look up. The shadows kept him safe. So long as he didn’t move.

But … the bundle he had placed nearby did begin to move. What the hell, he thought.

It cooed.

The sound echoed throughout the church. The men stopped searching and listened intently. The man quietly grabbed the bundle and held it firmly
against his chest. It began to squirm. The man began to sweat. He was exposed. He had to move. The man silently lowered himself into the second level with his free arm.

God, he thought.

The man did not notice the sweat accumulating. He did not notice the droplets collecting on the tip of his nose. He didn’t notice them drop. Straight into the baptismal font.

Drip.


He leapt through the second story window as bullets and glass sprayed by him. The man hit the ground. Hard.

The man struggled to his feet, dazed. He ran for the nearby woods. Death whizzed by as he ran in a zigzag pattern towards safety.

He knew this forest. They did not. He had the advantage.

He ran a few hundred meters to the left along the edge once he’d made cover. This was where the stream began. He had heard barking during his flight. A bad sign. But the stream should help him lose his scent.

The man traveled up the swift stream for a few minutes. It was slow going with one hand. Slippery rocks and sharp edges.

The man grew tired. He did not know why he had grabbed the bundle as he escaped. Instinct, he thought. He chastised himself for being stupid. For not checking what that thing was. The man uncovered the bundle. Watery blue eyes stared back at him. It grabbed his hand and squeezed. The man bit his fist.

He covered the bundle.

IV

He stopped to catch his breath under a large rock that overhung the stream.

He heard a twig snap and turned around just in time to catch a shoulder to the mouth as someone barreled into him. The bundle rolled from his arms and came to a stop a few feet away. It began to cry again.

The woman was awake.
They wrestled on the ground. The woman was slippery from a mixture of blood and sweat. The man became enraged. He gained the dominant position and lashed out. Made contact. Struck again. And again. His hand became slick.

The woman was losing consciousness. She was able to fend off a few more hits but it wouldn’t last for long. She saw the hilt of his blade.

She acted quickly. Blocking a fist with her left hand she grabbed the handle with her right and stabbed the knife into the man’s leg. He howled and rolled over. The woman still had the knife and was attempting to get up. The man gained his feet and kicked the knife out of her hand. It rolled into the swift stream. He lifted his hand for another strike.

He stopped. Listened. The barking became audible again. The bundle was still crying. A stream of thought burst in the man’s head like a firecracker. The cry would alert the men. The woman couldn’t run. He couldn’t run. His leg attested to that.

The man knew what he had to do.

The man got up. He quickly tore a piece of his dirty shirt and tied it around his leg. He tried to hobble over to the bundle but his leg was caught. The old woman was holding on.

No, don’t, she whispered.
Get off me. I must.
But he’s all I have.
If it doesn’t shut up, you won’t have anything.
Please, not like this.
We have no choice.
But he’s all I have.
The man kicked off her grip. He walked over towards the bundle. He reached for his knife. A quick clean death. He groped near its sheath. Air. The knife was lost.

The man hesitated.
I’ll do it, she said.
The man turned and looked at the woman.
Give him to me. I’ll do it.
The man looked at the bundle. Looked back at the woman. The dogs were nearly upon them. No time to lose. He scooped up the bundle and laid it in her arms.

V

What was his name?
Agneau.
We had to do it you know.
I know.
If we didn’t do it he would have died. We would have died. Horribly. I know.
You don’t believe me.
I believe you.
The man shifted awkwardly. The heat of the day was in full force.
I can bury him if you want, the man said.
No. I’ll take care of it.
Do you have matches? To keep warm? The nights are cold.
No, but I’ll survive. I always survive.
He reached into his pocket. There was a packet. Only three matches were left. The man picked out one and shoved it in back into his pocket. The woman watched with uninterested eyes.
Here, have some, the man said. He tossed the packet in front of her.
She stared at it blankly. Her face betrayed no emotion.
What now? she asked.
What do you mean? the man replied.
What do I do now? What is there to live for?
I don’t know. Sometimes life’s not worth living anymore. Sometimes it is. That’s for you to decide.
Is it?

VI

The man walked back to the church. Dusk had come and gone. Twilight had arrived with a chill. The men had wrecked the church even more. The
altar was broken. A pillar had been destroyed. The old oak doors were busted in.

The man went back to work on the church. Partly to keep himself warm, mostly to keep himself occupied.

The work was slow going because of his leg. He fixed wooden panels onto the windowless walls. He cleared the casings from the floor. The man even managed to prop up the great wooden doors. They had to be nailed. It was a shame, he thought. No longer would they open in greeting for the Sunday masses.

The man was busying himself with clearing rubble from the altar when he smelled smoke. And he knew.

In the morning, the man went back to the stream. He whistled as he walked. The man picked up small stones along the shore and skipped them down stream.

When he had reached the overhang, the man stopped whistling. He had been right. Underneath the boulder was a large pile of ashes. Red embers still glowed under the shade of the rock. That must have been a big fire, he thought.

Big enough for two.
They fell in love in quite possibly the least appropriate place imaginable. Or rather, perhaps love is a bit too strong of a word. Neither the boy nor the girl really believed that one could fall in love at first sight. Both believed that love takes getting to know the other person. Both believed that love takes time. But then again, what could they call what happened that day? It was something that was surely more than nothing. And perhaps (though one can never admit these things without sounding absurd) it was love after all.

***

Leida Rebane had never been in love, had never married, nor had ever been enticed to marriage. Leida Rebane planted herself firmly in the good Estonian soil that still sprung in her mind from the gray-weathered youth of her past. She disliked the smell of cornflowers and the way chairs sometimes squeaked when she sat on them, and she hated the pisshead Russians who had tried to steal her country from her. She took great pride in her strict daily schedule and her wake-up call that put the sun to shame and the extensive vocabulary with which she could insult Russians (those bastards). When the Soviets had invaded her beloved homeland and taken control and all of her brothers and sisters had left for Canada, Leida remained, stubbornly unmoved, in Estonia. Her face became set in a permanent scowl that deepened slightly every winter. Whispers, whispers followed her when she passed children in the town. Watch out, there goes the witch. Many believed it quite possible that she would live forever, so hardened by her souring exterior that the interior could never be touched. She may have lived forever, too, if not for the flying car that had fallen, gracefully twirling like an Estonian ballerina, out of the sky one unusually warm summer day.
* * *

Peeter Rebane had been about to sit down to drink a warm beer when the shrill ring of the telephone seized him back from his seat, and the voice of his younger sister drifted through the earpiece, explaining that Aunt Leida had gotten crushed by a flying car. Peeter’s only memory of his aunt was as a very small child, right before his family had left Estonia, and he really only remembered how she had been cursing about the Russians, and how his mother had been gently trying to turn him away from his aunt and shield his ears at the same time without being too obvious about it. Peeter Rebane liked lining up books on shelves in alphabetical order by the author’s last name; he found great pleasure in the way his vacuum cleaner fit perfectly into the corners of the rooms of his house; and, most of all, he enjoyed telling long-winded stories about his short childhood in Estonia to his daughter Hanna. And now someone had abandoned their car partially on a railway track, and when the train had come through, it had lovingly lifted the car high, high into the air, cleanly splitting the car into metallic fragments. The pieces had then sailed freely above the ground until gravity had finally patted them serenely back down to the earth, finding port on top of his inflexible, unfortunate aunt. Sitting in a reclining chair in his living room in Southern California (for he and his wife had left Canada in search of a more temperate climate), he could only feel sorry for the cantankerous old woman. Tucked securely under the mechanical oddity and laying fused on top of the bed of grass underneath, odd bits and angles of the woman his aunt had once been were excavated slowly out of the wreckage as quickly as possible. Thus she remained in death, as she had in life, in Estonia. With no living relatives in the mother country, though, the funeral flew to be held thousands of miles from her resting place, in the country she had once scoffed so vehemently at long ago. Peeter sighed and took a sip of his tepid drink.

* * *

Hanna Rebane tipped back shots of cheap vodka more often than she
would like to admit. She enjoyed clothes that did not match the occasion and thought that caterpillars were the most beautiful insects on the planet. She had met seven celebrities in her life. Hanna Rebane was not a particularly social person, but she had some peculiar quality that made people want to approach and talk to her, like a magnet for the mouths of the lonely, whether she felt like she had invited them to do so or not. She was plagued with the full life stories of strangers which ended in loud sobbing at least seven times a year (she often liked to keep a tally), and sometimes she wondered if the very air around her was somehow sending out signals of sympathy to strangers that she herself could not see or decipher. The thought of having to interact with her entire extended Estonian family at a funeral for a great aunt she had never met made her almost more nauseous than any cheap vodka she had ever consumed before.

It was not that Hanna disliked her relatives. They were a rather pleasant group of people, actually. But growing up in California rather than Canada meant that Hanna was always the one who had stood silent and motionless while the other children had twirled and danced and laughed in circles around her. So it was with sinking heart and slow-trawling legs that Hanna dragged herself onto the steel claustrophobia of Air Canada, and while they were flying high above the earth, she imagined them continuing to fly, right over the edge of the horizon, free, vaulting through the air, and never looking back to the rest of humanity, heading straight for the celestial vastness beyond. But then they were driving, and hotels pretending to be friendly and warm were inviting them, and suddenly Hanna found herself plumed in black, rambling behind her parents as they glided to the funeral.

Hanna looked at the high-floating church in front of her. Arched brows, miss-matched green and blue glass eyes, a gaping brown mouth ornamented by notches and scrolls and little figures, all waiting for the chance to crawl inside and be swallowed by the darkness like the black-clad people entering for the funeral. Her family was not particularly religious, but she liked observing the architecture of old churches and cathedrals. Hanna enjoyed the soaring feeling she got when she craned her neck back to look at the pinnacles of a high pointed ceiling, lost to the ether and the stars. It was as she was staring
up at the looming marble monstrosity that she happened to turn her head slightly and glance down, and she caught a glimpse of a boy blossoming into view as he rounded the corner to the church. His appearance was so sudden and his walk so graceful, so like floating, that Hanna was not entirely sure that the figure before her was a human or an altogether different species. He could quite easily have just been a figment of her imagination. She was sure that his bronze skin and dark hair were glowing in the sunlight and his black suit was so perfectly molded to his body that it did not seem altogether unlikely that he could be some sort of animated garden statue, enchanted to walk the streets and charm the strangers he passed. But then his eyebrows frowned slightly and his shoe scuffed the sidewalk and the bewitchment broke, and Hanna slunk into the church after her parents, thoughts drifting vaguely to what the boy was doing there.

* * *

As Anthony Martin loped toward the great white structure with the cold black interior, he could not remember why he had agreed to go with Erik to Erik’s great-aunt’s funeral. He wasn’t related to anyone there. Anthony did not like funerals. He did not like the thought of death, and he sometimes broke out in a nervous sweat on the back of his neck if he thought too much about his own mortality. But he had been best friends with Erik since they were seven years old, tripping over sidewalk chalk and flying off of swings, and he wanted to support Erik through this time. Not that Erik seemed to be too emotionally distraught by the death of his great-aunt: from what Anthony could draw out, Erik had never even met the woman. It seemed that the real reason Anthony was there was because Erik hated having to interact alone with his relatives.

“There are too many of them, man,” he had told Anthony the other day. “They just swarm around you and try to devour you with way too personal of questions. Twenty years of dealing with this crap, and I can’t do it anymore.”

Anthony hoped that Estonians were at least a friendly group of people. Leaving behind the safety and boredom of another slow-melting sum-
mer day with every step he took, Anthony’s eyes fell upon a pale-looking girl dressed in black, perched ponderously at the top of the stairs to the church, surveying the structure, a far-off expression dancing across her small face. She resembled some kind of bizarre, thin bird about to take flight, black feathers rustling gently in the wind, and her eyes swooped suddenly near his direction. He immediately dropped his gaze. The next time he looked up, the little black bird had flown. Perhaps she had never really been there at all. He wondered briefly what she was like.

* * *

Hanna Rebane liked many things that other girls liked. She liked some things that other girls didn’t. She liked the feeling of the warm sun on her skin after being in an air-conditioned building. She liked the salty, grainy, crunchy taste of tortilla chips, and she especially liked them when she was drunk. She liked the feeling of a boy’s hand on the bare skin of her waist. Hanna liked watching movies that made her cry, but it took a particularly well made film to move her to tears. One time, a boy had told her she was beautiful, but she was pretty sure he was just saying that to try to get into her pants. She enjoyed looking at her hands in the shower as water droplets and rivulets ran over them, and she enjoyed sitting outside, silently watching the ocean as it approached and retreated, forever calmly changing its mind. She disliked wilted lettuce. When she walked out the back door of her periwinkle house at night, she often wished that she could actually see the stars.

* * *

Anthony Martin often wished that he could figure out the meaning of life, or at least have some sort of epiphany gaining him insight into what it all meant. Anthony thought the idea of going to the moon was fascinating and was horrible at philosophy in school. He liked the feeling of putting on a well-tailored suit. He enjoyed the first bite of chocolate cake more than the second, and he enjoyed any bite of chocolate cake more than vanilla cake. He
had been in exactly seven relationships, and in exactly seven of those relationships he had seriously wondered what it would be like to spend the rest of his life with the girl he had been currently dating. He often found himself trying to call at least one of these girls when he got really drunk, but normally a friend stopped him before he could actually do it. One time a girl had called him beautiful, and he could not stop himself from laughing a little. Anthony secretly enjoyed watching movies that made him cry, and he cried much more often at movies than he would have cared to admit. He enjoyed taking walks in the winter, alone with his thoughts, bundled up against the cold, and then defrosting as he stepped into the warmth of his yellow home afterwards. Anthony loved the sun.

* * *

Hanna squinted. The sun was shining right in her eyes. It filtered through the stained glass window by her, shooting rays of blue and green light into her face. The ache of sitting on a hard pew for an hour was burning into her backside, and she was now also being blinded by celestial rays. Perhaps this was some sort of punishment from above for not feeling more deeply sad about Great-Aunt Leida’s death or for not paying attention to the speeches being made at her funeral. A small man with a large mustache and a suit that (she couldn’t quite tell) was either a very dark blue color or black was now speaking. She had a vague notion tugging at the back of her memory that she had seen him once before in her life. He had just called Great-Aunt Leida a “great woman,” and Hanna wondered if he had actually ever met Great-Aunt Leida. She wondered how many people at the funeral had met Great-Aunt Leida and if any of them had any fond memories of the woman at all. She shifted slightly and tried to turn her head as inconspicuously as possible to try to see how many of her relatives had bothered to make it to the funeral. Then, just as she felt like she was about to reach the limit of inconspicuous head-turning, her eyes locked with the breathing sculpture that had so gorgeously approached the church earlier that day. He had been staring at her.
Well. She had caught him staring at her. More specifically, she had
catched him staring at the back-right angle of her head. Truth be told, it was
an all too mesmerizing spectacle to look away from. Her pale face and short
flaxen hair were bathed in a blue-green light from the stained glass window,
and she shone brilliantly in the tinted sunlight. She had evolved from a crea-
ture of the air to a denizen of the depths. This mysterious creature of the sea
seemed to be floating gently below the surface, currents whispering across
her face as she tranquilly bobbed in her marine surroundings. She looked
like something out of a dream, and for a moment he was afraid that maybe
she was not entirely human. But she had fidgeted, she had scowled a little,
shined her eyes, and finally she had turned her head, a halo of blue framing
her visage, and her eyes had pierced through the blue-green space out to his
unenlightened and terrestrial face. Anthony leaned to his right a little and
whispered to Erik.

Erik raised an eyebrow slightly, sighed faintly, and whispered back,
“That’s my cousin, Hanna.”

Hanna wondered why the boy was sitting with her cousin Erik. Erik did
not have a brother, but Erik did have an almost otherworldly and altogether
quite impressive ability to avoid coming into close contact with the Rebane
family tree, so it at least seemed fairly unlikely that the boy could be related
to her in any way. The shadows that had been playing across his face had given
him an even greater sculpturesque quality. The warm, earthly brown eyes
had bored through the puddle of light that had been surrounding her, and,
despite the funeral marching on around her, she could not stop herself from
wondering who he was.
Anthony Martin was the son of Anthony Williams, a black man from Quebec, and Trisha Martin, a white woman from Ottawa. Trisha Martin was a passionate feminist who was strongly against the idea of women having to adopt the last name of men when they married. Anthony Williams was a man deeply in love with Trisha Martin, and when he had asked her to marry him, he went into the commitment knowing full well that his children would bear the last name of his wife, and he also knew that anything would be worth spending the rest of his life with this woman. This decision drew the ridicule of his family, and it took almost seven years after their child’s birth for them to forgive and reconcile with those members of the family. Anthony Martin grew up not understanding why people thought it was odd that he had his mother’s last name, but with time he realized that he was glad he had been brought up in such a unique environment. He had always known how deeply his parents loved each other and loved him, and that was more than many kids he knew could say.

* * *

Hanna Rebane looked at her parents and wondered if either of them knew who was speaking at the moment. She stared at the moving lips and moustache of the man until they were all she could see, black cavernous mouth opening and closing over and over again. Ceaseless but gentle movement, moustache fluttering, some strands fluttering higher than others. She thought about birds fluttering in the summer air outside the church window. She wondered what it must have been like to see that bird-like car flying through the air, coolly, quietly, deadly, scoping out the hunching, small, shriveled figure of her great aunt. She wondered what it must have been like to see that car approaching, faster and faster. She blinked and tried to rid herself of the disturbing thought. Perhaps Leida Rebane had seen nothing at all.

* * *

Leida Rebane had terrible eyesight, worse hearing, and rather robust
legs. She took a walk by the railroad seven days a week every week of the summer. Those who saw her could also often hear a faint grumbling noise rolling across the air between them, and more often than not a vehement “venelased” issued a little more loudly across the space than any of the other unintelligible words. It was a curiously hot, steaming day already when Leida arose and took her early morning walk. The very earth seemed to be sparkling, and Leida was sure that the peculiar quality of the misty air around her was a sign of something about to happen. As she shuffled along, she thought of the Estonia of her youth, and a twinge of nostalgia pricked her old and withered heart. Her grumbling escalated slightly in volume as a faint whistling noise, almost reaching a shrill screech, tried to crawl its way into her ears.

***

Hanna could hear a faint tuneless whistling coming from the deserted hallway she was approaching. The soft din of her relatives consoling each other faded behind her as she walked farther away from them, and the whistling seemed to delicately bounce off the walls around her, surrounding her with its joyful sweetness. On her way to the bathroom, where she planned to spend at least the next half hour, she had run into Erik. She had tried to casually ask him who the boy that had been sitting next to him at the funeral was, but for some reason he had just rolled his eyes and walked away without saying a word. The whistling grew incrementally louder with each step, and as she rounded the corner, she stopped short.

***

The footsteps stopped abruptly and the aimless whistling died on Anthony Martin’s lips as he saw the girl from the funeral, the black bird, the underwater creature, or, more specifically, Hanna Rebane. She looked as surprised as he felt, and he was almost afraid that if he moved too suddenly, he would scare her off, and she would fly back or swim away or vanish entirely from his life. But she did not seem frightened or annoyed to see him there;
he instead saw a hint of curiosity playing in the bright blue eyes that reminded him of the stained-glass ocean she had been floating so peacefully in before. His heart opened to swallow this crushing flood at the same time as his mouth opened to try to send the words that could bridge the small but infinite expanse that currently (and, oh, how he prayed, prayed it would soon be formerly) lay between them.
The house is full of foreign girls
chaste little Dutch things
in dark rooms blooming.
All eyes averted, modest
so unlike those rotting modern
loquacious mees, immanent
onto a new world that cowers.
They were each some man’s
hippy Galatea, weedy Aphrodite
each named cautiously Mary, Marie
No peachy cheeks ever bruised
by paint literally but for what else
can we credit omnipresent small
bundles of fruit, carefully obscene?
And each must have had dreams.
“Once I sat in a stream with my sister

“Blood like tarnished copper oozed through my fingers
our hands numb, our mouths mute,
_and Janie laid nude beside me, her eyes open,
like the world was too much with us.”
_the red water pushing in from all sides.”

“Maya had seen the future, her eyes dark and heavy,

“Mud like primordial magic clung to us, inside and out,
like two black holes punched through her face
_making the world old and dark again, like times past
and the sound of her heartbeat scared her.”
_when secrets lurked in the shallows and the ripples stilled.”

“There is a willow tree above me, rotten and broken,

“A hand strains upward, fingertips breaking through glass,
and I remember when we hung from it, hands twined,
_as beads of water rush off your face and you gasp in air,
our bodies like red giants, engulfing each other from the inside out.”
_joining the world again, pain like losing you stealing my breath.”
DEAR BIOLOGIST,

Please help me.

Are you real?
Can I touch you, please?
I have proved objective reality with a tea kettle.

The tea kettle hasn’t caught fire yet I am burning.
Yes, turtles, I will try! Inside my dreams, outside the world, not Gertrude Stein, when I a turtle the word is my own designed shell. The world is resting on the turtle’s shell not snails, not whelks, not scallops, not quahogs. The scallopers haircut has coming fallen I will to home for fried and sautéed scallops from carapace to car. To tent to coat to boxers, not box turtles, but sawback turtles, like maps their carapace markings. There is a turtle tall enough for me to rest my head on flatness, his is soft (his chest) and listen. Giantest turtle, what do you feel about rivers? All right rivers.
Ginger Brostowski is currently a sophomore, and she is a visual communication design major. She took this photograph when she was in 10th grade on a service trip in Ecuador. On the day it was taken, her group went on a 7 mile hike in the Andes. She wanted to ride this donkey really badly, but she had to settle for just a photo.

Jacqueline Cassidy is a senior from Scottsdale, Arizona currently studying English and creative writing. She has been published in Re:Visions twice before, and her work also appears in A Time To Write, the school’s Violence Prevention Initiative literary journal. She was awarded a silver medal in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards for her novel, Broken, and you can read more of her work at www.artandwriting.org and http://writingfolly.wordpress.com

Dakota Connell-Ledwon is a sophomore English major from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She is still recovering from the shock of seeing her first snowfall freshman year. In her free time, Dakota is a proud member of the Band of the Fighting Irish, an avid ukulele player, and a staff writer for College Magazine.

In the words of the late, great Frank Norris, Robert Dorenbusch doesn’t like writing. He likes having written.

Jordan Dorney is a second year PhD student in political science and a graduate of Boston College. Jordan studies political philosophy and is from Long Island, NY.
In his childhood, **Charlie Ducey** aspired to drive enormous yellow construction vehicles, setting skyscraper foundations with shovels and drills and dinky little backhoes. Then he turned twenty. Now he has to content himself by building things with words.

**Gregory Duffy** is a senior Economics major from East Greenwich, Rhode Island. He envisions a world where one day his writing will support his lifestyle of oversleeping and being chronically late to important events. When not writing, he can be found procrastinating and hoping his Mom doesn’t worry about him after reading this story.

**Lucas Garcia** is a Senior English and FTT double major. The end is nigh. Lucas has been published in Re:Visions twice before and thinks you should submit to it too.

**Monica Gorman** identifies with the feeling of the wind when a train goes by, the sound of rain on the roof, the smell of oranges and used bookstores, the taste of cinnamon, and the color red.

**Allie Griffith** is a daughter, a doer, a don’t-er, a dabbler, a dribbler, a doodler, a dancer, and a dreamer.

**Laura Gruszka** makes things (stories, music) by hitting keys (computer, xylophone). She’s an aspiring author, an idealist, an amateur photographer, and a dog enthusiast. She is a sophomore double-major in English and Music.

**Tess Guntley** believes narrative is the soulstuff of humanity. She enjoys bad French pop, toasted almonds, and the facial expressions of jazz musicians.

**Miranda Herrera** is a junior at the University of Notre Dame majoring in Environmental Engineering and minoring in Theology. She is originally from San Antonio, Texas but currently resides in Cavanaugh Hall. She recently took a creative writing course to take me out of my comfort zone, and she
guesses it worked.

**McKenzie Hightower** is a mess of an undergraduate who enjoys foreign films, Jean Genet, and meditating on the small apocalypses of the world. She hopes for a future in writing, but then again, don’t we all?

**Natalie Kim** is a member of the class of 2017 and in the process of studying Accounting and English. She writes poems about whatever comes to her mind—no matter how bizarre.

**Gerard Ledley** is a Junior majoring in English and Philosophy, concentrating in creative writing and minoring in Business Economics. He hails from Brewster, NY and is a proud member of Zahm House here on campus. Gerard enjoys writing both poetry and prose, but does not enjoy writing his own bio.

**Julia Rose Lewis** is a postgraduate student in Creative Writing at Kingston University London. When not in school, she lives on Nantucket Island where she is a member of the Moors Poetry Collective. She has one horse and three cats.

**Keith Loh** is a crossword puzzle enthusiast and is passionate about the outdoors.

For **Diego Lopez** “Mission Statement” was a result of his reflection on his years here at Notre Dame, and his relationship with the university, student body, etc. “Numerical Self-Report” is a compilation of several personal experiences, void of context. They are all very specific instances, which carry more weight than he is willing to admit.

**Ann Mangano** completed “The Depression” for her portfolio three years ago as a part of a study of how music and history have impacted each other throughout the 1900s. The piece is in black and white compressed charcoal on cardboard. The cardboard was meant to evoke the feeling of the cardboard homes that became characteristic of the poorest during the depression and the black
and white was meant to produce a bleak feeling.

**Mary Grace Mangano** is a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame with big dreams, hoping to serve others in any way she can. A recent graduate of Villanova University with a BAH in English, she likes to write poetry and short fiction in her free time (and especially on trains). She enjoys reading, traveling, and being active...and is still holding out on her letter from Hogwarts.

**Megan McCormack** is a sophomore English major and French supplementary major who currently resides in Los Angeles. Shoutout to her parents, her brother, and the Unofficial Quint. Love thee.

**Sinead O’Donovan** is a sophomore at Notre Dame majoring in Finance and English. She lives in her head, mostly, and other people’s books.

**Jack Pietrowicz** is a fencer, an avid appreciator of music and a hobbyist computer programmer.

**Malavika Praseed** is a sophomore English/Pre-Health major from the Chicago area. She enjoys peanut butter, a good baseball game, and reading on rainy days.

**Robbie Ryan** is a sophomore economics major living in Morrissey Manor who enjoys writing prose, specifically fiction. He is a voracious reader and holds to the principle that all good writers are great readers. Robert hopes to continue his writing while he studies abroad in London next year.

**Vienna Wagner** is a senior English major with a concentration in Creative Writing from the Indianapolis area. Her poetry is featured on Moving Forward, an exhibition on the Indianapolis cultural trail. She will return to Notre Dame next fall as a double-domer in the English Department’s MA in English and American Literature program.