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**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.**

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LETTER FROM : /  
THE EDITORS (!)

Dear Reader (n. a person who reads; a person who enjoys to read; a person who reads to correct enjoy),

Welcome to the Spring 2011 issue of Re:Visions, Notre Dame's undergraduate literary journal (n. diary; a written record of personal experience) is highly corrosive. Originally brought to life to serve as a forum for the best (adj. having good qualities in the highest degree) works by up-and-coming young writers, this issue of Re:Visions showcases outstanding poetry (n. non-medicinal [approved for human consumption] magic) and prose (n. straight-up voodoo hoodoo) from Notre Dame undergraduates campus-wide. From math whizzes (n. not urination) to musicians (v. root toot toot), world travelers (n. Oman!) to the clergy (v. Amen!), a dozen---we're no math majors here, say the Editors (in fact, we're quite the opposite. MFA = master of faking arithmetic-skills) ---voices make their homes (n. where you live at a particular time) in these pages, darkening the doorways with heartbreak and throwing[up] open the curtains with good humour (n. phlegm; or, a popular American ice-cream brand.).

We're probably supposed to say something about increasing artistic consciousness and upholding creative venues here (adv. not there) but if you turn the page, we think you'll see all that for yourself literature will rain down upon you like a plague. Far beyond being a simple (adj. free from vanity) representation of "quality" work, Re:Visions is a collection of poems full of surprising snakes and images, prose full of compelling quandaries, and above all else, STYLEs fit to stun the senses (n. a way to end on an alliterative allusion).

Get comfortable. Enjoy.

The Editors, n., plural, those responsible

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# Michael Todisco

## meanwhile in a parallel and equally sane universe

It seemed as though the second hand on the clock had come to a screeching halt. Each second felt like an hour, each minute an eternity. Church simply could not hold the attention of a twelve year old boy. The stories of morality and heroism that his priest frequently returned to had long since ceased to entertain William, who was currently re-playing the diving catch he had made in his baseball game over and over and his head.

The bright spring sun tantalized the young parishioner. Winter had given way to the beauty of early spring. The rejuvenated rays of the sun snuck through the ornate stained glass windows and reminded William of the pick-up game currently being played by his friends. He once again grabbed at his father's wristwatch. How was it possible that only twenty minutes had passed? William sunk lower into his pew seat.

He had lost a thorny debate with his parents about coming to the day's service. William and his brother Sebastian had pleaded to be pardoned from the mass. William wanted to take advantage of the suddenly recharged weather, and Sebastian had plans to see a new movie with his friends.

Sebastian was eighteen years old and had already been confirmed into the parish. He now could make his own decisions about when and where he wanted to go to church. Needless to say, Sebastian skipped out on mass that Sunday morning when a better offer arose. William, all alone and excruciatingly bored, continued to sulk about his current condition. It only enraged him further that his brother was out enjoying a movie. The pastor's voice dredged on and on, and William

continued to day dream.

When the priest finally dismissed the mass, William secretly rejoiced. When his family's car pulled out of the church parking lot, he watched the dreaded edifice become smaller and smaller in the rear-view mirror until it finally was out of sight. Safe for another seven days!

"William," his father's voice beckoned "what did you learn at mass today?" Despite William's absentmindedness in church, he was prepared for the question. Each Sunday, William could be sure it was the first thing his father would ask when the family entered the car. Consequently, William made sure to listen in mass just long enough to formulate an acceptable response.

"I really liked this week's reading, Dad, from the Book of Mufasa," William added in this superfluous fact, with an air of pride in his voice, to give the illusion that he had been extra attentive today. "I learned to never give up. Even when his father had died, and it seemed like he was never going to be King, Simba never gave up his dream." William's dad flashed a discreet and brief smile towards his wife. He was clearly proud that his son was taking an interest in the religion that had been such a large part of his upbringing.

Satisfied with his son's answer, William's dad turned on the radio to hear the morning news. He was saddened by what he heard as the sound from the speakers filled the family mini-van.

"Today's top story," the news reporter continued "following a disturbing and violent trend, another Rafikist committed a suicide bombing of the Canadian embassy after the running of offensive cartoons of the sacred prophet in the Toronto Times. Thirty-two were killed and dozens more injured. The Zuzuites have issued a fiery response, launching a forceful missile attack on the-" William's dad shut off the radio.

"All this violence seems so senseless. We all believe in the same savior. Why does everyone get caught up in the semantics- killing each

other left and right? One person believes Rafiki was the true messenger, the other believes it was Zazu. So they kill each other.”

William always kept supremely quiet during his father’s rants. The subject had become increasingly pointed since his cousin had been deployed to fight in Africa last month. They’ve been fighting over the Holy Land for thousands of years, his father would tell him. No matter how much society progresses, some things never change.

The family caravan and Sebastian’s beat up Toyota Camry pulled into the driveway at the same time. Sebastian threw open his car door. “What a movie” he exclaimed. “Truly unbelievable! The imagery, special effects, cinematography! All top notch!”

William didn’t want to hear it. Sebastian thought he was a movie critic since he took a film class last semester. What did all those terms even mean? If a movie made William laugh, or had a car chase scene, He said he liked it. Cinematography? Imagery? Maybe these were things people cared about when they got older.

“Yes, Sebastian,” his father said. “That’s all well and good. But what was the movie about?” William smiled. It seemed as though he wasn’t the only who was fed up with Sebastian’s abstract movie reviews.

“Oh, the plot was fantastic. Whoever could think of a story like that is brilliant. I guess a sort of wizard-zombie drama. Hard to fit into one category. There was murder, sex, lies, magic.”

“Sounds like my type of movie,” William’s father said, only after making sure his wife was not within earshot.

“The main character, he could walk on water, and do things you wouldn’t even believe. He even rises from the dead! You just have to see it,” Sebastian continued. He turned to his little brother and roughed his hair, which had been perfectly parted to the left for mass.

“How was church, little bro?” He said, with a patronizing and snarky tone of voice. William ignored him and clenched his fist. His father sensed a fight was brimming, and quickly diverted the conversation back to Sebastian’s movie.

“Sebastian, that plot you described, it sounds familiar,” his father said. “Was it a remake?”

“No, but I think it was based on an old book, or something.”

“What was the name of the movie, again?”

“Jesus Christ,” replied Sebastian, answering his father’s question.

His father just stood at the kitchen table with a blank expression on his face. “Huh, no that wasn’t it. I’ve never heard of that one.”

# Dylan Krieger

## Art de Miss

In the moon there  
are several  
depths at which  
to dance  
bony cakes  
of ash to  
sink bright  
toes  
capillaries  
kicking up red  
knees  
in silken anterior  
craters  
molecules  
ballroom skating  
in blood water

oh you can  
can

feel the blast  
the liquid ripples when  
she crumbles up  
like limestone  
open jaws

with empty  
middles  
she is dipped  
in glacial  
whiteface  
la petite  
gray ballerina  
rubber skeleton  
sharp predatory  
pearl  
the walk-in  
closet where I  
learned to spin  
is rubble now  
like you.



# Kelly McCauley

## The Frozen Tundra

Pink jellybean noses peep out from their hooded heads, exposed,  
as they tiptoe toward the icy expanse, unprepared to brave the cold.  
An ivory domain, vast and void of footprints, taunts the pale pair,  
never ending and mocking as they enter the harsh snow globe.  
Cold peppermint breath clouds the air as they exhale, positioned  
courageously to battle the snowstorm surrounding the schoolyard  
Gloves and scarves will serve as little saving grace in their crusade  
(only the enduring persevere on these freezing, frosty odysseys).  
A town the size of a gum blown bubble, yet no relief is offered,  
despite nearby drivers heated and clutching hot cocoa, unconcerned.  
No regard for two small girls, wavering with windburned faces  
preparing for their reluctant yet ritual route, ready to reach home.

# Lauren Restivo

**You came home from Italy and were no longer offended by the smell of cigarette smoke.**

Tears of rain,  
drop upon the  
salt of the earth,  
flowing nerves, and  
synapses,  
flowing nerves and  
children half  
moons chasing  
fireflies, like  
carousels of  
blinking lights and  
spinning sounds,  
spinning lights and  
blinking sounds,  
porcelain horse  
flame mouth tongue  
whispers late-night,  
paper-cut red  
lollipop rose  
wide-eyed-susans  
forget-me-pleases  
forgive the lids, lashes,  
cracked knuckles,

thumb-dot, polka-print  
two-one, done  
come out come out,  
laughing out of  
open window,  
heavy hand-  
in-hand,  
rug burn  
rhymes with life,  
life in rhyme  
unknown,  
as patchy heart, you  
are a brilliant blue, you  
  
are a wayward bus.

# Alexandra Butz

## The Cross

The cross was simple. Its smooth, vinyl-coated surface felt cool as I pressed it against my face. The back was rougher, my fingers finding the familiar etching there like a magnet finds metal. Turn away from sin. I wanted to turn away. I wanted to turn away from many things, from everything, from nothing. That's why I stole the cross. I flitted in like a shadow, a breath of air, a wisp of wind. I reached into the open casket, and your pale, hollow face held nothing for me. I straightened your tie, smoothed your hair. You looked so peaceful, so content. I didn't want to leave you empty-handed. A white rose you now hold in your hand, something you would remember me by, if you were still here; a wooden cross I now hold in mine, something to remember you by, because I'm still here. Because I will always be here.

•••

Your cross has changed. I doubt even you would recognize it. Its smooth surface is now the pock-marked face of the moon, its body the shards of shattered space rock. A knife, its blade now two silver slivers once part of a whole, sits on the floor feeling fulfilled; its life purpose was to cut and it has succeeded wildly beyond even its own expectations. I want to take the words, turn away from sin, and rearrange them into something that has meaning, but every combination is without. I want to examine each shard, to climb inside their fiber innards, to discover their wooden secrets. I want to find the hollow where your memory lurks and hold it hostage.

•••

I want to put it back together. Maybe, somehow, that would put you back together. But the cross is damaged beyond repair. You are damaged beyond repair. Perhaps even I. Anger flows like molten lava through the tunnels of my body. I want to burn the cross, and I can. The cross is without you; I have found nothing inside it. An empty token, a pile of ashes. I will return it to you, as you have left me. Empty, broken, burned.

# Claire Kiernan

## Eat Your Heart Out

It was Napoleon  
who had such a passion for chicken  
that he kept his chefs working around the clock,  
plucking  
chopping  
baking the succulent poultry in sumptuous spices—  
cinnamon  
cardamom  
curry  
burying this decadent dish in a sea of gravy  
for the ravenous emperor to devour, so to  
demonstrate to the empire  
the truth of his adage—

*An army marches on its stomach.*

It was Marie Antoinette  
who has such a taste for sweets  
that she kept mounds of them in Versailles,  
beignets  
croissants  
profiteroles with piles of crème fraîche,  
macaroons  
madeleines  
meringues  
for her royal sweet tooth to savor,  
and, in between swallows, she spoke

her prophetic words—

*Let them eat cake.*

It was Adolf Frederick of Sweden

who was so fond of dining

that his last meal consisted of

sauerkraut

kippers

hetvägg with a bowl of warm cow milk, which he eagerly

gobbled

gulped

guzzled up,

fourteen generous servings to be exact,

a whopping feast that proved too much for his stomach;

He is today still known among school children as—

*The King who ate himself to death.*

So tell me,

are you like Napoleon, Marie, or Adolf,

these European foodies of old who

relished

revered

venerated

the food on their plates?

As for me, I prefer a strict diet

of other, more flavorful things:

sestinas

sonnets

septolets.

Look closely and you will see

the ink that is dribbling down my chin—

*I have been eating poetry.*

# Mary Herber

## Postpartum

A plastic box prone on the counter—  
shrink-wrapped sandwich halves,  
thermos chilling milk,  
green apple settles the top left corner.  
She tucked a patterned napkin in—  
don't let the apple bruise—  
measured the partitions  
and wished the angles softer.  
Steps on groaning hallway wood—  
snap shut the box,  
hardly gleaming armor;  
hand passed to hand  
that lingered on the handle,  
then swept the counter bare,  
so only crumbs wetly clung  
to hands curled in flowered pockets,  
until the box returned.

# Christina Mastrucci

## how to grow a piece of glass

we were nothing but tree trunks in the dark,  
frozen arms growing behind a steering wheel  
cold like the concrete, all your syllables  
spinning in my brain the constant phrase  
“YOU ARE NOT HERE” as I traced your touch  
through the silence of your bare eyes.

I'd never seen your breath so broken,  
so labored I could see the shards you swallowed  
every time our voices ruptured in the wind,  
every time you scattered me like glass  
across the soil, where I grew my own roots  
that you stumbled upon in the graveyard.

which one of us was too young to die?  
before that night I was sleeping on the inside,  
a corpse taking refuge underground  
from every drop of rain I could not catch,  
singing “holy, holy” solitude, wishing  
it meant something more than death.

forgive me, love. I've been dead so long  
I've forgotten how to be alive, and I can't say  
I remember the last time you shivered so.  
you tapped your fingers like a sullen rain

on the windshield, I thirsted like a seed  
beaten into the earth, and we echoed,

we echoed like every second I lost you.

# Bridget Apfeld

## The Remembrance of My Self

Trains rush by in the velvet night, their mournful keening piercing the hum of the summer cicadas and whispering fields of Queen Anne's Lace, the stars above lulled by the wash and wave of the lake, and I know that I will not sleep. I will sit at the open window and let the midnight breeze waft slick and cool over my hot skin, I will close my eyes and press them shut until I see tiny constellations burst and shimmer under their lids, I will float ghostly into the night air and wander through the sun-parched grasses, now brittle and white as bone under the moon. But I will not sleep. My mind refuses to surrender and prefers instead to prowling the deserted alleys and paths of my memory, dogging its own footsteps no matter where I turn, circling endlessly around and around until I am dizzy with fatigue and cannot think, would fade into darkness if I could, if only I could sever my thoughts from myself. Sometimes I imagine a life with no memory, a mind like a window through which experiences could stream as sunlight but never make a mark, or perhaps the thoughts simply scrubbed off, expunged forever: would the blank abyss be beautiful, or would I be haunted by the spirits of those murdered memories, forever lurking just out of sight in the corners of my eyes? I think it could be worth investigating. If I could, perhaps I would.

I wonder how much we ever really know, what is real and what isn't, whether the reflections in our mind mirror ourselves or something more--or less, perhaps. Why we do the things we do, say the things we say. Where we end and our imagination begins, like some

sort of fun-house distortion of what we've been told we are. Sometimes I think my childhood was more real to me than any part of my adult life, as if suddenly I woke up one day and the colors had turned to beiges and flat grays and I hadn't noticed it before, or the sound had gone muted and I couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when someone hit the switch. I glide along as if in a numb fog, occasionally catching a hint of a far-off memory, wafting elusive on the air. I'll be walking in a field in early morning and suddenly I am five, running through the rattling wheat and trailing a broken kite behind me; I slip on my rain boots, breathe in the rubber smell, and find myself searching my coat pockets for the lucky stone I found in a quarry when I was ten; my fingers skim the rain-brushed needles of a pine and I am thirteen, crouched behind a dewy gravestone, drinking in the scent of the rich earth, waiting to scare a friend. I thrill at those moments, and am flooded with bitterness when the remembrances fade back into nothingness and I am faced with the present again.

But sometimes my mind will not stop remembering and I cannot find my way out of the things that have already happened, cannot discriminate between then and now and real and was real and could be real or might have been real, the coulds and woulds and didn'ts and shouldn'ts and don'ts of my past. My mind regurgitates it all in a billowing swell, vomiting out masses of tangled and broken impressions until I cannot breathe for choking on them all. The sound of the maple's roots being dragged from the earth as the neighbors bulldozed it, replacing it with a patio. A whispered voice in my ear, I could. Blood-spattered snow, the deer still graceful as it stumbled and fell. Black and white images, the television fuzzy, people jumping, falling through the air like ash on the wind. The damp shriek of the shovel through the clay as we dug the dog's grave. My brother's face when I told him I hated him. My father's tears. My mother's tears. My tears. The zip of a tent. His voice, if I wanted to. My tears. His voice. My tears.

I cannot sleep.

\*

It was the summer before last. I was on my annual canoeing trip, a journey through the twisting lakes and black rivers of the north, and was searching for a campsite. I scanned the shore of the narrow lake, searching in the misty shadows of the dripping pines for a sign of a site, but the trees yielded no instant secrets. Dipping my paddle into the lake experimentally, I tested the depth: most likely twenty or so feet, judging by the surface clarity and the charcoal blackness of the water around the canoe. The lake was smooth and dark; a slight steam rose from the dim rocks lining the shore against which the water faintly lapped. The canoe was stationary, rocking only slightly when I shifted carefully, reaching for the plastic-covered map. I drew it out of its protective bag and wiped the condensation off its creased and faded surface. Fumbling in a pocket for my compass, I glanced up at the iron skies nervously. Rain would complicate things, make landmarks blur and disappear into the enveloping shadows of the forests. Marking my coordinates on the map, I set the compass carefully and found my directionals: the arrow danced slightly northeast. I frowned, and folded up the map, stowing it strategically in my personal pack. Twisting my back to relieve the tension, I picked up my paddle once again and headed for the shore, intending to make a closer inspection. I paddled silently and swiftly, enjoying the ripples and whirlpools spiraling evenly off my strokes. The repetition was soothing, the dull ache in my shoulders a welcome reminder to stay focused in the present. A loon shrilled in the distance, its haunting wail disconcertingly similar to the howl of a wolf. I knew the difference, yet the loons still put me on edge at night. Noises at night did that: sounds became amplified; cries in the dusk carried over the emptiness of the lakes and echoed in the whispering trees, waking you out of a dead sleep with the vague feeling that you were being intimately watched. The forest breathed at night, and you had to learn to breathe with it.

I drew the canoe up to the rocky shore of the lake, watchful of

the rocks below. The lake ended abruptly, the shore a jumbled pile of boulders appearing as if they had been tossed and scattered by some primordial giant of the north. Looking down into the stillness of the water, I could not yet see the bottom. If I were to disembark, I would have to rely solely on the slick surfaces of the rocks. It would be easy to break an ankle, or drop a pack. The campsite was here, I could see the fire grate glinting through the pines, but I wasn't sure if I should stay: it was early, and pressing on through the portage would open up new lakes, with possibly better campsites. My indecision made me nervous. The faintest rumble of thunder in the distance echoed over the lake while a few tentative drops of rain rippled on the surface of the water. I relaxed slightly, my choice made for me by the thunder: I would set up camp for the night on the shore.

The afternoon air was damp and cool as I drove in the last stake holding down the rain fly over my tent. Resting my pack carefully against the tent wall, I padded carefully over the bouldery surface of the bluff and knelt at the edge. I leant forward slightly, toying with my dizziness as I looked down into the rock-strewn lake, imagining letting go into the void and tumbling down, down until I met the water. Would future travellers find my bones among the rocks, my grinning skull washed by the icy water while fish flitted among my shattered ribs? Settling myself more firmly onto the ledge, I took out my pocket knife and picked absentmindedly at the moss on the boulder. I let myself dissolve into my surroundings, listening to and smelling and feeling the forest and lake around me. An eagle circled overhead, a black silhouette against the gray sky; I supposed it had an aerie nearby, though I had not seen a nest. The high-pitched whine of flies and mosquitos rose in the silence, a normally blocked-out noise now returning to her awareness. I could hear the waters of the lake gently stroking the rocks below. Closing my eyes, I again felt the light rocking of the canoe. I breathed in, feeling the forest and the lakes pulling me in, claiming me. The wind made a high, keening sound as it travelled over

the silent lake and whipped my hair around my face. I suddenly shivered into my sweatshirt. Black shadows flitted over the surface of the lake. The trees quivered, alive and watching, mute sentinels guarding the ancient rocks and the bottomless waters of the lake. I stood up and scanned the horizon once more. The forest stared back. Walking over and unzipping the tent, I crawled inside and lay down on my unfurled sleeping bag, using my backpack as a pillow. I fell asleep listening to the whisperings of the forest.

He had appeared out of the mists of the lake, his canoe seeming to glide more quietly than a fish flitting through the black depths of the waters. I was sitting on the bluff, breaking twigs and sticks into a pile of tinder for a fire, enjoying the last faint warmth of the sinking sun, when I saw him approach. I stayed still, as I was unsure if he had yet seen me; I hoped he had not and would continue on, leaving me my solitude. But as I sat in silent watchfulness, clutching my pile of sticks, he looked up toward the bluff and raised a hand: he had seen me. I lifted a hand briefly and let it fall into my lap. Would he leave now? Plunging his paddle into the shadowed waters he turned the canoe toward my shore and began paddling. I sighed, then gathered up my wood and went to see what he wanted, moving cautiously over the mossy, treacherous rocks.

I crouched down for balance on a flattish boulder near the water's edge and waited for the man to pull up his canoe. He guided the prow up next to where I had tied down my canoe, but remained seated, watching me as I stared.

"Hi," I said finally. He nodded.

"Hi," He said. We were quiet for a bit, listening to the descending hum of the water-flies and mosquitos.

"I'm looking for a campsite," He said. I shook my head.

"This is the only one on the lake," I said. I shrugged my shoulders as if to indicate and it's taken, can't you tell? He smiled awkwardly.

"Yeah, I know, normally I would just rough it without a site,

but...” He looked up at the rain-heavy skies and cocked an eyebrow. I followed his gaze as if interested in his predicament. Rain would not affect his plans if he truly didn’t need an official site, as He said.

“Look,” He said after a minute, humbly, “I hate to ask it, but can I put up here tonight? I’m heading out early tomorrow.” I studied him carefully. He was young, maybe twenty-five or -six, just slightly older than I was, and looked very unassuming: dirt-stained shirt and sweaty bandanna, crooked smile, and carrying the lumpy and overstuffed pack of the novice. I decided to relent.

“You can pitch over there,” I said, gesturing toward an area opposite my tent, “it’s not rocky.” And with that I strode back into the clearing and left him to struggle with his pack on the slick rocks. I would be accommodating, but my generosity would only go as far as the protocol for camping hospitality demanded: that is, whatever was necessary but no more.

\*

On the nights I cannot sleep, I’ve found that it helps sometimes to pretend that I am dissolving into the air, letting my body ease into the particles around me and all that’s left is my self. Invisibility is calming, even if it is only in the mind. I am free to wander about then, wafting along on the night breeze that slips in through my cracked window, smelling of lavender and wheat, smoke and pine, the faint sporadic glow of fireflies just visible against the darkened lawn as I sit and watch the marbled sky. I let my mind rock along with the waves of the lake as I breathe into a calmness where my thoughts drift along but I let them go, casting no hooks or lines. Washed by the ethereal fog of unformed thought I can sink into blissful unconsciousness and forgetfulness.

Until I am woken by the panicked beating of my own heart, the scream of a barn owl echoing in my ears, and my memories crash through the barriers I have formed, surfacing slick and blind to stare with unblinking eyes. Footsteps on the rocks. The zip of the tent. If I wanted to. A shadowed face. Breath in my ear. I could. Breath on my

face. My tears. Could, could. Hot breath.

I cannot sleep.

\*

He wouldn't stop talking as we sat in the deepening dusk, staring at the fire while our fish sizzled on the grate. His name was Sam, he was a few years out of school, and still discovering his "purpose in life."

"And so I was like, why not go camping? See nature and all that," He said, with his mouth stuffed full of the last of my dried cranberries. "You do this a lot? I never have before, and I can't get enough, I'm never going back." He grinned at me, teeth bloody with fruit.

"I come every summer," I said shortly, though not unkindly.

"See, that's great, that's really great, being up here by yourself, communing with the trees," He said. I poked the fish with a stick, checking their creamy bellies.

"I think they're done," I said. Sam lumbered over to his pack and rummaged around noisily for a mess kit, scattering bottles of bug spray and sun screen and dirty socks around my formerly tidy site. He returned triumphantly with a plate and fork, and sat down heavily on the ground beside me. I couldn't help but smile as he scarfed down the fish.

"Careful you don't swallow a bone," I said.

"I'm so hungry, I haven't eaten real food in forever," He said. "Well, in about five days," he amended as I raised an eyebrow at him. "I have no idea how to build a fire, so I've been going with granola bars for the whole trip."

"You came up here and can't build a fire?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I figured I'd learn along the way, but the rangers told me not to try teaching myself. They said something about burning the forest down," he laughed. I stared.

"But don't worry," he continued, scraping his plate clean of fish, "I'm getting the hang of this stuff a lot quicker than I thought. It's not too hard." I shook my head and went to go filter more water.

He followed me down to the lake and stood behind me, leaning against a crooked tree while I pumped the filter, balancing carefully on the edge of the boulders. The lake was still and quiet, the threat of rain having passed by with only a few sporadic drops. Flies danced and flitted on the surface of the water, while the sinking sun cast a purple hue over the pines. A turtle poked its head out of the water a few yards off, silent and curious, and sank down again with barely a ripple. Sam didn't notice it.

"So are there wolves around here?" he asked hopefully. I shrugged with my back to him, concentrating on the filter. It was getting clogged, and I was frustrated.

"Yeah, but you're not going to see one. Maybe hear them, but that's about it," I said.

"How about bears?" he asked.

"Do you really want to see a bear up close?" I asked. I hoped he could hear the disapproval in my voice. He laughed.

"No, but that would be a sweet story to tell back home," Sam said. "What's the coolest thing I'll see?" I thought for a moment.

"Moose," I said, standing up and turning around, "if you're quiet enough." I knew he would never be quiet enough for that, but I thought the idea of it might stem some of his incessant talk. His eyes lit up.

"Awesome! Maybe I'll get a picture," He said, stepping closer to me. As I looked up at him his face was suddenly cast into shadow and my stomach clenched, my skin contracting with a mindless cold fright. He stood on a rock above me staring down, face darkened, eyes glinting in the last weak light of the evening. His figure blurred in my eyes, then came into focus again. I breathed in deeply.

"I'm going to sleep," I said, and clambered past him hurriedly. He stared up after me as I ducked into my tent and zipped the door shut.

\*

It is amazing what kinds of things you can discover in the deep hours of the night when the rest of the world is locked in slumber.

For example, the resonance of frogs' chirping will outweigh that of crickets when the wind blows from the east, but not from the south. Matches burn best when struck with the left hand. A fair-sized piece of ice takes one hour and seven minutes to melt if left in the moonlight on a windowsill in November. Ferns stretch their tender leaves toward the dawning sun faster when they share space with violets. The word jump loses its meaning after four hundred and thirty-two repetitions. Train tracks smell like rust and sand. My average thought lasts for twenty-one seconds before it is interrupted. My thoughts are interrupted. Interruptions. If I wanted to. The zip of the tent. Breath in my ear. I could.

\*

Soft footsteps on the rock woke me out of the pitch black of my sleep. I lay perfectly still as I trained my ears toward the noise, gauging its distance from my tent, trying to shake the fuzziness of sleep from my mind. The steps approached the tent and halted abruptly; I could see a faint silhouette through the translucent door as Sam crouched and fumbled for the zipper. The door opened slowly, incrementally, unfolding carefully against the night sky. A mosquito darted in and I had to stifle the instinct to immediately blow it away from my face as I heard its shrill whine dart about my ears. I kept my breathing slow and even as I watched Sam step gingerly into the tent, trying desperately not to trip on my legs and strewn sleeping bag as he stooped awkwardly, nearly doubled over, under the low ceiling. My heart pounded in my chest so hard I wondered if he could hear it. What was he doing? Despite my surprise I was only slightly puzzled by this intrusion, though, somehow I thought he must be confused, must have a question about something. Standing in the pearlescent moonlight streaming through the mesh door his eyes glinted opaque as he bent toward me, flat and shining in the darkness, feral; he was crouched so close now I could smell the aroma of sweat and damp clothing and dried sunscreen that clung to him and radiated out from his skin. I could feel his hot

breath on my face as he bent down further, closer and closer.

“What are you doing?” I asked. He halted, breathing heavily. We stared at one another for a while. He was silent, poised above me, and I could still feel my heart fluttering wildly in my chest.

“Sam, what are you doing?” I asked again. He stretched out his hand and let it hover just above my face, tracing the air above my cheek.

“It’s just us out here,” He said finally. “Why not?”

“What?” I said. His eyes shone in the dark.

“You’ll never see me again, what’s the big deal? Come on,” He said, leaning closer still. His breath was warm in my ear. “Why not?”

“I don’t know you,” I said as I tried to back away along the wall of the tent, my legs tangled in my unzipped sleeping bag, my mind protesting, my breathing constricted, “I don’t know you.” Sam grabbed my wrist and held on, rather unnecessarily, for where could I possibly go?

“Come on,” He said, “I’ll be nice. I promise.” And suddenly his mouth was crushing mine, lips tasting of salt and sweet berries, his breath hot and ragged as he pressed down, trapping me beneath his weight. His voice was in my ear while I struggled, “Stop worrying, it’s no big deal,” his hands at my waist, his knee digging into my hip as I twisted under him. Choking for breath I raked my fingernails down the side of his face and he reared back.

“Don’t,” I gasped out. Sam stared down at me, leaning on his elbows, his face in shadow. It was quiet as we lay in silence, the only sound the timid quivering of the leaves on the trees as they scraped against the outside of the tent. I felt a tear as it slid haltingly down my cheek to rest in the hollow of my collarbone; my legs were hot and sticky against the flannel of my sleeping bag, and I could feel Sam’s ribs uncomfortably as he rested against me. As I lay trapped against the ground I could feel the rocking of the canoe, my body swaying gently on the waves while my mind drifted into fog and shadow.

“Don’t,” I said again, quietly. Sam shifted his weight slightly but

didn't move. I saw the shine of his teeth as he spoke again.

"You know," He said, his voice low and soft in my ear, "if I wanted to, I could. I could just do it." His eyes were cold and black. I could feel a sob rising in my throat, I felt my hands shaking, the smell of sweat and smoke was heavy in the air, heard footsteps on stone, the zip of the tent, Sam's shadowed face, felt my tears, could, I could.

"I could if I wanted," He said again, and leaned closer.

A loon shrilled out briefly, and then the lake was quiet.

\*

I am sleepless. I am sleepless not only through the lilac-scented nights but through the sun-drenched day as well. I am sleepless when I rise, when I walk, when I eat, when I speak. When I laugh, when I frown, when I wait, I am sleepless. When I sleep, I am sleepless. My ever-waking life is consumed by ghosts and stirrings of a past that will not die, and I will not sleep until I have traced a path beyond memory and thought and time, into the pale heath of forgetfulness, where my mind is my own again. I will not sleep until the loon's cry has been retracted, the words unsaid, the tent zipped, the rock face silent, until I am skimming across the waters of the lakes and drinking in the dappled sunlight and my only thought is the rhythm of the paddle as I delve forward, only forward. I will not sleep until I am alone again and the voice in my ear has been silenced, the shadows behind corners dissolved, the frightened beating of my heart stilled. For I must be alone again, not tailed as I am now by the rabid memory that snaps at my heels and pants with breath hot and sour. I will be my own, and I will remember again what it was like to dive into the frothing stream and swim wide-eyed beneath the surface. I will remember how it felt to lean on a lonely fence post and watch the barren road while tiny sandstorms raged in the dusty gravel. I will remember again what it was like to run barefoot through the fragrant grassy fields as a child, my coltish mane streaming in the wind as my soul swelled with life and happiness. I will be alive.

And then, maybe, I will sleep.

# Brittany Burgeson

## Dali Designs Cereal Boxes

with speech-like musicality  
with preaching ceremony  
with searching sabbath  
yesterday discusses to-day

with atomized detachment  
with disconnected enchantment  
in superegoic commandment  
dawn's present of fluid

enjambment; liberated restrain  
bodied thoughts refrain  
terror, terror three-one-one  
tomorrow is synthesized

by synthetic organisms  
from kinesthetic stagnation  
with apocalyptic auspicion  
shantih shantih shantih

# Christina Mastrucci

## devour

it is that piece I love  
that piece of sun  
you swing in the sky  
and I like a child gasp  
to open my mouth  
and swallow your hands  
tighten and plunge  
down my throat to rip  
the shining out  
I love that pretty piece  
that burns up my  
(sigh) saliva  
and every nerve of  
my tongue screams –  
just once more

# Dylan Krieger

## O Tell, Motel

Everything is as it sounds here.  
We eloped like yellow envelopes  
too much spit  
no stick  
the split of a slick rickety hack in  
the slopes of our throats on the ship  
no postage stamp and  
out sick without a coat,  
inside us the cutest blue  
blustering of gummed guts  
and the stubbly grunt of  
stuffed lungs.

This motel means disease:  
mildew-dripping drains,  
dropout wires,  
and me, the lead-painted  
pin-up princess, prostituted  
by the porter, popping  
pustules in swollen  
suites, sweaty yellow  
bedspreads, stealing  
pregnant yowls from  
gaping pregnant  
jug jug jowls.

Honeymoon held on to me  
drizzled halfway down my  
decoy hand-holds to a crescent  
even ten years after crafting  
twenty widowing divorces—drowning  
hotel hives in  
milky motel mire:

Room 299: Dakota Territory,  
I heard you treading like a single  
flimsy thread through the fat flooded  
floor above my head—Oh how, how  
historical of me—to listen to you die  
awhile. The clerk had locked you in  
and drove away in traded style, his droopy  
top hat towing teepees down  
the road a ways away—oh, rise,  
dead injun, rise, just do it  
far away, away.

Room 451: California,  
Bareback Republic, burdened  
by your grim black curtains,  
the gold-gridded colic in your  
gastro-intestinal single-bed guestroom,  
I have slept in the great bearded  
bridge below your gray  
belly, but you are still gaunt with  
your la la la last love-gutting from  
the missus minced meat, the Plastic  
Pacific Silt Surgeon next door.

Room 904: New York, New York  
New Amsterdam, New Right,  
New Left. New Liberty,  
nude, stripped of spikes, lipped  
all along the legs with strange new  
names: “send to me your green  
carved goods, your fat cats fasting,  
your hands and neck and feet and  
holes upon holes.” She hugs her  
head so hard so high at night I can  
hardly hear her hymns—though  
sometimes she hitches herself to  
the elevator shaft and rides out of hiding  
with no blood in her eyes.

Everything is as it sounds here—  
So porter porter please this time  
pick me up and  
peck the poison shankers  
from my shedding fur, porter,  
like the pretty peacock you put on,  
porter, feather me; don't prick,  
porter, like a pin, porter,  
don't pop me porter don't  
porter don't—

lest your shushing start to  
sound too much like wind,  
wind in the tunneled prairies  
where travelers—tinted  
green—once stopped to  
sleep at night in their own

prickly air.

# Allison Franklin

## Chains of Caution

Behold the drug deal of existence  
Meeting in dark corners of the mind  
Trading desires for green scraps of safety  
These are a people playing at life  
Working nights under the fluorescent glare  
For more crisp green bills to fill their bank vaults  
Chained to office desks  
Hopes always corrupted by numbers and fear  
Kicking dreams aside, into the gutter  
Hypnotized by the next worldly goal, no matter how mundane  
Sacred desires thrown in the dirt and abandoned.

# James Kachadoorian

## Enough Time

*“We think about forever but we’ve only got today...”*

Like a foghorn from a lighthouse, Keith Urban rang out through the silence of our dorm room. Chris had recently taken a liking to country music, for no apparent reason. Following suit, he had ditched the beeping alarm clock for Kat Country 99.9.

“What part of the south are you from again, bro,” I drearily inquired to my very Northern roommate. Gently stirring, I slid my legs over the side of my bed and found the ladder. I didn’t really expect a response. Chris was about as far from a morning person as you could get. Most days, I had to drag him out of bed.

“Southern Massachusetts, baby!” he exclaimed as he jumped down from the loft. I sat there, pleasantly shocked, as he dropped to the floor, turned up the radio, cracked open a Red Bull, and smiled up at me. I’d never seen him so alive at such an early hour.

\*

I eventually climbed down the ladder. We both had International Relations at 9:30 every Friday morning. I couldn’t stand it, but he loved it. Chris’ desk was covered with the New York Times, The Economist, and Foreign Affairs. Diligent to a fault, he never skipped over a reading on the syllabus.

“Chris, lemme take a look at that article for today? Sullivan said he’s probably going to quiz us.” There were still forty minutes before class started, and the last thing I needed was to get blindsided by another pop quiz.

“Come on Ty...we’ll be fine. You’re a smart dude, and I could have written the article on South Africa. Let’s just wing it.”

“Dude, just lemme look at it. “

“Ty I didn’t even print it. You’ll be fine.”

I was immediately taken back. Chris was one of those people that did everything as hard as he could. That included working out, drinking, playing ping-pong, and homework. And did it ever include homework. A high school valedictorian, he made it a point to succeed at the college level, too.

That translated into a Spartan-like discipline. His desk calendar was freakishly organized -- tests in blue, study groups in red, office hours in green, and as of late, a couple of doctor’s appointments in black. Chris said he’d blown out his shoulder lifting the week before and needed a couple follow-up appointments. Whatever the reason was, he’d been waking up early to head to the doctor, and the lack of sleep was starting to show. Red Bull had become a stalwart of his early morning routine.

“Are you for real? Since when do you bail on homework? And you know I’m hanging on by a thread in that class.”

Chris gazed distractedly out the window, staring out at the green. The first snowfall of the year had brought a seasonal death to the environment I’d become accustomed to, as birds vanished, squirrels ducked for cover, and trees shivered, hanging on for dear life. At this point, Chris was still singing along to the radio. He was now Kenny Chesney, serenading our room with his empty can of Red Bull as a microphone. Turning back at me with a puzzled look, He said, “You think a pop quiz is really gonna matter in the long run? Do what makes you happy, kid.”

This was particularly odd, coming from the kid with a shelf full of color coordinated binders.

“Whatever you say, chief. Lemme throw some real clothes on and let’s get going.”

I wasn’t in the mood for some newfound amateur philosophy. I

was faced with the pressing task of finding something semi-presentable for that morning's lecture. I tugged on a baggy pair of sweats and a hoodie. It wasn't my best, but I figured it was good enough for an early class.

"Yo Ty, be honest with me...do I look damn good or damn good right now?" Chris held a look of genuine uncertainty on a straight face as he looked over from his closet. Clueless as to what I might expect, I turned to look. Chris was decked out in slacks and a Brooks Brothers oxford, with a J. Crew belt to match. The signature half tuck was a thing of the past. He slung a brand new Polo coat over his energetic shoulder. His Nike sneakers were nowhere to be found, replaced by a pair of casual loafers that would be standard fare at the local country club. As Chris ripped the last set of tags off his impressive ensemble, I turned back to the mirror, noticing that I looked like an absolute schmuck in comparison.

"Since when is Sullivan's class business casual?"

"Since now, bro!"

Looking like an investment banker on a Friday in Manhattan, Chris reached deep into his desk. He pulled out his Seiko watch and stuffed a few bills in his wallet. Bathing himself in scented body spray and running his hand through his shaggy mane, he cleared his throat and stepped into the hall.

At this point, I wasn't sure if it was the Red Bull or the country music, but what I had just witnessed far surpassed anything I was able to comprehend, explain, or handle.

\*

I'd been best friends with Chris from the start. We both ended up at Sigma Nu during our first night of college. As I rolled out of the cab, I caught sight of a starry-eyed freshman raising eyebrows with a sterling dizzy bat performance. A couple of seniors tried to mess around with the random freshman, but they must've underestimated Chris.

Stopping his spin with the agility of a cat, he waggled the wiffle ball bat twice like Gary Sheffield, and after staring down the pitch, he effortlessly bombed a crushed-up can over the house. Smiling and laughing, he happily walked down the front hill. Eager to meet some other freshmen, we started talking and finally realized that we lived right next to each other. A lifelong bond was forged, right then and there, over Keystone Light and a wiffle ball bat.

We were in the same pledge class, and we roomed together the next two years. He got an unbelievable internship on Capitol Hill after our sophomore year, and after looking for a place to stay, he ended up living with my family at our house in D.C. all summer. We studied abroad in London together, and as Political Science majors, we pretty much took all the same classes. We had signed a lease for an apartment off campus together for our senior year.

It was absolutely too early to tell where, when, or why we would go our separate ways. But I didn't think twice when I noticed we both had a brochure from Duke Law on our bookshelves.

\*

Trying to pull every last drop out of my Diet Mountain Dew, I clumsily stumbled after Chris. As I finally caught up, Mamie, our dorm's cleaning lady, diligently wiped some kid's puke off the mirror in the hallway. Kneeling, she furiously scrubbed away.

"Mamie, do you have a minute?"

Chris spoke gently but purposefully. A bit startled, Mamie smiled and stood up.

"Come on kid, we're going to be late," I whispered.

"Only going to take a minute, bro," he replied, standing tall.

"What's on your mind, honey," Mamie asked. A nervous twitch of the leg revealed an unsettled, cautious air.

She had every reason to be skeptical of another rich kid from New England starting a conversation. Too often, she had noticed, Housekeeping Staff was interpreted as Personal Servant. Chris had

never been overtly antagonistic to Mamie, but as far as I could tell, he certainly didn't go very far out of his way.

"I just wanted to say thank you. I'm in the middle of my third year here, and it hasn't always been the easiest ride. It's all good, but stressful, too."

"One thing's been money, though. Every morning, Monday to Friday, I wake up and walk down the hall to the bathroom. And every morning, you've smiled at me, said "Good morning, honey," and done the job you've been trusted to do to the best of your ability."

"Are you trying to get with Mamie?" I couldn't help it.

"Shut it, jackwagon," he snickered back.

"I'll never forget the time my sink backed up and you personally called a cleaning service to show up in my room twelve minutes later. Even better was when that girl got sick in my room! You helped me set up the steam cleaner the next morning. To this day, I crack up laughing when I remember you smirking about how I "really know how to pick 'em."

"Don't ever think you're taken for granted. People like you are the reason I love this place. Mamie, you're the best. Do me a favor and never change."

Taken back, Mamie stood taller, oblivious of the fact that her wet sponge was dripping all over the carpet.

Chris gave her a hug and casually walked towards the stairs.

\*

Chris held the door for me as I descended down to the lobby. Students had already started to return from classes, a surefire sign that getting to class on time would be a close call. A kid held the door for us. Stepping outside, Chris looked back at me, perplexed.

"Does it seem a little hot to you?"

"Dude I don't know. Is this the opening line of another soliloquy? What the hell was that up there?"

"Simple question, Ty-Ty."

“Yes? Maybe?”

It was, in fact, unseasonably warm. The day before was snowy, and a thin powder coated the grass. Yet today was different. Birds were back outside the building chirping, seemingly as confused as we were. The pristine powder from the night before had degenerated into a slushy mess. I took comfort in my decision to rock sweats and a hoodie, and I just rolled up the sleeves. Chris’ coat, on the other hand, had made him start sweating like a bagel in a toaster.

“That’s what I thought. One sec.” He ducked back inside the door, and stopped in the vestibule.

“Honest to god? Come on man, the one night I don’t go out on a Thursday so I can make it to class on time Friday, you pull this on me?”

A clothing donation box sat just inside the door. It was woefully empty for a school this rich.

Shedding his jacket, Chris threw his Polo duffel coat into the clothing collection box for the homeless. A quick metallic glimmer lay exposed, revealing his Seiko watch curled up in the sleeve.

I watched as he donated away his high school graduation present and a brand new coat with reckless abandon.

“Can I ask...” Chris quickly cut me off.

“You said it was hot out, numbnuts. Why would I need a coat?”

\*

At the end of the day, most college friends are drinking buddies. Midweek conversations almost always revolve around weekend plans. It’s the great unifier. Everyone in jail loves trading cigarettes, and everyone on campus loves figuring out where it’s at Friday night.

For all the expectations of lifelong solidarity, only a few college relationships truly extend beyond the realm of drunken stupidity. Chris and I may have met in the front yard of a five-kegger, but our relationship went far beyond the party scene. He was one of the very few people I trusted freshman year. Adjusting to college was tough for me; after eighteen years of standing out in a small, suburban town,

I was thrown into the jungle of college competition. Nobody really cared that I ran for nine touchdowns my senior year, took eight AP classes, and dated the homecoming queen. All of a sudden, everyone else was special too. Where I used to turn and find close friends, I found enemies obsessed with little more than class rank and GPA. I started counting down the days until Thanksgiving.

With the exception of Chris. He felt the same way. I wouldn't quite call it bonding over misery, but similar insecurities forged a connection. I hadn't know the kid for four weeks when he invited me up to his family's ski cabin for a long weekend. The season's first snow had just fallen, and we ripped it up for three days as the winter doldrums descended on campus. As everyone else locked down before midterms, we were three thousand feet higher, staring down from a summit without a care in the world.

Two weeks after we went skiing, my mom got in a car crash at home. Stuck on campus, three states away, I felt helpless. My entire family was around her in the hospital and I was sitting in a dorm room, staring at the phone, praying the next call would be good news.

Chris stormed in looking for an Xbox controller, swigging a Diet Pepsi and unwrapping a Blow-Pop. As soon as I told him what had happened, he told me to follow him. In silence, I trailed Chris all the way down to the student parking lot. He insisted on driving me back home. I told him he really didn't have to do it. She'd probably be home within a couple of days; plus, school was starting to pick up and missing a night of work could get brutal. But like Teddy Kennedy at a happy hour, he just wouldn't take no for an answer.

Everything ended up fine. We got to my town just as Mom was sent home with a cast and an otherwise clean bill of health. After seeing the bandaged hand, Chris remarked how "cool" it was that she had a "club to work with," and seemed enthusiastic about my Mom's chances of winning her next bar fight with her newfound weapon. The next morning, Chris raided our kitchen and swiped my dad's Springsteen

CD collection. We set out for campus, burning through Born in the USA and turkey sandwiches the entire way, laughing about the fact that the leftovers we were bringing back would be the best food we'd have until Christmas.

\*

“Much better. It was hotter than a camel’s ass with that coat on.”

I immediately cracked up. Chris had an uncanny ability to defuse any situation he encountered with a bizarre, adorable sense of humor. Almost always, he was witty and crude, using a rare intellect to present humor that could make a frat boy blush. But his charm only went so far. I kept trying to understand why he was acting so peculiarly.

“You realize that we don’t have a prayer of getting to class on time, right?”

“All the more reason to go to Diamond for breakfast! I’m really feeling a Chronic right now.”

Diamond Deli was universally regarded as the greatest breakfast spot around campus. Wolfgang Puck couldn’t compete with their specialty -- a bacon, egg and cheese with hash browns and hot sauce. Chris, with his unusual penchant for Dr. Dre, immediately recognized Hash and dubbed the sandwich the Chronic in the middle of our Freshman fall. A month later, the entire campus had followed suit.

We strutted into the coffee shop around 9:35. As with most spots on a college campus, it was dead the minute after a popular class time passed. Most people had filtered out already to avoid the inevitable Tardy. Undeterred, we forged on. My unhappiness about showing up late was quickly appeased by the unmistakable scent emanating from the kitchen.

Diamond was owned by a local football legend. Signed jerseys hung everywhere, and the counter was adorned with game-used footballs, nestled between danish and bagels. Tim Martin wasn’t working the register, though. A middle-aged woman named Isabella was the only one behind the counter, incessantly rotating between the grid-

dle, register, and fridge. In the rare moments when there weren't any customers, Isabella swept the floor and wiped down tables. In the even rarer moments when the place was quiet and clean, she sat on a milk crate in the corner, desperate for a moment of tranquillity.

Only one student was before us in line. He wore a long sleeve Lacoste polo, just an inch too short to cover his Rolex. The Wall Street Journal was tucked under his salmon-colored sleeve, paired neatly with a seersucker belt. I could have sworn I recognized him from my Econ seminar last semester. Engrossed in a phone call, he seemed genuinely pained to put down his BlackBerry for a minute.

"Wait, what happened with the IPO? Hold on a sec, bro, don't hang up. I'm ordering. I want an egg white omelet on wheat bread, toasted. I need it now...I'm late for class. Don't even think about putting any sauce on it. Put it in a Styrofoam container with a fork. You got it? You understand English, right?"

Stretching her weary legs, Isabella rose off her milk crate and took to the grill. In broken English with her back turned, she replied, "You pay cash or credit?"

The student dropped his American Express on the counter and returned to the BlackBerry, grumbling about the preposterous burden his tax bracket was increasingly required to shoulder.

A minute later, Chris stepped up to the counter. "Hello, Ma'am. I hope you're doing arright. Would it be possible to place an order for two?"

"Yes that work. What you want?," Isabella was visibly flustered, undoubtedly from the striking difference between Chris and the customer before.

"If you could, my friend and I would greatly appreciate Two Bacon Egg and Cheeses, both with Hash Browns and Hot Sauce. We'd be more than happy to help ourselves to two bottles of Gatorade from the refrigerator in the corner. I'll pay for both of us. If it wouldn't be too much trouble, we'd love it if we could get the sandwiches to go.

Thanks.”

“Dude you’re not paying for me. You picked up Burger King yesterday, too.”

“Come on buddy, least I can do. I’m the reason we’re going to be late,” he insisted.

Beaming back a worn-out smile, Isabella replied, “No problem. Two minutes!”

True to her word, Isabella came back two minutes later with a plastic bag full of sandwiches, napkins, packets of ketchup, and a customer appreciation card. Chris reached for it.

“Isabella, I’m here at least four times a week. It’s all because of how helpful you are. Every time I come by, you cook me the best food you can, as quick as you can. And you’re always smiling.”

“I can tell from the picture taped to the register that you have two little kids, and they’re beautiful. You work your ass off to provide for them and it’s absolutely selfless. You are the best employee Tim Martin could ever dream of. Know that you’ve inspired me more than words can ever express. Have a wonderful day, Isabella. “

A single drop fell from Isabella’s eye. Embarrassed, she turned to grab a tissue.

As she looked away, Chris dropped a fifty dollar bill on the counter and strode out.

\*

“We should probably go to Sullivan’s class right about now.”

Wiping hot sauce off my face and trying to figure out why Chris was acting like Mother Theresa everywhere we went, I didn’t muster much of a response.

“About time.”

We strolled in at 9:57, just shy of a half hour late. All that was left were two seats in the top right of the lecture hall. I picked the seat adjacent to the wall, leaving Chris the aisle.

“Excuse me, Professor Sullivan!”

Chris started strolling down to the front of the room. Mystified, the class was drawn to his descent.

“Like we’re not busy here?” A frail-looking nerd, destined for a cubicle in corporate America, was mortified by Chris’ brazen walk. Others dismissively shook their heads as the rhythm of the lecture was disrupted.

“Can I help you, Chris?”

Sullivan looked about as befuddled as I had been all morning, as he watched his model student disturb his entire lecture. Something was off. Whatever it was had empowered Chris beyond any typical, explicable behavior. As he leapt down the last three stairs, he looked up with a full smile. Displaying a vigorous passion for his actions, he seemed fully aware of everything around him, with an air that bordered on nostalgic.

“Sorry for showing up late, Professor!” A few guys in the back released a round of nervous laughter, puzzled by what they saw.

“A simple email would have worked,” Sullivan replied with a smile. If there was any kid who could get away with unusual behavior in Sullivan’s class, it was Chris, a kid who he knew well and fully trusted. For all he knew, Sullivan half-expected the stunt to turn into a teachable moment about Apartheid in South Africa. Chris was that gifted.

“Just wanted to let you guys know -- this man is the best professor at this university. What he’s done for my understanding of the world, and more importantly, myself, is immeasurable. Pay attention and trust him -- it’ll be worth it. Professor Sullivan, everybody!”

The peanut gallery started chiming in.

“Ass kisser.”

“Does he really think he’ll get out of the final for this?”

“Sullivan is the man, but this dude’s out of his mind.”

Finally, the unshaven slob in the back row woke up.

“Sullllllliivvaaannn!”

\*

Like the straw that broke the camel's back, the shout cracked everyone up. Students joined in, one by one. Surreally, the monotony of a lecture hall had transformed into a raucous celebration of a beloved professor.

"And I know I just got here, but I've had enough! Be good, everybody!"

Chris jogged up the stairs, leaving a wake of utter confusion, laughter, and chatter behind.

Our eyes met as he neared the last row of the lecture hall. Bounding past, he reached out for a high five.

"Love you bro!"

\*

Ty,

I'm glad you found this. I wasn't sure you would -- after all, you're the kid who lost his sunglasses on the top of his hat for two weeks. Bear with me...writing this was the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

Because there's no way to sugar coat it, I'll just say it. I have stage 4 Malignant Melanoma. At this point, it's terminal. It spread to the lymph nodes throughout my body, so surgery won't be effective. The only option I have is experimental chemo.

So much for being an Irish dude with pale skin, right? The thing that did me in is that I didn't notice it until last week. I've always had a mole-looking thing on the front of my left shoulder, as you know from watching me lift like an animal in a cut-off. I thought it was just a birthmark. But I went for my physical last week and the doctor started freaking. He ran a couple tests and got in touch with the Oncology department at Yale. Tuesday, he called me back in, and when I got there, three more doctors were sitting down and my parents were on speakerphone. They said "Distant Metastasis" and "one week," and immediately, my mom started crying. My dad kept asking why, like

there's some million-dollar answer that no one's telling him.

Have you ever been in a spot where you seriously had no idea how to act? The dude in charge was this guy Dr. Swett. (Naturally, I kept wondering if his first name was Richard.) He kept assuring me that they would respond as aggressively and diligently as they could. I asked why they would even try if I'd be dead in a week anyways. He told me that I needed to go immediately back home near Worcester, and that he knew a specialist at a great palliative care center. I got him to stretch it out until Friday. Once I'm in there, it's more or less over. Apparently Malignant Melanoma at this stage of the game has a 1.3% survival rate. And Swett had the balls to say that 1.3 was optimistic, so I think I'm pretty dicked. Hey, at least I don't have to take finals though.

There wasn't any way I could tell you this in person because there isn't anyway I could bring myself to have that conversation with you. There's just no way I could put this burden on anyone else around me, either. I hope you understand.

Honestly, I've had just enough time. I got to know some of the most amazing people in this world, you included. I did what I wanted to do, played the sports I wanted to play, studied what I wanted to study, and lived abroad where I wanted to live. I attended the school of my dreams. I have no regrets, besides my inability to see how short my time would be. These last 21 years have been a helluva ride, and I wouldn't have had it any other way.

I just spoke with my family, so I'm good with them. Over the last couple days, I pretty much touched base with everybody I wanted to around campus, so it's all legit there. I couldn't be happier with how our morning went...sorry about the tardy though. You'll be fine, I typed up a study guide for the final already. It's in my binder on the shelf.

I tried to give away as much as I could this afternoon, but there's still some stuff of mine left around the room. I trust you...give away

as much of it as you can. Keep whatever you want.

You're going to be so successful it's not even funny, by the way. Keep slaughtering that LSAT book and you'll get in wherever you want. Not many people have your charisma and native intelligence... just don't sell out once you make it big time, bro. And definitely make a move on that blonde from I.R. Now that I'm out of the picture, I guess she's all yours.

I'll be Watching,  
Chris

\*

I dropped the letter. It fluttered near the open window, eventually sighing to a standstill.

Amid the smooth whisper of a cold breeze and the playful chatter of guys down the hall, Chris' speakers sang a little louder. As I listened in, I heard...

*Who would have thought forever could be severed by  
The sharp knife of a short life, well  
I've had just enough time*

# Erin Cain

## Distinction

I am the one who treads cobblestones  
In the winding, narrow alleyways  
Near Piazza della Pigna,  
Twirling around corners in secret,  
Letting the rain soak the fabric of my sneakers.  
I am the one who climbs fearlessly, recklessly, silently,  
Stands on the precarious peak undaunted,  
Focused only on the sea:  
The crash of the waves, the mist in my hair,  
The salty water washing the sand from my feet;  
I turn my face only to the sea-  
It alone may view my ecstasy.  
I am the one who burrows in a comfortable corner  
Peeling off my own mind, my own thoughts, my own heart,  
Stepping into someone else's for an afternoon  
So that when I am returned to my own skin,  
It clings to me from longing; I feel it more intensely.  
I am the one who won't tear things down  
But can't build them up.  
I am the one who sees angels  
Walking on the quad.

I am the secret-keeper, the guardian of memory.  
I am more patient, more timid, more fragile;  
The depths masked by unseen pockets  
Are invisible in my mirror.

I am a vagabond of time and space,  
Forever wandering through the skies:  
At home amidst the pink and yellow clouds  
That tower above the storms,  
At home in the ruins of Selinunte,  
At home in the mists of Howth,  
At home amid orange pizzeria countertops:  
A resident of past, present, and future.  
I am nostalgic for what is yet to come,  
Glancing through hidden windows  
To uncover what cannot be known;  
I know nothing and feel everything.  
I am the one who defies assumption:  
A victim of hyperaesthesia,  
A dreamer gnawing at tethers,  
A lunatic with a porcelain heart.

# Lauren Chval

## Tiger

“Is that a latte? Did your boyfriend pick that up for you, Thompson?” Michaels jeers and claps me on the shoulder. He continues around the conference table and sits down next to Jamison, clutching his Red Bull to affirm his very masculinity. I raise my eyebrows at him and nod upward just once.

I have the urge to sink my head to the table and rest my face there like my students do in class. Nearly all of the history and English departments have trickled in with their various forms of caffeine by now, waiting only for the department head, Cranley.

When she arrives, she is trailed by a girl who can't be more than a year out of college. The girl is slim and quite pretty, dressed like a secretary in her heels and skirt, brown hair up in a bun—trying way too hard. All the rest of us are in jeans. The two departments are composed of mostly men (only a few women teach non-honors English), and I am the first of them to notice this girl. I cringe with the realization I will not be the only one to notice her.

The banter and wit die down as they all look up to see her. Their eyes are already shifting among one another, as if to say, Who will be the first to go after her? Who can get her number first?

“Good morning, everyone,” Cranley says. “This is Samantha Hadley. She's the newest member of the English department.”

“It's Sam, please,” the newcomer says with a nervous smile.

Don't worry, sweetheart. We'll call you by your last name anyway. I smirk.

“Some of you will remember Sam from when she was a senior at Park Hill only four years ago,” Cranley continues. “She has returned to

us from . . .”

I am not listening. A former student? Well that certainly changes things. Michaels must know her. Hell, maybe he even taught her.

I glance back at Michaels and am relieved to see he’s not leering at her like he would have any other young thing. But he is watching her. We all are.

I debate for a moment whether I should make an effort to call her Sam, but I know Hadley will set in soon enough, and that is her name to me from that moment on. Cranley proceeds with the agenda of the meeting—the first of many pointless and painful conferences that will go on this week before the students burst through the front doors again—and Hadley sits down and crosses one leg over the other. She nervously pops her heel in and out of her black pump, and for a moment I imagine her barefoot.

The students are back, dressed in their first-day finest. They hug and squeal and fist-bump like they haven’t been hanging out all summer, but what drives me crazy is what they wear in the late-August stickiness. This progressive school doesn’t have much of a dress code, and the underage girls flaunt what they have with a coy innocence—half-woman, half-child. It’s a dangerous business being a male high school teacher.

I see Harris in the hallway, and he widens his eyes and nods in the direction of a flock of passing juniors. I roll my eyes in response. It is not a perverted exchange—we don’t lust after the students—rather an expression of irritation. In a few weeks, those girls will want their grades to be better than Cs and Ds, and they’ll know what they’re doing when they try to appeal to their sympathetic male teachers.

“Did you see what Heather Nelson was wearing?” Michaels asks at lunch in the teacher’s lounge. He chuckles from the back of his throat, and it makes my skin crawl.

“Sure did,” Jamison laughs. He is just trying to be one of the boys,

tagging along with us. But the comments Michaels make are harder for me to brush off. Forget the other teachers the married guy hits on, it's the students he flirts with shamelessly.

There's something about being a high school teacher that doesn't allow us the privilege of growing up—like being a Lost Boy, forever trapped in the twelfth grade with the same circle of people. The weeks roll into years and, over time, the cocky adolescents we're trying to teach end up infecting us with kiddish mannerisms and slang until we have no hope of ever acting like we're older than twenty-five.

Not that I worry about that yet—I just turned twenty-five—but Michaels is almost forty and still high-fiving his buddies like he's on the football field.

"You'd think he would watch himself," Harris mutters to me as he goes to heat something up in our shitty microwave.

You would think. I heard that ten years ago, Michaels was an assistant soccer coach to the girls' team, but he was asked to step down because of some allegations. It was a quiet affair, I'm sure, but there's nothing like a hushed change to fuel the teachers' gossip, even ten years later.

"Did you want to get into *Lord of the Flies* by Friday?" Harris asks me as they sit down at our table.

"Yeah, sure thing. We can assign chapters tomorrow, and I'll bring in the movie for Friday."

"You guys are still showing the movie in your section?" Michaels snickers.

I don't like where this is going, but I play along. "Just clips."

"Keegan would have never shown clips of it," Jamison says.

Fuck you.

"Keegan did show clips of it," Harris snaps. "That's where we got the idea."

They grumble to each other, not wanting to back down, but shut up for the most part. I'm grateful for Harris, who has been my teach-

ing partner since I started at Park Hill. Keegan was Harris' partner before me. Keegan, "the best teacher ever."

Oh yeah? So why doesn't he teach anymore?

Cranley comes in and takes one look at us, sitting in the corner with two tables pushed together like the exclusive teenagers we are. She rolls her eyes and sits with some of the older teachers on the couches. Sometimes the clique comes into the lounge at lunch and the older teachers have pushed our two tables apart. They smirk to each other as we look around, unsure of what to do. They're smug bastards getting enjoyment out of breaking our routine, but I think it's kind of funny, too.

Teachers form social groups and protect them with a viciousness that can rival our younger counterparts. We text and gossip. In my three years at Park Hill, a few of them have sat a little too closely in the teacher's lounge. We watch them flirt a little bit on Facebook, and then the anticipated rumor circulates that the pair is dating.

The whole place is incestuous. Michaels' own wife was a science teacher at the school a few years ago until she got pregnant. There are more married couples than I want to think about. In a weird way, it pressures all the rest of us to hurry up and pair off.

I wonder where Hadley is eating, but I don't want to deal with the ribbing that will come with asking. I notice that Jamison keeps looking up at the door, and it's not hard to guess why. Other than the guidance counselors—all of whom I have ruled out for various reasons—Hadley is the most attractive woman to step through the doors of this school in a long time.

Suddenly she materializes, holding a tray of cafeteria food. I wonder if she actually stood in line with the students. She looks around, her face adorably worried. Cranley looks up at her, and for a moment I'm afraid she'll sit with the older teachers, but then Michaels calls out, "Over here, darlin'!"

She cracks a smile of relief, and just like that, she's in. "Thanks, Mr.

Michaels.”

So he did teach her.

“It’s Michaels now, Hadley,” he says, nudging her shoulder with his. It seems more affectionate than flirty to me, but Michaels’ attitude still leaves me queasy.

Jamison perks up at her presence. She is a new freshman for the seniors to play with. “How’s your first day?”

“It’s been good,” she lets out in an overwhelmed sigh. I know that tone—her day hasn’t been good. We all hold a genuine understanding. She doesn’t have to say it’s terrifying to stand up in front of those kids. We know.

Even worse, she’s teaching the AP kids, who can smell fear on a young teacher and aren’t afraid to push on the soft spots.

She looks pretty, I can’t help but note. After our first day of meetings, she’s let go a little bit. Her long hair is loose around her shoulders, her dress bright blue under a sweater-type thing. I look down at my food so she doesn’t catch me staring.

“They’re just a little wound up,” she says.

We all laugh. “Do you want me to come in and calm them down at the beginning of your next class?” Jamison asks without thinking.

“No!” she exclaims, looking horrified. “No, thank you. I’ll be fine.”

Jamison, you can’t read her. This girl’s is an overachiever—freshly graduated from some little liberal arts school on the east coast. To accept your help is failure to her.

I can’t help but admire that in her. I wonder how long it will take her to break down and accept some help.

Hadley eventually learns to bring her own lunch, but her recollections of the day don’t get much better. Everyone always says the first year of teaching is the worst, and it’s true, but she seems especially discouraged. I can tell she’s used to being good at things. For the life of me, I can’t figure out why she wanted to be a teacher.

I pick up things about her here and there from older faculty. She was a good student—took the hardest classes, worked on the school paper, scored well on tests, the kind of stuff that gets you into elite liberal arts schools.

“You used to be such a feisty girl,” Michaels says at lunch one day. “Stop being so quiet!”

A blush creeps across her face with her smile. “I’m still learning,” she insists.

I peek into her classroom and see her up at the front, perched on a stool, reading aloud to her class. The kids are fidgeting and doodling—almost certainly not listening. I wince at her rookie mistake.

There are a hundred little tricks that could help her, but I hold them back for fear of being pushed away. Cowardice doesn’t hold Jamison back though.

“Try playing music as they’re walking into class,” he tells her one day. “It will make them think you’re cool and let them get energy out before class starts.”

Surprisingly, she gives him a little half-smile and nods. When she leaves the room, Michaels high-fives him. I roll my eyes at them, trying to keep my face nonchalant.

“Thompson just wishes he had a woman, don’t you, Tommy?” Michaels laughs at me.

I give Jamison the obligatory fist bump and leave for next period.

I was taught that very trick by Keegan, almost four years ago now. Keegan—the best and worst thing to ever happen to my teaching career.

Keegan had shaken my hand when I walked into Park Hill for my interview and asked me to sit down. I had prepared my answers to the expected questions down perfectly.

“What’s your personal philosophy as a teacher?” Keegan had asked me.

I had looked at him blankly. And so began the most influential hour

of my career, which was more conversation than interview.

“You have to love what you do,” Keegan had said emphatically. “You have to love your subject. But it has to be able more than your subject. These kids are looking for answers, not just to school but to life and, every once in a while, they’re willing to find them in us.”

I had stared at him for a full ten seconds before responding. I had wanted to be just like him. I had wanted to learn from him in every way.

“Here, I’m going to give you something,” Keegan had said, pulling a box from his pocket. He slid it across the table, and inside was a tiny crystal tiger. Its little black eyes glinted knowingly at me.

“A student gave that to me a few years ago for my birthday. We were reading *Life of Pi* in that class, have you read it?”

I had nodded, even though I hadn’t.

“It’s a great book—the kids usually love it. Anyway, she’s a freshman in college now, but she still emails me sometimes. She still asks me for advice on things completely unrelated to English.”

I had thought maybe Keegan would be my teaching partner—for the sophomore and junior classes, Park Hill employed a partner approach to teaching, two professionals instructing both English and history to one class together. But I found out shortly Keegan was replacing himself.

How is that possible? The best teacher I have ever met left the profession abruptly and early. If there was a reason, I still don’t know it.

I can’t help but try to be like Keegan, though. His words from my interview play on stuttering repeat in my mind. I regularly remind myself of the tips Keegan shared during training, and that goddamn tiger sits inside my desk drawer. Perhaps that is why I can’t escape Keegan’s shadow. Every lesson plan, every essay assignment, every project is compared to how Keegan would have done it.

“Get Keegan out of your head,” Harris has told me more than once.

“He’s not in my head,” I respond stubbornly every time. But he is.

Keegan haunts me.

As homecoming starts to approach, the kids are all hyped up on who's taking who, but there's a different rumor circulating that perks my interest. Jamison hangs around Hadley's classroom a lot more, and suddenly she's in his profile picture on Facebook. I feel like such a creeper staring at that picture of them, analyzing the way her head tilts ever so slightly into his. It's like someone asked the girl I wanted to the dance.

She sits by Jamison in the teacher's lounge, trying to ignore the nudges from Michaels and the looks of the other teachers, even Cranley. I do everything I can to not watch when Jamison scoots his chair closer to hers.

For some twisted reason, I take comfort in the fact that Hadley's still having trouble in the classroom. Every time I steal a look into her room, her expression is terrified and her students are rowdy. I hear from Harris that one day Hadley left her classroom for ten minutes to regain her composure after her students all insisted she graded one of the questions on their tests wrong. I tell myself Jamison can't help her where it matters. Keegan could help her. I like to think I could help her.

After class one day, Jenny Dixon steps up to my desk tentatively, her eyes darting back and forth and her face reddening with each passing second.

"Mr. Thompson...um, do you know when we're getting our essays back?"

I have already graded her essay, although I'm not done with everyone's, and I know she won't be happy with the B that is waiting for her. She's a smart girl—in fact, she probably has the most potential as a writer of anyone in my class. But she'll never get there unless I push her.

"I'm giving them back on Friday, Jenny," I tell her. "Is everything OK.?"

She bites her lip, and suddenly I know she is about to cry.

"I'm going to fail your class," she wails. "I'm going to lose my 4.0 and then I'm never going to get into a good college. I never should have taken this class."

I push a box of Kleenex toward her across my desk and tell her to sit down.

This is my moment. This girl can get some of her answers from me.

"You're not failing," I say. "What do you have in this class, a B?"

She looks up at me, appalled. "I have an A minus."

"That's not failing." I try to keep the laughter out of my voice.

"Anything lower than an A is failing," she insists. "My mom said I wouldn't get an A in this class. I should have taken honors instead of AP."

"Jenny," I say sharply. "You belong in this class."

She shakes her head, tears falling in earnest now. "I have to go. I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Thompson."

Before I can think of what to say, she's out the door. I am completely still. I always thought when that moment came I would know what to say to make the connection with the student reaching out.

I'm not the teacher I want to be.

I spend the week trying to talk to Jenny a little more in class. I want her to know it's OK to talk to me, but she is nervously awkward, so I drop the efforts. My week is rough for reasons beyond my relationships with my students. Michaels is giving me more shit than usual, and I have to present my lesson plans for the next month to Cranley.

The presentation goes longer than I could have possibly expected. It's half past five when I make my way back to my classroom, weighed down by stress and a dozen files of planning. I stride across my room without really looking up, and when I finally do, I stop mid-step. Hadley is sitting there in the first row, directly opposite my desk, crying.

She looks completely startled to see me. She drags her sleeve across her blotchy face, stuttering an explanation.

“God, I’m so sorry. I thought everyone had gone home. I didn’t think...” she trails off.

“Why are you in here?” I blurt. I meant to say it softly, but I’m so thrown off it doesn’t come out that way.

“This is going to sound ridiculous,” she begins. “But the teacher who had this room before you, Mr. Keegan, I always used to come and talk to him when things were screwed up.”

I sit down at his desk. She just keeps stunning me. Keegan taught her?

“This room always makes me feel better,” she adds. “He used to keep this huge armchair by his desk, and I’d just fall into it and talk to him.”

I’m so scared of saying the wrong thing like I did with Jenny. “What’s wrong?” I try. It seems safe.

“I guess being a teacher just isn’t what I thought it would be,” she says in a rush, like she had just been waiting for someone to ask her. “The kids hate me, they really do. I can’t really blame them. I remember when I was in high school, I hated all the women teachers. I mean, men go into teaching because they really want to make a difference, right? But I always just looked at the women and thought, ‘You couldn’t think of something you were good at, so you decided to be a teacher.’”

I smile ruefully. I don’t have the heart to tell her that in college I decided to major in education because I knew my classes would be comprised of mostly girls.

“That’s honest of you,” I chuckle.

She laughs roughly. “Yeah, it is. But I just loved this high school. I loved every moment I was in this school. I love the person I was.”

“That’s why you became a teacher?”

“Don’t judge me,” Hadley chides me, but she’s smiling now. “It was partially because of Keegan. He told me I would make a good teacher. I always watched the way he talked to students—cultivated relationships with them—and just thought he must have such purpose in his

life. Imagine my surprise when I emailed him freshman year of college and found out he was leaving.”

I can’t think of anything to say, so I just stare at her. God, she’s pretty. But what really gets me is how Keegan haunts her too. Probably for reasons more legitimate than my own.

“He got tired of it, he told me last year. He told me he felt like he wasn’t making a difference. And I just felt like an idiot. Like everything he had ever said to me was a lie,” she says bitterly.

“Do you still think he loved teaching?” I ask, desperate for the answer myself.

She looks up at me, her face surprised. She hesitates for a moment, the answer right there on her face. “Yes. I really do. But I don’t think I had answered that question for myself until right now.”

Hadley sighs. “I think he’s getting his Master’s in philosophy now. Maybe that held more meaning for him. Maybe all of this wouldn’t bother me so much if I wasn’t such a shitty teacher.”

“You’re not a shitty teacher,” I tell her. “You got into it for the best reasons. The first year just sucks.”

“Yeah. I guess I was just hoping that I would change a student’s life the way Keegan changed mine. I know for a fact that hasn’t happened. I remember I felt like he was my friend—I could tell him anything. Well, maybe I edited a few things,” she corrects herself sheepishly. “But he was a friend. For his birthday during my sophomore year, I got him this little Swarovski tiger because we had been reading *Life of Pi*. Have you read it?”

I nod soundlessly. It’s all I can muster. I open my desk drawer just a crack and peek at the tiny tiger nestled next to my paperclips, as if to make sure it’s still there.

“It’s a good book,” she lets out in one breath.

“Keegan didn’t make that connection with you in his first year of teaching though,” I say softly. “You’ll get there.”

Her eyes water and I’m afraid I have made her cry again. But she

stands up and smiles at me.

“Thank you, Thompson. I really mean that.”

The moment had found me again, and in it I discover answers I didn't realize I had. Learning, it seems, is not reserved for students.

# Erica Chenard

## Untitled

I can hear the tires crunching the gravelly dirt as we speed  
down the familiar wooded road from your house  
to mine. It feels comfortable,  
like waking up Sunday morning  
to the sound of rain pit-pattering on the window panes,  
but knowing that you could stay in bed all day if you wanted.  
Your beat up yellow Wrangler jostles  
over the ruts in this winding dirt road,  
and we belt out Hootie and the Blowfish as it blares,  
crackling, from the weary old speakers.  
I think if you flicked off the headlights  
we could still see by the light of the moon,  
round and purely white in the sky tonight.  
Brief silence, and then the next track on the CD spins to life.  
I know what you're about to say:  
Remember the first time we drove this way?  
I grin, mind wandering back, the sticky summer air threading past.  
That first night I didn't know that the passenger seatbelt  
wouldn't click into place unless you jiggled it a bit,  
and you laughed as I struggled and the prickling heat  
rose to my cheeks, blushing as usual.  
That laugh of yours: I didn't know that yet either,  
and the way it hiccups at the end, like your contagious  
joy is spilling out in little bursts, refusing to be pent up inside you.  
Still smiling, I breathe in the smells that will always  
remind me of you: the soft worn leather, the earthy,

tangy dirt that clings to your cleats in the back seat...  
I reply: Remember when you wouldn't sing in front of me?  
You chuckle and turn to me. You sing as loud  
as you can, raspy, your hand resting lazily on the wheel.

# Dylan Krieger

## Profit

My parents sleep in separate bedrooms now. Little hands pinned on the wall and the Christmas-colored comforter is all out of sackcloth and ashes and gods. She doesn't quilt anymore. I think of '50s television and the tiny black and gray cinders of our hair on paper dolls but their bodies always fall outside of ours, like a stencil over a handwritten letter a — a — a — abstraction is a dangerous thing. When I told him you were going off in pairs to have your mighty syphilitic skulls shrunk professionally on the weekends, the prophet Jeremiah snorted in his tobacco-blown nose and made a wise and exilic remark: "She will be fucking the Pharisee by this time next year." Then he went back in his trailer and I stood alone among the hissing trees, clownish as a bowling pin: wide and immobile and faceless. Maybe this town really does need more drugs.

# Jamal Hilal

## avalanche

lily-bird like lady-dog  
in a livid bog  
forever-rusting  
tree-limb  
leaflike swimming bug,

tug of war that tore her dress  
to press those rosy hips to his lips;  
it makes my belly ache  
a little liver burst  
lily-bird  
and spilt a verse,  
she caught me by  
my flaps of skin  
to say, “help me,  
lily-llivered  
little kid,” and I  
replied, “help me?”

flustered like a stuttered wing  
clipped or snipped  
unfluttering—the lift is less than—  
catch my drift to sea?

we’re boats caught in an avalanche.

# Christina Mastrucci

## Song of Ourselves

We live in the green  
and not in the grass itself.

Each spear of summer grass  
is seen only for its color,  
but not for how it grows  
or how it suffocates.

The lilacs in the dooryard have withered.  
Purple mountains roll only to hide  
the dead in the valley.

Wake up, wake up!  
See the sprawled eagle  
bathing in its blood,

the trail of tears it carved  
on the faces of the forsaken.

Beneath that gulf of bones  
the bodies of the slain  
are rotten, unburied,

while the spears of summer grass  
think themselves an island.

Perchance a memory  
of the soil in our souls  
can cure our twisted nature,

but how does one sow  
shrivelled grass, or yet,  
a graveyard of lilacs?

If we could remember  
the roots of our hearts,  
perhaps they would be revived; yet,

We live in the green  
and not in the grass itself.  
Grass by any other name  
would still be grass.

# Lauren Restivo

## Georgia O'Keefe

Stop lying to me.  
With your yellows  
And blues,  
And not enough gray.  
Your puddles and  
Raindrops,  
And not any snow.

Bare arms  
And legs,  
And no need for--

Flannel, was the shirt  
That I stole from your  
Closet when you went  
To take a shower  
One morning last spring.

The one that last night  
Came from the dryer  
So warm and so worn,  
Static, electric.

Outside my window,  
it looks like April.

So please,  
Stop lying to me.  
For I have seen a  
Midwest November.  
And this,  
No, this is not it.

# Kelly McGauley

## A Familiar Caravan

In my mother's kitchen with its moss countertops  
and vine crept walls, plants lining the worn windowsill  
our five man expedition forged its way to our  
own clearing through the mismatched shoes and spilling bags.

We learned to hunt our Mickey Mouse waffles; “eat his  
ears first so he can't hear you coming,” Dad warned us.  
Felt anguish for the mouse's fate, but his own roar,  
deep and snarling, could put any lion's to shame.

Ultimately my mother steered our safari,  
tamed my father's growl and the wild space we'd made home.  
And in her kitchen we heard teapots trill chirps. Watched  
butterflies grow and reindeer spring from craft paper—  
collecting tools we needed to survive this quest

# Grant Hodges

## Lighthouses

Every day, on the first floor of the English building, the young man would stop and get coffee at a small shop. The shop had several booths and tables, one in particular where he would always sit and finish his reading from the night before.

He did not really enjoy coffee but, like cigarettes, they offered to him a picture of someone he could be. So, every morning the young man would procure his ID and hand it to the cashier, asking for a small black coffee—all he could truly palate.

The cashier was a very pleasant lady. She would smile at him while she poured the coffee into his small, insulated cup. The young man would accept it and return the smile. Then, he would find his table and pull a novel from his messenger bag. He chose to read it with his legs crossed, the right over the left.

I am the picture of refinement, the young man thought. Although I do not have many friends, I have this coffee and these books. They make me someone.

This kept him content every morning and he would forget how lonely he was, except for the days when the young girl came to the coffee shop too.

She did not come every day. He only saw her on Mondays and Wednesdays.

I wonder if she is a freshman, he would think. She does not carry herself like a freshman.

Some days he would build an intricate life for her in his head.

She is the daughter of a rich man, he mused. She is not very smart, but only here because she is rich. Or perhaps, she is very smart and

not very rich. She is here on scholarship because both of her parents died when she was young and she lives with grandparents who could not afford the tuition.

The young man could never decide on a life for her. She was mysterious to him.

Others were mysterious to him but he never found their mystery as appealing.

She is very pretty, he thought, and her eyes are the right color of blue. They reminded the young man of the sea on a stormy day.

He had only visited the sea once when he was very little, but he remembered it well. He remembered the gulls winging across the sky and the smell of salt thick in the humid air. He remembered the way he felt when he looked out across the great pure ocean. The girl's eyes made him feel that way again.

Perhaps she is a lighthouse keeper when she does not go here. The young man liked lighthouses and she made him think of them.

The girl sat on the same chair at the same table every Monday and Wednesday. It faced his but he never saw her sea-blue eyes anywhere other than on a book. Usually it was a chemistry book but occasionally it would be history or calculus.

Most days when the young man was reading he would fantasize that she was looking at him. He did not truly believe that she was, but his mind held doubts because he wanted her to be looking at him. Occasionally, the young man would jerk his eyes from the prose to see if they could dive into hers. He never found an opening.

I wonder why she reads so intently? Is there so much to learn from a book? The young man did not understand, but that did not trouble him. I do not understand anything about her, he reminded himself. She is mysterious.

This routine continued for half a year. The young man began to fall in love.

“Her teeth are remarkably straight,” he mentioned to himself in the

shower one morning, “and her hair is just the right shade of brown.”

“I think she is very handsome,” he told the mirror, “and she smells right to me.”

“She is also very studious so she must be very smart,” the young man said to his table. “I wonder if she knows who I am. I wonder if she sometimes tricks herself into thinking that I look at her while she reads. I guess she would not have to trick herself into thinking that because I do look at her.” He sighed. “I guess I would have caught her looking before.”

Even with his disbelief the emotions fermented until the young man could not bear it any longer.

“Wednesday,” he whispered to the reflecting pool outside the library. “Wednesday, I will tell her that I think she smells right.”

He felt that Wednesday was soon, but not too soon. Monday was too soon. He was a lonely young man and had not talked to another person for several weeks. He was nervous about talking to her. Wednesday, he decided; Wednesday will be the day.

It was Monday when the girl left her notebook.

The young man had risen early. He showered just as the sun began to break through the frosted glass in the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and dressed himself. He put his messenger bag over one shoulder and walked briskly to the coffee shop where he ordered a small black coffee.

The girl arrived a quarter of an hour after he sat down at his table. She did not order anything. Sitting at the table, she instead took notes from her chemistry textbook. He shamelessly observed her because he knew that she would never look up.

She wrote tirelessly.

She must be copying the entire book, he thought, imagining her penmanship to be the slanted kind that important and wise people all

seemed to have.

The young man stared at her. How I wish to be that pen, he thought. I would love nothing more than to be moved by her with purpose.

He drifted into her thoughts for a while. Then mused about her life. Finally he settled on admiring her beauty. The young man was so focused and intent on her hair and face and smell that he did not notice that the girl's eyes had moved from the notebook.

She was looking at him.

He was thrown into the turbulent sea. Courtesy might have demanded that he break his gaze but the young man could not. The eyes grabbed him. The young man knew that he had been waiting for her his whole life.

She stared at him as she closed her chemistry book. She stared at him as she placed the book in her purse. She stared at him as she rose and left the coffee shop, walking by his table before finally moving her eyes down to her shoes.

He stared back because he did not know what else to do and it was not uncomfortable. Her eyes were silent and deep. Her eyes went inside of him.

When she had left, he sighed deeply. The young man placed his head on the table and sighed again. He felt as though he needed air. She had sucked the life from the shop when she had walked away.

The young man sat a few seconds more to recover. When he felt his breath again, he took his head off of the table and saw the girl's notebook on her vacated table. This puzzled him because he thought that she had been leaving.

She had left. He was sure of it. Could she have forgotten it, he thought. She must have forgotten it.

He pushed his chair back and stared at the notebook. He waited for the girl to return to pick it up. She did not.

Could she have just forgotten it? The young man's mind fantasized about the notebook and its contents. Perhaps she left it here on pur-

pose for me to find, he thought. If she did, then I must pick it up so as not to disappoint her. The girl did not seem so absentminded as to forget it. She must have meant for someone to find it.

The young man pushed back his chair. It creaked as his weight lifted. He walked deliberately over to the notebook and picked it up. Then he walked back to his table, picked up his bag and left.

He returned to his dormitory room instead of walking to his class as he normally did. "This is more important," he reminded his mirror. The mirror raised its eyebrows appraisingly.

He opened the notebook. A blank page greeted him. He turned it. He turned the next and the next. They were all clean.

"I do not understand," He said. "I saw her writing in this notebook today." He continued to turn each page slowly. They were all blank but the young man scrutinized them meticulously. There must be a sign, he thought to himself. She has left it for a reason. Why can I not find any writing? Why did she not leave me a name?

The young man was determined to turn every page. Soon he was very close to the end of the notebook. There were only three pages left when he found the drawing.

It was a sketch of a young man. He was sitting at a table. On the table there was a small cup that could have contained coffee. At his feet was a messenger bag. His legs were crossed, the right over the left. In his hands there was an open book. Oddly, his eyes were not reading the book. They were staring ahead at the unseen artist.

He turned the next page wordlessly. There was a list of names. "Anthony, Carl, Michael, Jeffrey..." he read. Some of the names were circled. Some were crossed out.

"My name is William," He said to the notebook.

The young man waited until Wednesday. He came to the coffee shop on Tuesday too because he came everyday. He also came because

he hoped that she would be there. She was not. She only was there on Mondays and Wednesdays. The young man returned on Wednesday.

I do not know what I am going to say, he thought. I will just hand her the notebook and look into her eyes and hope that she will understand. He thought this as he waited with his coffee and messenger bag and his right foot over his left. He waited for a long time. He waited long enough to outlast his fantasies about what she might say or do when he gave her the notebook. He waited long enough for his imagination to move past their life together.

Finally he could not divert himself any longer. "Where is she?" he asked the smiling lady behind the coffee counter who always gave him a small black coffee.

"Where is who?" she asked.

"The girl who sits there."

"A lot of girls sit there."

"The girl who sits there every Monday and Wednesday."

The smiling lady just smiled and shrugged. "I'm not sure I know that girl."

"She is not here today."

"A lot of girls aren't here today."

He nodded because it was true and bit his lip. As he turned to leave he saw a newspaper on the counter. Her picture was on it.

Student Falls From Top of Library

The young man stopped breathing for a minute. "Oh..." He walked away.

He walked back to his table and sat and picked up his novel, crossing his legs once more. After a minute he reappeared at the counter. He picked up the newspaper.

"Do you know this girl?" he asked.

The lady shook her head.

"Oh..." The young man returned to his table. He picked up the notebook and turned it to the last page. It was the only page that he

had not seen. There was writing “Library, 3:15 PM.” He said quietly to the table.

The young man grew old after his days of small black coffees had ended. He left the coffee shop and his dormitory. He spent some days in thought and many days in work. He did not spend many days in love and there came a time when his memory blurred. There came a time when he wondered if the girl had ever existed at all. Eventually he began to think that it was his handwriting in the notebook that he kept beneath his bed. He found this pleasing. He found it peaceful.

Although I do not have many friends, he thought one day, I have this notebook. It makes me someone.

# Mary Herber

## Volume

Sound

Waves gritted

By ground marrow dirt

Pump from the stereo—

Turn down the volume

Of death

Liquefied,

Poured from a vase

And then replaced.

Violets

Swim through

Skies dyed (red)

Victory blue

Like finch wings

Buried

In a cave

With lost keys.

Crouched

Under the radio tower

A little cat sang

To hydrogen

That failed

To reply because

It was melting

On a griddle  
With a checkerboard waffle.

Yesterday—  
In December it rained  
On the prairie  
And the cardboard farmhouse  
Shuttered  
Its windows  
Against the blueblossom  
Downpour  
Determined  
To wipe all clean  
And ring round  
A rosy rue dawn

# Erica Chenard

## Blowin' in the Wind

A phone goes off next to me and I almost clap my palms to my ears, but I don't want to look like the crazy guy on the subway. I force myself to sit calmly, intertwining my fingers on my lap so there's less chance my hands will wiggle free. The girl rifles through her bag, utterly incapable of finding her phone in the abyss that is her purse. Who knows what's in there? I don't particularly care; I just want her to find her phone already so that she can pick up and silence the shrill bleeping that's crashing back and forth on the walls of my skull. I always keep my phone on vibrate. I wish everyone else would too, but inevitably I realize that if they did I would be out of a job. That's when I start getting depressed. The girl's phone continues to chirp away, and she rustles a little more frantically. The subway takes another lurch and the entire bag topples out of her hands. She lunges after it and I can finally take a deep breath of relief when whoever is trying to call purse-girl decides to just give up.

I glance up at the older man sitting across from me, whose chin rests on his chest. His head lolls back and forth whenever the subway changes speeds. I'm half expecting him to start snoring when I notice that the newspaper he fell asleep reading is flopped open to an entertainment piece. It catches my attention because there's an old picture of Bob Dylan, his unruly hair sprouting up dark and wild around his head. I'm reasonably sure the universe is hatching plans to drive me insane.

I hum a couple snatches of "Blowin' in the Wind," thoughts drifting back to when I still thought I would be spending my nights up on stage with my guitar in front of a screaming crowd. Like Bob Dylan. But now

I am twenty-four years old and riding a cramped, sweaty subway home from a day holed up in a cubicle. I am not heading out to get ready for my concert tonight. And to make matters even worse, I am forced to listen to a strained falsetto of cell phone ringtones throughout this lovely subway ride.

Finally, the subway arrives at my stop, and I stagger out of the sliding doors onto an impossibly hotter subway platform. I stumble up the crowded stairs and somehow make it back to my apartment. When I walk inside I don't remember how I got there, the commute a blank spot from the Bob Dylan sighting on. Collapsing on my bed, I stare at the ceiling numbly to avoid looking at my mess of a room. CD's stacked in piles litter my desk, and I glance fleetingly at my open closet, the door swung open. I apathetically wonder if I'll ever clean it up. My tee shirts hang raggedly, half off their hangers. Some have finally let go, lying crumpled on the floor. I'll clean it later, maybe.

Last week, I was in the midst of taking a surreptitious nap in my cubicle when my boss, Randy, sidled by. "Hey, Charlie! I'd like to have your latest melodies emailed to me within the next few hours, if you're not too busy. I can't wait to hear the new batch!" He lingered for a moment, peering at me eagerly. I gave a bleary nod, trying to look awake. When he realized I wasn't going to say anything else to him, he trudged away. I tugged a blank sheet of empty measures out from under a pile of folders and started pencilling in notes. My fingers were still uncoordinated and heavy from sleep, but twenty minutes later I attached a file with my new sample ring tones to an email for Randy. Moments after I sent it he popped into my cubicle, exclaiming how much he loved the new melodies. To be honest, I wouldn't really call them "melodies." They were more like generic musical themes, tweaked for optimal use by the average cell phone user. I grimaced, forcing out a "thanks." I could just imagine him sitting in his office, eyes focused intently on his computer monitor, refreshing his inbox for the last twenty minutes.

The buzzing of my cell phone startles me out of my memory and I blindly swipe it off the night stand, refusing to move off my bed. I mumble a half-hearted hello into the phone.

“Charles,” my sister’s voice murmurs through the ear piece. Shit. I forgot about our dinner plans for tonight. “I’m sitting alone at a table in Vito’s and my waiter keeps coming back and condescendingly asking if I’m waiting on someone. Please tell me you’re not standing me up, because I’m not sure I can take the humiliation of being the subject of a fifty-year-old balding Italian man’s ridicule.”

“Lizzie, I’ll be there in five. Tell your jerk waiter to shove it.” I get up and glance in the mirror, rubbing a hand over my brown stubble. There’s not enough time for me to shave, so I just splash some water on my face, as if that will erase my five o’clock shadow, or the even darker shadows under my eyes. Soon enough I’m sliding into a booth opposite my little sister, who looks at me with those perceptive brown eyes. They’re the same color as mine, but hers are full of spunk and truthfulness. I’m not sure what’s in mine; all I know is it’s definitely not spunk. Her arms are crossed lightly over her NYU sweatshirt as she thinks of how she wants to start the conversation.

“When’s the last time you picked up your guitar?” Liz probes. I’m not sure how she can pick up on exactly what’s bothering me, but I guess she and I have always been close. When she was ten and I was twelve, and I was just starting to figure out how much I loved music, she would sit at the foot of my bed while I plucked awkwardly at the strings on my guitar.

“You’re gonna be good someday, Charlie!” she would encourage in her little-girl voice, perched cross-legged on top of my checkered comforter. I’d always try a little harder when she said stuff like that. She asks again when the last time I played was, and I come back to the booth at Vito’s, looking down at my hands, splayed out on the red and white checked tablecloth. I study the four blocks—red, white, red, white—between my thumbs. A puddle of condensation surrounds the

bottom of my water glass.

“That long, huh?”

I nod at her, slowly. She raises an eyebrow and then changes the topic, asking, “Well, how’s work?” I laugh, explaining Randy’s latest episode of eager lurking, mimicking his request for my “latest melodies.” Lizzie chuckles and I feel a little better, a little more like my head is above the water. Like my head is above the water and I have a reason to breathe. We order our pizza from the balding jerk of a waiter, and once he puts away his little notepad, I ask to add sausage. He takes it back out and adds sausage in tiny scrawl, sliding the notebook back into the front pocket of his apron. When he turns to leave, I tell him to wait. I want peppers. He takes his little notepad back out and adds peppers, grumbling. I can see Liz grinning, and I wait for him to put the notepad away again to request onions. He gives me a dirty look and storms away. “He’s gonna spit on our pizza,” Liz announces after she stops giggling.

When I get home after dinner, I sit on my bed and stare at the worn poster of Bob Dylan that’s taped to my wall. He’s sitting at a piano, microphone suspended in front of him, harmonica propped in front of his mouth. His hair splays out, unruly as ever. His music truly changed his generation. My music annoys people on subways and disturbs students in classrooms. I reach over and turn off my light with a click and sit on the edge of my mattress in the dark and silent room. I don’t move for a long time, and when I look at the clock, the red numbers cut their way through the darkness: 3:42. What the hell am I doing?

The next morning, I sip cautiously on my near-boiling coffee. I didn’t sleep at all the night before, and the caffeine makes me feel jittery and light headed. Randy ambles by. He flashes me an overenthusiastic smile, exposing the ends of his long rabbit teeth all the way up to his bulging gums.

“Randy, I’d like to speak with you about something important.”

A look of intense concern melts onto his face and he nods seri-

ously. As I tell him that I am quitting my job, his eyes get wider and a look of goofy shock dawns upon him. He wants to know why, and he wants to know what he did, and he wants me to know I'm the best writer he's ever had! I fight the urge to roll my eyes, and the more he tries to get me to stay, the happier I am that I am quitting. Randy sputters a bit more, looking panicked, and I unceremoniously dump a few items from my desk into a cardboard box I brought for this momentous occasion. He thanks me for my work, but he wishes I wouldn't quit, and I drop a stapler into the box with a clunk.

After a few more minutes of gathering office supplies and miscellaneous papers, I heave my box into my arms and trudge toward the elevator. Randy slumps in the leather chair in his office, his sad eyes following my exodus. With every step I take towards the city street outside, I feel simultaneously more relieved and more panicked. I have no commitments. If I wanted to stay in my apartment all day and sleep, I could, and nobody would even know. Except that I also have no source of income, and I'm going to have to eat sooner or later. Glancing down at my arms encircling the box which contains the complete contents of my cubicle, I see the old bracelet Liz made me peeking out from the sleeve of my button-down. My roiling, conflicting emotions calm themselves slightly.

At the end of my senior year of high school, I was sitting on my bed one night, messing around on my guitar and making up some lyrics about this girl I'd known forever and always thought was attractive. Obviously I never could work up the courage to tell her, so I would just sit in my room writing songs about it. It's funny how I can remember exactly what I was doing, how I felt at the time, even what things were laying about on my desk. Stuck on a word, I slumped back onto my bed in silence, staring distractedly at the fan twirling around on my ceiling. The phone rang and I could hear my mother pick up downstairs. But suddenly I knew something was wrong, and a tinge of panic seeped into my mother's tone of voice, the words too muffled for me to hear.

“Charles!” my mother yelled, her voice rattled but oddly numb, almost devoid of emotion. I took the stairs two at a time. Pressing the car keys into my hand, she told me, in eerie calmness, to take us to the hospital. Liz, with her newly issued license, had gotten into an accident. It was bad enough for her to be in the hospital?

My heart was pounding when we strode into the hospital. The doctors told us Liz was in surgery and she was in pretty rough shape. She had fractured three of her ribs in the accident, and one of them had punctured her lung badly enough that the tissue wouldn’t be able to repair itself on its own, so they had to do surgery to attempt to fix the damage. A strangely blank muteness oozed over my thoughts. My feelings felt like they were floating around my brain, completely disconnected from the facts of what was going on.

Weeks later, Liz was still in the hospital, but she was “doing fine,” according to her taciturn doctor. He ran his hand habitually over his buzz cut every time he updated us, using as few words as possible. I would drive to the hospital after school every day and visit with her, talking or playing cards or just sitting for hours. It didn’t really matter what we were doing. She could see my clenching jaw relax every time I sunk into the chair next to her bed. She’d look at me with those perceptive eyes, and I didn’t have to say anything. One afternoon, Liz reached over and grabbed my hand, her little hands strong as she pressed something into my palm. “I know this is really corny, Charlie, but the last couple weeks have been a little rough for both of us. And I just wanted to give you something to remind you that no matter where I am, I’m in your corner.”

I looked down at the bracelet she had made me while she sat in her hospital bed all day. “I tried to make it as manly as possible...” She trailed off. I wrapped it around my wrist and held it out for her to fasten.

“Lizzie, I love it.”

Back from my memory, I find myself in front of Liz’s apartment

building. She doesn't have class on Fridays, so I call her and get her to let me in.

"Charlie, what are you doing here? Don't you have work today?" Liz asks. She looks down at the box full of papers and office supplies I'm hugging to my chest. She lets out a little gasp and exclaims, "You quit!" I nod slowly, trying to figure out what she thinks of my rash actions. She turns and walks up the stairs. I follow her, cracking my knuckles nervously. Liz strides purposefully into her apartment and I linger in the doorway to her room, where she is digging through her closet. Whenever Liz is on a mission, she does everything in powerful little movements. Right now, she's moving boxes around systematically until she can pull a black guitar case out from underneath the organized chaos of her clothes. Liz turns to me, holding the fraying old case out with both arms. I gave that guitar to her years ago. It was the first guitar I ever owned, and I was going to sell it a few years back. But Liz insisted that I give it to her. "I want it for when you're famous and I can sell it on eBay for millions," she had said, half joking. I study my feet for a moment, and the laces on one of my Rockport shoes is untied. It trails onto the dark hardwood of Liz's floor.

"Come on! You haven't played in forever. I know you miss it, and I know that you quit your job because you're pissed you didn't try harder to show everyone how good you are. Maybe you don't realize that's why you did it, or want to admit it, but I know that's why. So play." She takes a step toward me. "For me, Charlie. I'm in your corner, right?"

When I pick it up, the wood feels cool against my fingers, but it feels natural. After months and months in the bottom of a closet, it's badly out of tune, so I adjust it. My fingers feel deftly confident tuning the guitar, kind of like my brain isn't even telling them what to do. I run my fingertips up and down the cold strings lightly and flop back onto Liz's bed, my back resting against the headboard. I realize my hands are shaking. It's been more than a year since I've played anything, and more than two years since I've played in front of anyone, even

Liz. I clench my right hand into a fist, trying to fend off the shaking. After I strum a few chords, the comfortable vibration of the guitar replaces the trembling. I feel surer of myself than I've felt in months. I play the song I wrote for Liz during my senior year of high school, the chords happy and bright. When I'm done she's laughing, that big smile stretched across her face. And before I know it I'm laughing with her, laughing until I'm crying.



(cut after the manner of a Slice which Deary-women use about their Butter)

loosen the skin of these excessive words  
from within the flesh.

Your slice (a left-hander's) will move to a right-hander's backhand,  
and that's convenient  
for slitting open your sentences  
and trimming away the fat.

The Pellican hath a beake broade and flat,  
much like the slice of Apothecaries and Surgions with which they  
spread

their plaisters.

Boats do slice,  
where Ploughes did slide of late.  
And look at that man yonder,  
He stands snipping and slicing at the sheepskin in his mouth.  
All have discovered the secret to the  
sleek shape of a silver tongue.  
Be that man,  
The one of whom people say,  
"He would haue sliced his body of words  
into as many parts as there be dayes in a year."  
It is only through their skin  
With scourges slyce't,  
must the bare bones of words be seen.

# Brittany Weens

## Oops

He hated his job.

Humans always believed, or said they believed, that there were beings walking around earth doing nothing more than looking out for their best interests. They even made stories about them, sickeningly sweet dramas like *Touched by an Angel* or *It's a Wonderful Life* that turned them into little more than do-gooders with wings and magic powers.

To some extent they were right. There were beings—angels—on earth. But those who worked down here were the ones who, like him, had been forced into the job by Mary's incessant guilt tripping. And the worst part of it was that Jesus always took her side. Something about her being immaculate.

He couldn't even get an interesting job on earth. Guarding the pope. Rescuing children in burning buildings. Punishing demons. No. He was assigned to cloud spinning over the North Atlantic. Cloud spinning. It was almost as bad as polishing halos.

He puffed off a few cumuli filled with rain and a couple flashes of lightning. Just to make things halfway interesting he added a couple of hailstones to the mix and swirled the whole thing together, watching as the clouds clashed and re-formed. He built them up, incorporating wind currents, directing the clouds higher and higher until they were towering over the ocean, until even he, formless though he was, could feel the power of the squall crescendo-ing.

Why was this normally banned? It was fun, something out of the ordinary, and floating up here at the end of the world it wasn't like there was anything it could really run into—

Something caught his attention. A long, hollow tube with wings attached, gliding through the air, lights flashing. An airplane. And the angle it was going...

Oh hell.

\*\*\*

A loud beeping went off and drew my eyes from the windshield towards the pressure gauges. The needles inside were twirling like windshield wipers. "Taylor!" I hissed, switching off the jet's autopilot, reaching one hand over to shake my co-pilot's shoulder. "Taylor, wake up."

"Wha—What?" She sat up straight and wiped drool from her mouth. "What's wrong?"

"Storm out of nowhere. Radio it in."

"Sure thing. Should I wake up Reilly?"

I glanced back at our navigator. He and I were supposed to be working together while Taylor caught a couple hours of sleep, but he'd drifted off about an hour ago. Somehow in that time, he'd twisted himself so that his feet were propped onto the back of the chair, his head balanced precariously on the edge of one armrest, seat belt tangled around his chest. "Nah. He looks comfortable."

Taylor snorted and started to twirl the knobs. Feedback and static crackled through. "Miles..."

I muttered under my breath. Call me old-fashioned, but I didn't curse around women. "Get Reilly up."

Taylor turned from the radio to punch Reilly on the shoulder. He yelped and jumped just as the plane hit the first batch of turbulence.

"Work on the radio," She said, switching on the fasten seat belt sign and grabbing the microphone to the cabin. "Folks, this is your co-pilot speaking..."

I had to watch the controls jumping under my hand. Turbulence

was too light a term—the plane was bouncing in the air like a basketball. Where had this come from? Clear radar five minutes ago and now we were on the verge of going down. “Taylor!” I snapped, “Stop chatting with the passengers and help!”

She obeyed, flicking switches, pulling levers. “Any luck with the radio, Reilly?”

“No, this storm is a monster, I think it must be interfering with—”

The plane lurched, the lights flickering around us. A sensor went off in the cabin, not quite as loud as the screaming from the passengers outside. Everything was shaking and Taylor started shouting something about losing altitude but I couldn’t listen, I was too busy trying to keep the plane somewhat steady—

Another lurch and we’d spun out of control, were hurtling towards the ocean, Taylor shrieking, Reilly shouting, lights flashing like a stupid horror movie, grabbing at the controls, couldn’t move notoughtimedaymayday—

My hands landed on the steering column, yanked backwards and somehow we rose in the air again. The sensor’s alarm shut off, although the shouting in the fuselage was still going strong; it was turning from panic to demands for refunds and threats to sue. I had a feeling it’d be awhile before things got quiet again.

“Shit,” Reilly muttered, staring. “The storm’s just... gone.”

He was right. The maelstrom had melted away into innocent puffs. I breathed out and realized I was shaking. “Someone up there was watching out for us.”

“Yeah,” Taylor agreed, sitting back up and fiddling with her controls. “It’s like Touched by an Angel or something.”

# Jamal Hilal

## Nascence

During the very precious first few speckles of my nascence, as my mother held her heaviest burden and my father witnessed the quickening of his only begotten seed, he thought to tell her that she would have to repay him for a part of the medical expenses; such is the horror.

# Erica Wick

## Stay Out of Trouble, Kid

>>>Shut Down

Andrew Keyes froze and waited for the reading to appear on the digital scale. The scale reported that the mass of the sample of unknown was 14 milligrams. Andrew clenched his teeth. He knew that the scale was inaccurate, and that the real mass was 12 milligrams—which meant that his percent yield would be off for the column chromatography lab, the last experiment of the semester before final exams and winter break. He dutifully wrote “14 mg” in his lab notebook, anyway, feeling an odd combination of frustration and relief. He tried not to let either of these emotions show on his square face.

Andrew had an extraordinary power: he could measure anything. He saw the numerical value corresponding to the masses, heights, pressures, wavelengths, angles, pitches, pH's, volumes, densities, and molarities of everything around him. Although he would never mention these facts to anyone else, he knew that the tiles on the floor of his chemistry lab were placed two millimeters apart and that they covered 1124 square feet of space. He knew that there were 98 pages in his partner's lab notebook—she must have torn two out—and that there were 34 holes for the spiral piece of plastic to go through.

He saw numbers hovering over everything, with multiple measurements for most objects. The numbers were all compressed over each other, and with his mind's eye he could scroll through them to find the piece of data he wanted. Trying to see the real objects underneath these numbers was like looking at a picture through a particularly dusty computer screen. If he squinted, he could see past the measurements—and squint he did.

Andrew Keyes was in the habit of carefully ignoring his power because he hated Trouble. He hated Trouble, and he hated being Singled Out. Consequently, he felt somewhat relieved that he would not outperform his fellow college freshmen in this particular experiment, or any experiment, for that matter. He didn't understand people like his elder sister, Karen, who thrived off of standing out. Karen had confidently delivered her valedictorian's address when she graduated from college in May while wearing bright pink high heels and a diamond ring that contained .016 moles of carbon with her black academic robe. That summer, she married her high-school sweetheart, Sean, and seemed to love being the center of attention at their huge reception afterwards, impressing everyone with her dance moves. Andrew couldn't be like Karen.

At least he wasn't a redhead, like Karen. Having dull brown hair made it easier to blend in. His friends let their hair grow out long; Andrew let his hair grow out long, too (which had the advantage of hiding his unusually flat head). In fact, he did pretty much everything they did. He spoke up in class only enough to avoid being known as "that quiet kid on the left." He called home once a week. He tried to seem completely average.

He never spoke about his power. Not at school, and not with his friends, and not at home. Effectively, Andrew flew under the radar. He just had a headache from the constant mental squint.

>>>Sleep

Andrew had been an unusual child. One night when he was about two years old, Andrew didn't want to take a bath. "The water's too hot!" He said, before even testing the water with his hand.

"It's fine," his mother assured him.

"No, it's too hot! It's 108 degrees Fahrenheit!" He said, looking at her with big gray eyes.

Mrs. Keyes laughed at his imagination but ran some cold water into

the tub anyway. “How silly you are! Where did you learn to talk like that, Andrew? You’re like a little computer!”

Feelings hurt, Andrew didn’t say anything. He thought he was being scolded. When he looked and saw that the water was 101 degrees, he quietly agreed to get in the tub.

That was not the last time that he was called a “little computer.” When Andrew was a scrawny three year old with a flat-top haircut, his father was helping Andrew’s sister, Karen, on her math homework at the desk in the study. Andrew climbed up into his sister’s chair to watch what they were doing. Their father had a set of counting blocks designed to help kids learn addition and subtraction. There were cube-shaped red blocks for “ones,” rows of five yellow cube-shaped blocks for “fives,” rows of ten blue cube-shaped blocks for “tens,” and large configurations of green blocks for “hundreds.”

“What’s ten plus three?” Mr. Keyes asked Karen, showing her a blue row of blocks and three loose, red blocks. Karen hesitated, counting up each individual block.

“Thirteen!” Andrew answered immediately.

“Wow. That’s very good, Andrew.” Andrew glowed. Mr. Keyes turned to Karen and asked, “Do you see why that is? Try another, Karen. What’s five plus one hundred?”

“105!” Andrew said.

“Hey, it’s my question!” Karen said defensively.

“Karen is right, Andrew. You have to let her figure it out on her own,” Mr. Keyes said. Andrew did not pick up on his gentle tone. “What’s nine plus one?”

“Ten!” Andrew could not resist saying. Karen’s oval-shaped face was flushed; it was almost as red as her hair.

“My, my, my. Aren’t you just a little computer? We’ll certainly have to do more problems together later. For now, Karen needs to get her assignment done on her own.” With that, Mr. Keyes stood, scooped Andrew up, deposited him in the hallway, and shut the door to the

study.

In his flat-topped little head, Andrew was starting to get the idea that he was the only one who saw these numbers, and that when he talked about them, he got in Trouble.

But he kept using his power until he was in first grade. Every year, the Keyes family went to the local elementary school's Fall Festival, which was held in the school parking lot. One year, when Karen was old enough to help Mr. Keyes at the balloon dart game, but Andrew had to sit with Mrs. Keyes while she worked at the snack stand under the main tent, Andrew got in Trouble for the last time. The tent also contained a platform with a microphone, a face-painting booth, and a table with a Guess How Many Marbles in the Jar game. From his station at the snack stand, Andrew stared blankly at the sign advertizing the first prize for the marble game: an MP3 player. The more he stared, the more he thought he wanted that prize. Andrew became antsy and begged to be able to go play, so Mrs. Keyes gave him permission to wander around under the tent, within her sight.

Andrew ran to the table with the jar of marbles to make his "guess," although of course he could see exactly how many marbles were in the thick glass jar. The marbles were beautiful, all different colors: green Cat's Eyes, white pearls, blue Lutzes, plain red puries. He skimmed the entries of names and grades on the chart on the clipboard in front of the jar; most of his opponents were the older kids, the fourth and fifth graders. Their guesses were way off: 77, 89, 85, 60, 71. Someone had guessed 1,000 to be funny. He wrote "319" for his guess. Then he walked fifteen feet and nine inches to the face-painting booth.

As he was getting an autumn apple painted on his cheek, a PTA member mounted the platform under the tent, microphone in one hand and clipboard in the other. "It's time to announce the winners of the marble contest," She said, her 70 decibel voice ringing across the parking lot. "Remember, first prize is an MP3 player, second prize is a \$15 gift card to Amazon.com, and third prize is a Tamagotchi pet.

Guessing 97, the third place winner is Karen Keyes.” People cheered as Andrew’s sister, beaming, approached the platform to claim her prize. Her red pigtails bounced as she walked. “Guessing 100, the second place winner is Arthur Powers,” the PTA woman continued. Arthur, a particularly large (125 pound, six ounce) fifth grader, lumbered up and claimed his prize, as well. “And first place—this is somewhat unusual—but our first place winner guessed the exact number of marbles in the jar! And he’s only in the first grade! With the correct guess of 319, our first place winner is Andrew Keyes!”

Andrew jumped up from his seat. The volunteer at the face-painting booth had not finished his apple: he left it looking like a big bite had been taken out of it. The crowd clapped as Andrew walked the glorious fifteen-foot-and-nine-inch walk of fame back to the table. He felt triumphant as he claimed his MP3 player. When he stepped down from the platform, he saw that his mom had abandoned the snack stand to hug him and Karen. “Great job, sweetie,” She said proudly to each of them. She gave Andrew permission to return to the face-painting booth and told him to come right back to the snack stand afterwards. He felt like he was walking on air.

But his feeling of exaltation did not last long.

“How did you guess the number of marbles in that jar, Mr. Keyes?” asked Mr. Frick, the fifth grade teacher, materializing out of the crowd. Mr. Frick, a tall man with a shiny bald head, had a reputation for being very strict. His bald head was 28 and 1/8 inches in circumference. All the smaller kids were afraid of him.

“Uh,” Andrew answered. “I don’t know.”

“Did you look at the paper in my briefcase over there to find out how many marbles were in that jar?” Mr. Frick asked directly.

“No—I mean—no.”

“Then how did you figure it out?” he asked.

“It’s not like you think. I—I—” Andrew said. He did not know how to explain his ability.

“Mr. Keyes,” Mr. Frick said seriously. “Did you cheat, or didn’t you?”

Andrew knew what cheating was, and he couldn’t lie. “Yes, I cheated,” He said, hanging his head.

Mr. Frick referred Andrew to his teacher, who punished him with two weeks of detention. His teacher wrote a note to Andrew’s mother, who grounded him for two weeks. That was when Andrew realized that his unusual ability was Bad and would only get him into Trouble. From that moment on, he vowed, he would ignore the measurements.

>>>Restart

Andrew was glad to be home from college for winter break. After doing an intentionally mediocre job on his final exams, he was ready to sit idly at home for a couple of weeks. He was especially looking forward to the Keyes’s family Christmas Eve dinner. Andrew’s grandparents were coming over for the evening, and his sister and brother-in-law were coming to spend the week there. Mrs. Keyes was making her famous baked ham and homemade scalloped potatoes.

The numbers got in the way of Andrew’s enjoyment of the evening, however. Andrew was in the kitchen with his mother, getting dinner ready. To Andrew’s annoyance, the label on the ham said 9.5 pounds, but Mrs. Keyes had been ripped off—Andrew knew that it was only 8.8 pounds. The ham itself really wasn’t too big of a deal, but it was an alienating feeling, he thought as he helped his mother peel potatoes. He had a lot of extra knowledge that he couldn’t share with anyone.

He may have thought that secret knowledge of missing .7 pounds of pork was difficult to keep to himself; but that was nothing in comparison to what he saw when Sean and Karen arrived at the door. Sean was wearing a Christmas sweater and a bow tie, and Karen was glowing. The whole family was crowded around the door, exchanging enthusiastic greetings. Even their cat, Poker Face, came out to rub himself on everyone’s legs. (Incidentally, Andrew thought Poker Face needed to

go on a diet—he was fifteen pounds.)

But Andrew noticed as soon as he saw Karen that there were twice as many numbers hanging over her: four eyes, two hearts, two weights, and two heights. He had seen this phenomenon before—with pregnant women. He could see that the tiny human—his nephew, Andrew could tell by the number of X chromosomes—was five millimeters long. It embarrassed Andrew to invade his sister’s privacy by seeing her measurements, but it was not something he could prevent. It reminded him of when he had gone to the mall with her when they were in high school. When she tried to squeeze into a size six dress, Andrew kept his mouth shut and did not mention that her waist was thirty-eight inches, making her a better candidate for a size eight dress.

They had hardly sat down in the living room when the doorbell rang again. They all welcomed Mrs. Keyes’s sweet, elderly parents. Andrew’s grandfather was a man of few words, although he did frequently recount a story of being lost in a blueberry field as a child. Andrew’s grandmother shuffled around hunched over with a cane, but she sometimes surprised the family with a hidden wild streak, as they found out at Karen and Sean’s wedding: she got on the dance floor with Karen and started breaking it down, too.

All through dinner, Andrew kept waiting for Karen to make the announcement, but she remained uncharacteristically silent. As he saw the four-ounce piece of ham on his plate minimize to nothing and watched the permutation of the ratio of peas to carrots on his plate with each bite he took, he thought that seeing all of these numbers was enough to make him feel sick. In fact, sometimes, Andrew was overwhelmed with so much data—and no outlet for it—that he thought he might overheat.

“Would you like a glass, Karen?” Mr. Keyes asked as he filled his own wineglass.

“Oh, no, Sean and I were planning on going out to look at Christmas lights later, and I’m driving,” She said. “Do you want to come,

Andrew?”

Lost in his own thoughts, it took Andrew a moment to process her question. “Sure,” He said, swallowing a bite of scalloped potatoes. He couldn’t help but notice that they were lukewarm: 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Andrew stayed in his reverie until after dinner, when he walked his grandparents out to the driveway. The snow was nine and a third inches deep already and more was coming down; the cold air cleared his head.

“Bye, Grandpa,” Andrew said, shaking his grandfather’s hand.

“Stay out of trouble, kid,” He said, walking away to the car. It was a 1993 Buick Skylark: 189.1 inches long, 53.2 inches high, and 67.5 inches wide. Andrew’s grandfather got in and turned the key in the ignition.

Andrew’s grandmother leaned in conspiratorially and said, “Don’t listen to him. Everyone who ever ended up anywhere worth going got into trouble first. Just look at George Washington. Or Jesus.” She winked, put a hand on his shoulder, and began hobbling to the car with her cane. “Merry Christmas!” She said before getting in. Andrew’s grandparents waved as the Skylark backed out of the driveway.

Andrew had never heard such unusual advice. He stood there for a moment, watching the snow fall. Then he went back inside.

After they did the dishes—using about twenty gallons of water, Andrew did not acknowledge—Andrew, Karen, and Sean left to look at the Christmas lights. They took Karen and Sean’s 2884-pound Volkswagen Beetle. Since they lived in a somewhat remote area, they decided to get on the highway and drive to a nearby town to look at lights there.

They crashed.

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Andrew couldn’t be sure how long he had been unconscious, but he hoped it had only been a few minutes. All 650 of his muscles ached. He unbuckled his seat belt and leaned forward to look at Karen and

Sean. They were both unconscious. Shaking, he tried to ignore the exact volume of blood that Sean had lost when he had hit his head. Andrew dialed 911 on his cell phone.

When the ambulance arrived, he explained the situation to the paramedics. He answered their questions as far as he knew about Karen and Sean's medical histories.

"There's one more thing you should know," Andrew said. He was terrified—he did not want to reveal something he only knew because of his unusual ability. What would Karen think when she found out? He took a deep breath and a risk. "She's pregnant. She's probably about six weeks pregnant."

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When Karen regained consciousness, Andrew was alone in the hospital room with her. Luckily, she only had suffered only a few bumps and bruises. (Sean was in another room, getting a few stitches, but otherwise, he was okay, too.) She wanted to know how the doctors had known not to do an X-Ray or give her any drugs, and Andrew confessed his secret to her. It went much better than he expected: Karen didn't call him a freak, and she agreed not to publicize the matter. It was actually kind of anticlimactic.

>>>Log out

It was unusually warm for October; luckily there was a soft breeze. Andrew was home from medical school for the weekend. He was walking around with his nephew, Thomas, at the Fall Festival, while Karen and Sean were in charge of the game where contestants try to get a ball into a fishbowl.

It felt strange to be back there since he had changed so much. Andrew was no longer afraid of getting in Trouble by using his ability. Now, he did things like make delicious chocolate-chip pancakes without using measuring cups for the ingredients. He went shopping for mini-blinds for his new apartment without getting out a tape measure

to measure the window. He went running on exact 6-mile routes without looking on Google Earth to trace the distance. He surprised Karen by always picking out perfectly-fitting clothing for Thomas without asking for help with the sizing.

And Andrew had stopped trying to blend in with his friends. First, he cut his hair, proud to show off his unusually flat head. Then he started to use accurate measurements in his chemistry lab, yielding much better results. Working with numbers came so naturally to him that he quickly became quite good at math and science; no longer holding back in school, he climbed to the top of his class. Nowadays, he even had the confidence to report a statistic or two to his friends just to have an outlet for all the numbers in his head (not to mention in order to impress them). “Did you know that bees have five eyes?” he’d say if one buzzed by. Or, “Did you know that the average fire hydrant is 12 inches in circumference?”

They would shake their heads and laugh. “Dude, did you memorize Wikipedia or something? You’re like a walking computer.”

Even though Andrew was different, the Fall Festival was just like he remembered it. Unfortunately, Thomas had recently broken his right arm—it was in a bright green cast, and Andrew noticed that he had 207 bones instead of 206—so he could not play the game his parents were working at, or corn-hole, or the balloon dart game. While most kids were walking around with the funny hats and huge stuffed animals they had won, Thomas had nothing.

Instead, Andrew took him to the face-painting booth. Then they sat at one of the wooden picnic tables under the tent to eat caramel apples. But Thomas wasn’t eating—he was just sitting there dejectedly, occasionally heaving a large sigh.

“You okay, Thomas?” Andrew asked.

“I’m just bored. I can’t do anything with this broken arm.” The boy sighed again.

Andrew looked around. “Have you tried that game?” He asked,

pointing at the jar of marbles.

His nephew shook his head and they walked over to the table. Andrew noticed that this year, there were 226 marbles in the jar and the top prize was an iPod Nano. Andrew wondered if it was honest of him to give Thomas the answer. But Andrew felt so bad for Thomas, he could not resist helping him win something. “So now, you just guess how many marbles are in the jar. If it were me,” Andrew said, bending down, “I would guess that there are about—”

“226,” Thomas said.

# Re:Visions

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