Commonthought (2010)

Commonthought Staff

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Foreword

I heard it suggested this past semester that college literary journals like ours, Commonthought, are not “real” magazines. This came to me through the grapevine, so I didn’t have a chance to ask for elaboration, or to defend the work that my students and I were doing in Doble Hall every Monday and Wednesday morning. But, even if I had been there, if someone had said this to my face, I’m not sure how I would have responded. I think I would have stood there, flabbergasted, and been lucky to manage an “Are you kidding me?”

Just before sitting down to make final pass through this issue of Commonthought, I was reading Andre Dubus’s Meditations from a Movable Chair. Most of the essays in this collection have to do with how life changed for Dubus following the 1986 accident that put him in the eponymous chair, but there is an essay titled “First Books” that I would love to have had on hand for the argument about what makes a literary journal “real.”

In the essay, Dubus describes a 1975 conversation he had with the novelist Mark Smith.

He said publishers used to buy a writer’s talent, hoping that the writer’s fourth or fifth book would sell enough copies to earn money. He said: “Now they want money with the first book.”

This was in 1975! Just think of how much worse off the young writer is today, with the publishing industry in serious decline and the majors more than ever betting only on sure things. This is true of book publishing, and it is also true of magazines.

The young writer must start somewhere, and I believe it is the job of the college literary journal to provide the young writer with that start. Fewer and fewer outlets are willing to play this role because, financially speaking, fewer and fewer can afford to. But we can.

For the reader like you, journals like ours are a place to discover exciting new writing from invigorating new voices. We are proud to print within these pages over one hundred pages of new work by students, faculty, and alumni alike. The genres of poetry and short fiction are well-represented as always, but we are also pleased to include two works of narrative nonfiction, a short dramatic work, and pages of stunning visual art.

Enjoy.

E. Christopher Clark
Poetry

The Might of Might — Jennifer Leavey
High Seas (Tremolo) — Marcella Muscatell
Untitled — Kevin Menasco
The Warrior's Sonnet — Sara Clark
Madame Sherri’s — Lyndsey Carpenter
Untitled — Daniel Shay
Words — Roxan McKinnon
Call This Home — Christine Jozitis
Writing with Pencils on Fire — Jeremy Gray
Lucy and Miguel: A Meeting of Immaculate Siblings — Michael A. Luna
The Atlantic Lasso — Pamela Lowe
1996 — Kate Szumita
Futile Systems — Levon Schpeiser
A Day and a Night, Pt. II — Kelly Tehan Jankauskas
You, or Something Like It — Olga Godes
Wonderland or Bust — Lyndsey Carpenter
Lucrezia — Marcella Muscatell
The Day I Stopped Crying — Darnettes Hutchinson
I Expected to Free You — Anabel Balsebre
The Architecture of Friendship — Heather Mangone
Sitting in the Grass with You I Wonder — Katie O’Donnell
Sleepless in Allston — Meaghan Lis
Fading Roots — Daniel Shay
Italian Curse — Sara Clark
Poem — Tyler Burdwood
Statue — Kristen Ritchie
A New Age — James Nutter
Hands Clean — Meaghan Lis
Alice Grew Up — Kate Szumita
Cambridge: A Love Poem — Andrew Chenevert
Observation, 1662 Mass. Ave. — Kasey Lingley
Thinking of You — Christine Jozitis
The Sunslide Gardener — Tyler Burdwood
I Am, I Am — Phyllis Duff
The Ultimate Destiny of the Elements as They Undergo
Mankind’s Reliance Upon Providence — Kelly Tehan Jankauskas
I’d Rather Live Than Live Forever — Brittany Johnson
Our Sexuality, Who Art In Guilt — Meaghan Lis
Speed — Parthena Lambrianidis
Ode to the Heart Shaped Leaf You Gave Me One Afternoon — Melissa Streffacio
In The Field the Stones are Sharp and Glimmering — James Nutter
Summer — Kate Szumita
Lyman School for Boys — James Nutter
Reaching Perfection — Chelsea Quackenbush
Process — Nicholas Bridges
Grow to Love — Leah Laplaca
Three Villanelles — Richard Cranford
The Assassin — Anonymous
0010110101 — Kelly Tehan Jankauskas
Peace of Mind — Leah Laplaca
Resist — Rebecca Washburn
Translucence — Roxan McKinnon
Hidden — Ashley Delgado
Side A, Side B — Rachel Simon
Sixty-Five — Rebecca Washburn
Crows Flew from the Trees Chasing the Echoes of a Gunshot — Marcella Muscatell
Stubborn Leaves — Katie Zeitz
Mom’s Kitchen — Rebecca Washburn
Plants Need Love to Grow But... — Nicki Blodgett
Yoga Poem — Kelly Ur
Rage — Roxan McKinnon
Girl Who Raises Her Hand — Olga Godes
Conditioning — Rachael Holden
Hunger Occupies the Thoughts — Anonymous
Masquerade — Jennifer Leavey
Hunting — Devra Snow

Fiction

Amphetamine King — Mike Tise
The Way It Is — Elyse Gilbert
Ant, Mother, Iron Fish—the Unbroken Code — Cheryl Lawton
I’ll Be There — Emily Mangiaratti
Maxima Debetur Pueru Reverentia — Jeremy Gray
The Tale of the Talking Corn — Cheryl Lawton
The Seventh Draft — E. Christopher Clark

Nonfiction

The Devil Went Down To Ashland — Jennifer Leavey
Dirty Carrots — Suzanne Cope

Drama

Conflict Scene — Lyndsey Carpenter

Art

Untitled — Dorian Sanders
Untitled — Dorian Sanders
Untitled — Dorian Sanders
Between the Bars — Olga Godes
Interpretation of Dreams — Nadia Jennings
Untitled — Anonymous
Untitled — Anonymous
Untitled — Corinne Dasti
Untitled — Leah Cirkier-Stark
Untitled — Dorian Sanders
Untitled — Corinne Dasti
Untitled — Katherine Frangos
Untitled — Corinne Dasti
Untitled — Leanna Leon
Untitled — Chris Chew
Untitled — Anonymous
Siamese Twins — Kaila Gee
There’s No Place Like Home — Olga Godes
You might think
that this poem will
be full of angst
because I have
blonde hair
and breasts,
and every other word
will either be “hatred”
or “heartbreak”
and that I’ll be in
love with
artistically inserting
“fuck” in
every
single
stanza.
You might think that
I’ll read these words
at an open mic in Central Square
in flowing gypsy skirts
to the muted accompaniment
of an Ani Difranco CD—
that I’ll rant and rave about
past loves and losses
because I have a vagina
and that means
my nom de plume is Anne Sexton
and my job is to write forced,
overwrought verse.
Your thoughts are all wrong—
but I am angry.

Tremble, Treble Clef:
you pace down this five-lined plank,
seesawing back and forth
while those very waves
paw up at my ship.

La, Ti and Da
were pushed down savagely
on the vertical downturn of Bass Clef
into the darkeet, murkiest depths
of music theory.

Do, Re and Mi
cast off so brutally, O
from the ship’s leeward side
yet their loot remains on board, the high
octave screams echo.

Artificial harmonic,
all this rose in pitch as the chords clenched
the Treble Clef. And in
crescendo, Fermata teased
the deck, its on point of rest.

Fermata’s first mate
Metronome pulled back the plank beneath
Treble Clef’s feet;
accent pressures-
his last notes called out

as H2O filled up his diaphragm
he shouted out altissimo.

High Seas (Tremolo)
Marcella Muscatell
Five AM is a fah reach. Even tha sun has yet ta make an appearance t’day. Eyes feel heavy an’ m’ back stahts ta hurt. Two hours ta go an’ it ain’t lookin’ cleah if U’m gonna make it.

I hold m’ pill bottle in both hands, not lookin’ at it, but not makin’ an effort not ta. Ta be real about this U’m not really in any state’a mind ta focus on anythin’ besides tha blur; not yet anyway.

No I sit at tha kitchen table suspended in an insomniac haze. I must look like fuckin hell; caught my reflecction an hour ago, complete with bruised eyes an’ pale skin. My heaht has come down ta a slow but poundin’ rate; two days an’ U’m still goin’ strong.

“Hi my name is ____ and I’m an amphetamine king.” I hallucinate quietly ta m’self as I loose my grip on my scrip bottle. They hit tha floah with a rattle an’ settle att’a chaos. M’ motah skills ah stahtin ta go; I hope this won’t effect my ability to drive or operate heavy machinery.

One’a my seven’y-hits is stahin’ at me. That little blue an’ orange capsule is fah too legal an’ deadly. A full foahty-eight hoahs ain’t even had ta do anymoah.

Thanks Ma. Thanks Dad. I hope tha straight As an’ college education makes up foah all’a this.

Late night HBO an’ second rate indie films have become my nocturnal religion. Don’t worry U’m allowed ta worship outside’a m’ bottle at night.

All hail the king of the trinity. His sermon is goin’ ta begin soon; I don’t want to be late.

“Ah seven-O’five, fancy meetin’ you at this time’a day. How’s tha Mrs.?”

A few months ago I stahtid ta decompose again. Beginning tha second countdown ta insanity in three yeahs. It’s slow but it’ll leave some real dents. Kinda’ like a do-it-yaself project.

Dive in head first.
Abandon tha desiah ta eat.
Stop sleepin all tagetha.
Increase nicotine intake an’ triple tha caffeine ta match.
Pop a pill, chase it with coffee an’ I would recomend a smoke or three ta go with it. Anythin’ ta pass tha next few hoahs bafao my daily pharmaceutical kick in the ass.
Side effects may (will) include loss’a appetite, increased blood pressure, increased heaht rate, anxiety, mania, altered biochemistry, restlessness, difficulty fallin’ asleep, difficulty stayin’ asleep, full blown insomnia an’ chemical dependency.

If ya experience any’a these, you’ll love it and write them off immediately.

Half an hoah in an’ I already feelin’ it. This baron stomach’a mine’s gotta be free-basin’ this shit. Tha discomfit’a boahda line stahnvst is bein’ phased out. Food is expensive and always ends up shit anyway. Why not just cut out tha last phase.

Seven-thirty-one an’ I gotta go. Kill my coffee and fill it back up. I check my pockits frantically as tha mania sets in.

Phone? Yup.
Cigarettes? Got’em.
Lighter? Theah it is.
Phone? Oh yeah.
Wallet? Back pockit.
Cigarettes? Still have’em
Out tha front doah an’ sit on tha front steps ta smoke a butt.
My blood pressure an’ heaht rate spike, again. Thought’s staht ta raceasta than I can think.

Does anyone smell melting rubber?
Jump in tha front seat an’ boost tha ignition.
Geah change, raverse.
Geah change, drive. It’s show time, boys.

Amphetamine King

Mike Tise
I'm trying to forget the best the, gone the, long the, road the, songs the, one.

That I can't shake from the dust when I start the rise to let chance try to change,

All the things we've made inside of one more day till I count another time,

When we can back those coins we tossed in the water and,

Prayed not to lose or falter,

But my shin's breaking altars kneeling for a father that maybe I can't see;

Since an eye for an eye makes the world blindly believe,

In some Rx prescription,

Sam Summer addictions,

With a practical porn population,

Living on a desktop streaming to a nation still living in isolation;

Trying to find something

So we can walk past our wakes alive and leave those flasks on our trains behind.

But I still remember you. The one thing you got on me was every single memory.

To you I may disappear into this haze of missing eyes and Rx days, watching my knees

break while your altar stays the same.

But you must wake up and see: I have taken no eyes. I am not the blind. And you, are not the free.

My friend, she wears her armor black, a shield for the tear duct, pauldrons for every lash, a slope of creamy metal from the pencil she never lacks; so when the world decides to smash head first into her gut, at least her eyes will be ready, and not have to suffer the embarrassment of leaking. For mascara is really war paint, applied with a steady hand every morning, and when the world comes seeking a girl, it finds Areto, lips clamped shut and eyes dressed in black, ready for a fight.

I look and see someone's mother, a future Demeter, a face born of earth.

Wooden bridge, sunken path, hallowed trees guides you to her ruins — burned. The scent of smoke and lilacs, stale on the breeze... There, under the arches many lovers had lain spurned. The legend speaks of music, life within this castle throbbing. Its Madame wrapped in both furs and men, is now but a specter left charred and sobbing. Locals that feared this place of booze and sex as ill-reputed den, now come to meet the jazz music by stairway touch. Ninety years have since left their mark, a fire that ravaged has hidden all too much. Only the forest holds her true story within its bark. Careful though you may tread, You will find whispers unheard and awaken the dead.

Madame Sherri's

Lyndsey Carpenter
I wake up and do what I do first thing every morning: Math. Yesterday = #222
223 days.
223 days pregnant.

Well into the 8th month, I’m far past the point of no return. Of course, I’m resigned to that fact. I’m never turning my back on this baby.

Then I get up and do what I do second thing every morning: throw up.

My mother thinks I should hate the baby’s father, but I think she hates him enough for the both of us. I was angry before, sure, but now I’m just resigned. I’m never turning my back on my baby.

I stand up shakily, spit the venom of morning sickness into the sink, and brush my teeth hard.

The thing I was most afraid of was going to school once I started to show, and I have since slain that beast, and come through mostly unscathed. By now, the looks of shock, disappointment, and fear have morphed into looks of sympathy and encouragement from the strange shape-shifting creatures that stalk the halls of my high school. I barely notice the looks anymore.

By barely notice, I mean I notice only one. His eyes are green, but sometimes, depending on the weather or the color of his shirt, they turn grayish blue and almost match mine.

Every day at the end of third period, I take a left out of my Algebra II classroom, walk 11 steps down the hall, and clumsily lumber down the stairs with the ever-growing convexity hanging over my elastic waistband insert. At the end of the stairs, I turn right, and after about six steps, there he is walking towards me.

I see the top of his head first, with its unkempt sandy hair, sometimes lying down shaggy and sometimes spiked up like a hedgehog. He walks with some other boys from the wrestling team. They might make remarks about me, they do that sometimes. I don’t really hear them because he meets his eyes with mine. Every day, he meets his eyes with mine at the end of third period six steps to the right of the bottom of the staircase. He stares at my face for a few seconds, right into my eyes, to the right of the bottom of the staircase. He stares at my face for a few seconds, right into my eyes, as I get closer his eyes slide down to the protuberance.

His friends smack him to get his attention.

“Yo, Mike, Mikey, Yo! Did you hear Chad? He got so totally wasted and fell off....”

And then I’m past him, I remember that I called him Michael when we were together, that one time, because Mike is such a jock name and he’s so much more than that. I won’t see him again until the next day.

It’s okay, though. My baby is mine. The boy is not mine. He never was, he doesn’t love me, and I don’t love him. There’s no point in trying to create a perfect little family out of the raw materials we’ve been given. He doesn’t want it, he regrets it, he’s afraid. I do, I don’t, and I’m not. There’s the answer. I can handle that.

It’s not easy being pregnant, but I’m used to things not being easy. My mother helps me, and we work on the baby’s room together when I get home from school, arranging it all and getting furniture ready and painting. She gets frustrated trying to put a shelf together, and curses the name of my baby’s father, and I laugh it off because she can take the anger all for herself. I’m not angry.

Usually I’m not angry. The hormones and the mood swings that come along with being pregnant, that I have to handle on my own. It’s not impossible of course, but it’s probably the worst part of it. Little things set me off sometimes. I’ll lie down in bed at night and suddenly remember the way he kissed my ear when he was lying next to me. The party was so loud, but the door was closed and it was all muffled, and we were so quiet. I could hear every breath he took on that little bed.

Then, out of nowhere, I burst into tears. Thinking about a stupid little bed in a stupid little house, someone’s stupid party house. It’s dumb, it’s the hormones making me feel crazy. I’m taking Vitamin D supplements to increase the endorphins in my brain and make me feel better, but little memories like that still set me off. His hands wrapped around my shoulders....I curl up and shake with sobs under the covers. It’s so silly, these exhausting fits of crying. I’m lucky that they only come when I’m in my room, alone with no one to see me looking so stupid and pathetic. I do things better on my own.

It’s okay, I tell myself. I’m pregnant and hormonal. It’s okay to cry for now. In a month or so, I will have my baby to take care of and I won’t be alone and I will be happy and my hormones will be back to normal and I will be stable. It will all be gone in a month or so. It’s okay to curl up in my bed and heave with sobs and soak my pillow with salty tears, but only when I’m alone in my room, and only until I have my baby.

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CONTINUED

Several years later, a young
man is buying a cup of coffee from a barista at a stand in a park. He goes to the same girl at the same stand and gets the same thing every Friday afternoon at 3:34 after walking 8 blocks from the elementary school where he works as a teacher's aide. Medium, black, two sugars.

She smiles shyly at him. He gives her a polite little smile back, but walks away with his coffee and without a word. She is disappointed.

He follows the sidewalk south, in the direction of a bright, plastic outdoor playscape. Half-hidden behind a large maple tree, he pauses and looks at the children playing and laughing and being chased by their parents. His eyes fall on one little pale, dark-haired boy with grayish-green eyes sitting nervously at the top of a red slide. A woman with a black braid and a bright smile crouches at the bottom with her arms wide open, coaxing him down. After a few seconds, the little boy inches forward and finally zooms down into a big, smiling hug.

She shakes her braid across the other shoulder as she cuddles with her little boy, and as she moves her head, the man catches her clear blue eyes for a fraction of a second. It's only been four minutes, and it's already time to go.

His vision blurs as he walks away, fat tears welling up in his eyes as he counts his steps. Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four steps away. His thoughts follow the same pattern they do every Friday at 3:38 in the afternoon. He's so big now. Thank God he looks like her; she's so beautiful and she loves him so much. She doesn't love me at all. She hates me. He probably hates me too. I wish I knew his name.

She looks away quickly, her heart pounding in a way that was unexpected, but painfully familiar. When she looks back up, the place beneath the tree is empty. She is disappointed. She isn't surprised.

A fist-sized lump forms in her gut and crawls up into her chest, but she swallows it back down quickly. She knows how upset Michael would get if Mommy started to cry.
We hauled him down the stairs like an old sofa, his mud-puddle eyes worried, but foolishly trusting. As I touched his side, he whimpered because his arthritic joint creaked painfully, audibly under the pressure of my hand. After we lifted his hind legs into the car and shut the door, I thought I had severed us. Then my mother drove him to be lethally injected, or gassed, or some other criminal end, and I did not see him for half a year ‘til he gave me the last morsel of his dumb love in a dream.

Good dog.

I woke up perplexed by the ways in which we commemorate the passage of time. Each day relentlessly marks another anniversary of your absence. I want to tell you that yesterday, a child without a family asked me if I believed in God. I am pretending that he did not notice how I stumbled over my answer. I lied, and thought of how I promised you I never would again. The wind is stronger than my will to get out of bed and I’m wondering why the sun talked to Frank instead of me. But mostly, I wonder when you’ll call. Your t-shirt clings to my body like an infant as I pull the door shut behind me. I don’t have to tell you who’s name I cursed when I received a $100 fine for parking in front of a handicap ramp. I start the car and picture you riding shotgun. Coming home, I imagine my eyes, and how they would react if I found you waiting at the bottom of my stairs, at my kitchen table, pouring a glass of wine. I am skipping heartbeats and meals, while sliding down in between morals just to reach your ear, wondering if he ever found out who called the sun away from him, and if he ever heard them calling him. May he be burned out of the sky if he calls you away too. You look up too often, passing over the light falling to rest right at your height.

Jeffrey said there are two kinds of women — those you write poems about, and those you don’t. Every time I look at you, I see my life’s manuscript flying in the wind with your hair.

In the morning, the white sheets you pull over your skin become pages of ‘Don’t Leave’ and ‘I Love You More Than’, laced with hope that you’ll say we should call this home someday.
Writing with Pencils on Fire

Jeremy Gray

The scars never scared me. They, visible and palpable only when I scoured my maps for escape routes. Your youngest flesh raised and lining both arms, sing your songs of solitude so your mouth can mumble escapes from traps your eyes set for strangers. Uncharted, I drew our maps in pencil, and set a meteoric pace.

A fortnight.

I collapse, maps flaming — none complete — bright and heatless. My ankle is bleeding and, though vitriolic, your hands suppress the flow.

Human toxicity exists. Your unfading armor I still can’t see and never will; my maps are still in pencil our path in pen.

Greetings to you, My Sister, (7) What a Blessed, Holy day! (7) What has brought you to the Planes? (7) And why sit so far away? (7)

Why must we rhyme? (4) Is it a crime— (4) To speak out of tone (5) When I’m sitting alone? (6)

Sister! What is going on? (7) Why do you speak this way? (6) How can you say such a thing (7) On this Blessed, Holy day? (7)


“Rebuke” you say? “Duke” as well? (7) Dear Sister, what’s this Word? (6) You and I both know quite well, (7) Our Father’s name is: The LORD! (7)

Not anymore! (4) Father’s name, I abhor! (6) I rebuke Father’s name— (6) And I denounce His fame! (6)

Dear Lucy, you speak such spite! (7) Has the knowledge slipped your mind (7) Of His care in making you— (7) Most Beautiful of Our Kind? (7)

Miguel, Miguel . . . (4) You know me well— (4) But now, you don’t— (4) And now, you won’t! (4) For I exalt myself— (6) Like a traitorous Elf (6) Above His Throne, (4) So / alone (4) Will assume rule, (4) Not Him—a fool! (4)
You do speak of Treason! (6)
Oh, My Dear Sister Lucy . . . (7)
Surely, you can still repent. (7)
But please, just listen to me! (7)
Don’t abandon Our Father. (7)
You cannot return to Him. (7)
I am Beauty itself— (6)

A Tyrant is He! (5)
But, just look at me! (6)
I am Beauty itself— (6)
Like a traitorous Elf, (6)
I will . . . make War, (4)
Unlocking Hell’s Door! (5)
Now behold, my glory, (6)
Accompanied by my fury! (8)
Children of the Tyrant Duke, (7)
Listen now, as I rebuke (7)
The One Who Made Us and the World! (7)
In a sneer, my lips are curled! (7)
I cannot vanquish Him myself— (8)
Join me now, the Traitorous Elf, (8)
And I shall give you all Freedom! (8)
Join me now, Comrades, in my Kingdom! (9)

My Dear Sister, who has lost (7)
Father’s gift of Grace and Love, (7)
Whose Beauty shone ‘most as grand (7)
As The Lamb and Holy Dove, (7)
I still love you, Dear Sister, (7)
But if you challenge the LORD, (7)
I will cast you out of Here, (7)
With my Holy Flaming Sword! (7)

Come then, Brother, (4)
I am like no other! (6)
I, from Pride, Envy, Anger, and Sloth, (9)
And Greed, Gluttony, and Lust, make cloth, (9)
Weaving for myself a royal dress, (9)
Formed out of Sins: a beautiful mess! (9)
I will corrupt all that He has made, (9)
Beginning with the Ones in the Glade— (9)
The Garden, rather: “Eden” it’s called. (9)
Won’t Our Father be appalled (7)
When my serpent form, Eve’s March impede, (9)

The Lie I tell, seducing Man’s need (9)
For more than Our Father chose to share? (9)
Therein will I base my snare! (7)
They will soon think like me: (6)
The First Traitor—Lucy! (6)
They will want to be like the Most High. (9)
The Fruit pleasing to the Eye (7)
Will seal the doom of Man (6)
And ruin the Tyrant’s perfect Plan! (9)
The Lie will spread ‘cross the world, (7)
My perfect Plan will then be unfurled: (9)
To exalt myself, though I may Fall— (9)
To become the Ruler of all (8)
The world, its kings and all of their lands, (9)
And convince them that Our Father stands (9)
Beyond the reach of their feeble mind, (9)
That He and they are not in Kind (8)
In the Spirit, which He gave to them! (9)
“Breath” of Life? More like phlegm! (6)
Corruptible creatures—that’s all they are. (10)
Teachable tools—animals on par! (9)
I’ll feed them False Gospels of every type (10)
And when their blackened souls are ripe, (8)
I will pluck them from their earthly forms, (9)
Making their corpses food for the Worms, (9)
While their Souls fuel my ongoing War (9)
Against He Whom I Abhor— (7)
Such a light Word to describe my state . . . (9)
Simply put: The LORD, I hate! (7)
While I am Here, I cannot begin (9)
To share this idea of Sin (7)
With any but my Brethren Divine. (9)
So, hear you now this request of mine: (9)
Cast me, Brother Miguel . . . (6)
Cast me—down into Hell! (6)
But know this, as I exalt: (6)
God gave us free will, so this is His fault! (10)

Yet another Lie, Lucy! (7)
Of free will—now hear my voice: (7)
Father didn’t want robots, (7)
He wanted love by choice! (6)
Should you choose another path . . . (7)
Then you choose to face His Wrath! (7)
On the day of the assault, First Private Tom Bradley, of E Company, 5th Marine Division, hid behind a coconut log on a trail lined by cliffs and caves. He was part of the second wave of Marines who had landed on the beaches of Iwo Jima without resistance. Unbeknownst to them, twenty-two thousand Japanese soldiers were waiting for them in the honey-combed hills of the interior, all of them under orders to kill as many Americans as possible before they died. Bullets peppered the sand around Bradley’s feet. Razor-sharp grass, six feet high, slashed through his uniform and skin, pinning the green recruit and what was left of his company in place. He was reloading his rifle when a man with Asian eyes emerged from the jungle. The warrior was dressed in American fatigues and his face was painted with streaks of mud.

Bradley hoisted the gun to his shoulder. “Oh shit.” On the USS Bismarck Sea, his bunkmates had warned of suicide attacks by Japs who camouflaged themselves in Allied uniforms. His sights took in the man’s black hair and dark skin. “Stop,” he pleaded.

The enemy froze in place. Bradley screamed, “Stay where you are. I’ll shoot. I will.”

Gunfire rained down from the caves, forcing the foreign combatant to squat and crawl toward Bradley’s position.

The young man closed his eyes. He thought of his mother and then, his girlfriend, Diane. They had only had sex once, the night before he shipped out. Staring down at her cornflower eyes, Bradley prepared to squeeze the trigger.

The warrior pounced first, knocking the inexperienced soldier against the log and jamming the barrel of the exploding gun to the ground. “Shut up, Private. Didn’t your sergeant brief you? I’m Navaho, a Diné.” His voice sounded like home. Pulling a radio from his heavy knapsack, he handed Bradley a generator. “If you want to get out of here, start cranking.” Then he connected a broken antenna with a pair of wire cutters, and spoke into the transmitter urgently, his voice rising and falling in waves of what sounded like gibberish.

“You’re not one of them?” Bradley asked, letting go of his bladder.

“No, buddy. Air Command is on the way. We’re taking the mountain.”

To a fragile 6-year-old, it seems like their bones are made of stone, cased in strong shells of hard muscle, one flick of a tail like a whip—but they always liked me, and they knew I liked them, too.

On a good day—the best kind of day, really, I could climb on top of Joy’s back, watching her sturdy, rocking shoulders, her mane twisted in the grip of my small fingers, as we climbed the dirt trail leading up to pasture.

My mom, walking beside us, would remind me to hold on, but I was never worried. Be cautious, but not afraid.
Futile Systems

Levon Schpeiser

the feudal system was a futile system

but socialism can turn servile victims into worthwhile victors

the encomienda is a serious aspect of the imperialist agenda

but i bring the heat to hip hop heads and in reality i’m quick to bend ya

i got a thing for grass but it grows better when you put a little mulch in it

like cesar chavez i’m a cooperative agriculturalist

or che guevara bringing about a new era

from the northern area to all of the americas

but when i’m swearing yo i’m scaring you

efficiency is part of my arsenal and i already been done all the things you came to do

slowly but surely the path to peace is changing you

fight for people’s liberty like jose marti

not worried about religious strife

between followers of christ and allah

here to bring the masses closer a la simon bolivar

don’t believe in religion in general but i’m a god on every mic i step to

with the foresight to end more fights with nonviolence than 20 teks with silencers

it’s a small world we living in and i’m trying to bridge gaps and combine the differences dividing all the caribbean islanders

imperial powers trying to devour the people hour by hour

like wine without the united farm workers the grapes are getting sour

but i’m like a prophet trying to put a stop to people getting shot for profit

we got government officials burning down the biblioteca

but if you complain you might disappear in the basement of the politecnica

i’m here to represent and set a precedent because if you’re a person people should respect ya

for hundreds of years it’s been evident that indigenous people are irrelevant

at least until bolivia elected evo morales as president

whether we’re from latin america or the us we can’t allow cowards to corral us

nobody should have to worry about having no power or not being able to take showers

the countryside is full of the bodies of children who’ve died while mothers cried

he may be a communist but my problem is i don’t know what cuba will do when castro dies

the brazilians have silva but the forests are getting chopped off and tribal leaders are getting knocked off with sawed offs

paramilitary organizations stay scaring juvenile delinquents and firebombing and paralyzing parallel political institutions

military ruthlessness is a perfect way of convincing the people of their own uselessness

but really i’m more worried about how they’ll find new ways to use us next

growth without development leaves babies dead in the womb but for most people it’s the elephant in the room

new markets the capitalists eyed while the politicians lied but the people have needs and some turn to coca leaves and ponchos they just dyed

the only way to fight against these giants is with our mind’s defiance

in colombia they got no choice but to grow cocaine its the only way to keep their life sustained

in mexico no more jobs at the maquiladora so the poor gotta steal or jump the US border

fair trade now thats not a request its an order there’s a long list of worse methods we could resort to

the third world has alot of poverty but they usually have alot of resorts too

why don’t the cubans own guantanamo and why don’t the panamaneans own the panama canal zone

CONTINUED
why don't we fight to expand the rights of costa rican chicas

but it’s hard to fight cultural stereotypes when the taco bell dog won’t stop barking about gorditas

i’ve always admired guerillas in military fatigues but even i get fatigued when i see revolutionary zeal turned into greed

but i’m here to spread the seeds of independence and when it comes to oppression i feel a need to end it

i can’t say i’m underprivileged and broke when i’m rockin a peacoat but peace is something i want to promote and i have to emote

i’m not always the type to play games but when it comes to who’s causing pain i will name names

and we can’t stand for racism anymore or governments treating people as slaves

basically my point is why can’t we all get along?

even if sometimes we don’t get it except through a song

but some dudes got guns drawn and won’t stop until red dawn

in reality legal impartiality is a fallacy it’s kind of a bad way to seek balance b

part of the problem is we’re a part of the problem and can’t pick a side in politics like smeagol and gollum

i think it’s a bad idea to pick leaders who say we’ll grow and their promises are hollow

but let’s not get it twisted i’m not trying to go ballistic

i just think it’s a problem when people use ethnic criteria to gerrymander a district

alot of people think i fit the criteria of a misfit

it’s cool though i’m not in it to make bread i’m fine with some water and a biscuit

like two billion other people in the world who haven’t had a chance yet

there’s a new generation in latin american politics and it’s a positive trend if you’ve been following it

i’m kind of on the fence about hugo chavez but i’m mostly interested in who provides social services best

that doesn’t mean we can’t support anyone who doesn’t have an s on their chest

like superman but some people have big plans and people are celebrating in the street with big bands

i can’t think of a good way to end this song though so i’ll say what i always say viva la revolution!
A Day and a Night, Pt. II
Kelly Tehan Jankauskas

Anything’s possible, Johnny,
If you’re man enough to stare
Into the brown slide of
Your own lunch and bile
As it avoids the pebbles on Route 2.
It’s then that you reach your best:
For the feeling that maybe this is it:
Not understanding the weep and the want,
Or the pock marks left by rubber dirt.
Thank Lord for being outside
So you don’t leave a stain on the rug
Or cheek so many lost hairs
On the shit-speckled lip of the toilet.
It’s better to forget the bad times;
Even helps you to forget the good.
But oh, they’re good.
Some of the best times I can’t even remember.
But that’s just going for saying

Wandering around like a boy with his head cut off
as you travel through the good times.
(go, start, stop.)
We go puddle jumping into a pile of muddy bricks,
Shit thrown shown through the clear glass window.
Facing outward at my reflection in the sky
Fireworks flicker as people go to sleep,
Cherries blossom into thin, dark air.
I can feel it.

You, or Something Like It
Olga Godes

Your hair was too long, so they trimmed it.
Then they decided to cut it off completely.

Then your fingers got in the way,
So they cut off your arms.
They cut off your head next, so you
wouldn’t have to see what
they’ve done to you.

Your stomach caved in and your spine cracked.

Then your breasts fell off, since
they tore out your shoulders and
in the end had to push down
everything from the waist up.

They left your thighs outside overnight and
on the last day they cut off your legs.

Only your feet are left, still, standing
on the front lawn of your house.
Now when I see you there, I wonder if
you wished they had the decency
to dig out your roots so you wouldn’t
have to live with this.
Wonderland or Bust

Lyndsey Carpenter

Alice should have stayed
(long lost, life lost)
underground in a land of
mocking invisibility and painted
falsities. She would have been better
acquainted with normalcy.

Eyes better adjusted
to seeking Mad Hatters
than finding mad masters
striking and carving crimson
into their dark skinned things.
She would see no object,
but real muscle spasms and tears.

She would age in shock, dreaming
back to a black and red card army.
Seeing the nightmare alive of
shiny badges held by ones working
for the devils of coke and whores,
against the mothers and hard working men,
in a monster city with an untamed lust.

She might find a drunken rodent in her tea
unsanitary, but given the choice
tea or the kool aid,
she’ll drink down every last rouge whisker.
There is nothing left in this earthly circus
for a child of bread and butterflies
and golden afternoons.

Poor Borgia sister,
You’ll be married off for your father
and brother’s own gains
three times—the first one
will be annulled. You’re pregnant
at thirteen and your life
is destined by murderous gluttons.
The first crime family.
They have God whispering in their
Pope ears, but Lucifer too can
dress in white.
What would Perotto say?
He is your father’s messenger.
Would the secret Roman Infante
recognize Perotto? They have the
same eyes. Borgia sister,
Lucrezia—
would you offer thirsty Perotto
a cup of wine, tainted with
our loving cantarella?
Arsenic compound and extracted
pig entrails—
Poor Borgia sister,
you don’t need to know
the details, it is tasteless, I promise.
You just need to pour the wine.
Invite the Medicis over for dinner
while you are at it—
perhaps they too could enjoy the
liquor of succession.

Lucrezia

Marcella Muscatell
One year ago today was the day I stopped crying
Two years before that I met this guy named Chris
Three beauty marks on his face
Four dates later we had our first kiss
Five times a day I would check my phone to see if he texted me
Six weeks passed before we had our first argument

Six roses he gave me when he said sorry
One smile was all it took for me to forgive him
Five times he repeated, “I’ll never call you a bitch again.”
Four times I skipped school to see him. The
third time was when we got into yet another argument

Three minutes into the argument he called me a dumb bitch
Six days was how long it took me to admit I had already forgiven him
Four dozen roses were sent to my house that week
One of my best friends asked me why I was so sad
Two dimples sunk into my cheeks as I smiled and told her, “Nothing.”
Five days after that Chris took me on a road trip

Five states we drove through blasting Elton John’s Bennie and the Jets
Three times he wanted to change the CD, but I pouted, so he gave up
Twice he jokingly called me a bitch
Six piece nuggets and vanilla milkshakes cured our hunger
At one point we were driving so fast we almost crashed
Four hours into the trip, he introduced me to methamphetamine

Four days after that trip he punched me in the face
Five bruises on my legs
One sprained wrist
Three hours in the emergency room that night
Six dollars for the matinee movie we watched the next day
Two hours later we were in the car blasting Elton John

Two of my friends told me to break up with him
Four more seasons fly by full of arguments and black eyes
Six times in a row he would call me if I didn’t answer my phone
Five stitches in my head that I covered up with thick curls
Three times I told him I hated him
Once he told me he would stop beating me if I could just be the person he needed me to be

Two years after meeting him I was sitting at his funeral
Fifteen minutes before his death, he had threatened to kill me if I didn’t come to his house
Four p.m., I got to his house and found him hanging from the ceiling
Three other girls walked by me crying as they put roses down in his casket
Six times during the service, I almost missed him
One year ago today was the day I stopped crying
The Architecture of Friendship
Heather Mangone

Define forever. Continuous, ever-lasting?
Like the black ink injected
Into the cold bare flesh of
My right foot.
Permanent.
Unlike the friendship we built
Out of crumbling bricks,
Masonry of blind men who build
Stone walls of broken, empty promises.

The distance was torturous.
Unable to deny how eagerly you
Relied on me as your solid foundation.
I began to disintegrate,
No longer holding you up, or guiding your frame.
Repair was not an option,
The cracks were only worsening.
Sharp debris slicing through my stomach
As this happy home collapsed.

No goodbye, no explanation,
You picked up your pieces with ease,
Wood splinters, a mess of glass from broken windows,
And with little effort you discovered a stronger foundation.
She held you taller than I ever could
And molded you into picture perfection.
While I remained as concrete dust,
Abandoned.

Why,
for years limping on
without aim or healing
a shadow flickering in the adamant creep
from one haze
to the next
of consciousness’s dawn
nothing more than headstones
and breath,
did hope survive?

My heart is too restless
to allow me the luxury of sleeping.
I clean, I paint, I bake
I do not drink (too much)
I write, I dance, I sing
so I do not have to think (too much)
I am
too breathless
to allow myself the luxury
of sleeping.
Fading Roots
Daniel Shay

My great grandparents were O’Sheas and O’Briens and through their lineage, I have inherited their traits: my body is built to build, to herd sheep, to fall on its knees, to consume pints of Guinness, and to be washed with Irish Spring soap.

My father and his father and all their fathers since Saint Patrick were the same way: taught to fear god and woman, to work hard, to love without the word, and I am a product of that. Cloudy days of melancholy are my home, bread and potatoes my fuel, literature my shelter, sarcasm my given tongue, but green is not my favorite color, I fear not god but those who do, I read more Bukowski than Yeats, and I do not wash away my dirt and grime with Irish Spring soap.

It all is fading: from druids to Jesus, shaken by faith to shaking it, fields to libraries, Guinness to Pabst Blue Ribbon. It fades like lush green hills rolling into the morning mist.

The malocchio is utilized when you hate the bride and her white dress, when her hour glass figure disgusts you, when her happiness is over-kill.

I saw my aunt shoot it across her husband’s shoulder while dancing the waltz, wondering why our cousin should woo the good doctor and win his war chest.

I have proof of this; the camera eye shuttered, as it hit the bride above the scoop of her dress, ricocheted down her bony spine and spun into the lens.

At the reception table my aunt gave her gifts and wished the couple well as she measured her green dress against crisp, new white and forgot to say God-bless you.

Italian Curse
Sara Clark
I’ll Be There
Emily Mangiaratti

I can see the way they look at us, like we’ve just landed from Mars. We’ve been here for nearly two years—why are they not used to us? Me and my partner, Daley, are standing out in the hot midday sun. We look out over the vast sandy dunes, saying nothing at all to each other. Our humvee is parked on the edge of a pretty big dune. Daley sits on the edge of the dune and takes a long drag from his cigarette. He stares out into the vast desert. He watches the people of Iran in a nearby village walk back and forth through the winding streets. There is an outdoor market in one of the dirt roads and people from all over are coming to buy their groceries for the day. I watch Daley looking at all the people for a little bit, me thinking about my family, Daley just studying the village thinking about whatever Daley thinks about. I close my eyes and lean back on my backpack. My youngest brother, Aiden, will be graduating in a couple months. I really want to get back to see the graduation. Both my brothers will be there, and I feel, as the oldest, I should be there too. But my dad had other ideas for the oldest boy. I remember the day he picked me up from football practice. The leaves were turning their beautiful shades of red, orange, and golden yellow. An army man himself, it was imperative that I carry on the tradition. It was only a matter of time until I was asked to fall into the line of duty. Around here, “the talk” was no sex talk. Instead the talk was more like a draft letter. My father had spent a couple years in the service and my grandfather had fought in WWII, so the army was a family affair. I looked him dead in the face the whole way home, nodding when I felt it was appropriate. As we pulled up to our house, I could almost smell the delicious dinner Mom was cooking me. Both Aidan and Reid were home from school already, and were anxiously waiting for me to arrive.

I open my eyes, and look around. Daley is standing now, smoking another cigarette. I look up at him. “Jeeze kid, how many cigs is that today?”

He looks over at me and, just to tick me off, takes another long drag from his cigarette. Then he looks into the sun and answers, “Five.”

I stand up and take a drink from my canteen. “Damn kid, those things will kill you yet.”

“If this war don’t kill me first.” He takes the cigarette out of his mouth and flicks it on the ground. He walks over to me and pats my head, then looks out over the horizon. “C’mon kid, we best be getting back to camp. You know how Sarge gets we show up late for roll call.”

But neither of us move; we don’t want to. Instead we watch the kids of the village being called in for dinner one by one. Slowly the kids begin to desert the street. Without saying anything to each other we take one last look at the empty village and climb back into the humvee. As Daley drives away, I take one more look at the tracks we are leaving behind, and the village in the valley. I turn back around and pull a picture out of my pocket. There, staring back at me is my whole family. I look into the eyes of my brother Aidan and promise that I will be home to see him graduate.
Poem
Tyler Burdwood

For Salo

The wind took the hammer through the snow.
“The future’s off kilter but I still have somewhere to go,”
Thought the hammer, in the sky.
The storm let it go, made a lightning bolt crack in the ice.

I thanked the blizzard which changed my plans,
Lay still as a nail in a wiggling hand.
Cold winter fever, gray and bleak,
Should keep me frozen for more than the most of the week.

I was in love with a picture of you
That I painted daily with out meaning to.
Alone in my efforts, while all the time
You contradicted my hopeful design.
All of my dreaming takes its toll — what if —
There’s too many people and not enough souls?
We’re born with a burden we’ve all described:
We’re breaking our bodies and renting our minds
And I can’t help wondering if anything’s really my fault.

Gigantic
A single tip could swallow the Earth below her whole
Forever impaling her womanly form into sharp jagged pieces
She only wishes to wear a mother’s apron, a hand to hold
Staring out at the cold tiled rows she wondered,
What does the Earth hold beyond her capturing?
Is it only little jagged pieces?
The onlookers wore pastel scarves tying on their heads
Their lips were crimson red hiding their deep set eyes
Her body hovered over them like a shrine
Some prayed at her golden feet and touched her draping robe
She scorned the name of the man with the chisel and hammer
There was never compassion from the grasps of the tiled floors.

Statue
Kristen Ritchie
The world has become changed, we no longer are them. Ne’er are we solemn, lest solemnity’s in. The rote definition, of life, and life spent: loving, betraying, or contorting; chagrinned.

And so, we medicate; desecrate, will to propagate lost lies. Our minds’ endless seeing of soft, tumultuous cries. Forceful endeavors, in stone and steel boxes, forgetting the meaning, of a field, littered with oxen. The unwilling directed by myriad chemistry; seeking being lost, or false, heartfelt camaraderie. But always accepting the ancient avenue or destiny.

Lost little children of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Blindly grasping for meaning, without the guide of a mother. An eon forgotten past, assumed to be known, like presumptuous logic could place definition to soul.

Impermanent actions, guided by impersonal factions. The merit of blood, is red hypnotic, didactic? For if it be genetic, a percent makes us siblings, distracted. Passive aggression, pushing crowds just for sake. Monetary divulatory, progresses, ‘Til when? For comfort, for power? A juvenile striviation.

Unbound by the laws lain before history, mysteries of life become infantile compulsory. Just to awaken, from dream to a haze, this cold world may survive, least ‘till next day. But to be ruled by the bars, set in one’s mind, numbing experience, held by the crux of machined delirium, the fear within all, will burst out the seams, like a century old doll.

A New Age
James Nutter
Today is your girlfriend’s twenty-first birthday.

Sometimes I wonder if my life is really just one long film.
I play the nameless blonde you take to Brooklyn one lush, wanton afternoon in July.
My hands are those of an artist’s
and I have pleasing plush lips.
Some men regard it as one of my best features.

You always saw me as a Marilyn.
I thought of myself as more of a Jackie.

“I’m never going to leave her,” you say
I laugh and remind you it is only our third date.
My laugh sounds like two stones rubbing together.

This is the season of isotopic dreaming.
The skies are shades of charcoal
and all the birds are flying south.
It’s been eight months.
My body heaves with longing.

I try to read your face,
but it reveals nothing of your cravings
your desires.
Thin lips, cedar hair
pale skin.
You have the face of a man who’s never felt real pain.

I am drunk on the night of your girlfriend’s twenty-first birthday.
I won’t see you for weeks,
maybe a month or so.
My wrath could set this city on fire.

I dream of a sleepy Sunday morning.
You crawl into bed, the potent scent of cigars and scotch.
In my dream, I ask you questions that never struck me in waking life.
You slide your hand between my legs, ever so gently
smooth as stone.

In the streets, the fire rages on.

There’s a fork in the road, one sign reading: Wonderland, this way.
This time, there’s no rabbit hole,
and Alice is pushing 40, a heavy smoker
living in a trailer park with
a husband who likes to visit the tracks too often, but
she still has that pretty blonde hair, the same hair
on the same head that the Queen of Hearts
had wanted so badly to chop off.
Sometimes, Alice thinks
she should have let her.
Six days after his son’s death and three after the funeral, Jonas Carlyle orders 782 pounds of zinc powder costing just over a thousand dollars, and begins his search for the same amount of ammonium nitrate. He clicks through page after page on library computers, too scared to go home and confront the silence, his only company a new cordless home telephone in a plastic bag at his feet. After discovering he can only buy the second ingredient in 500 kilogram shipments at a price that he doesn’t bother looking at, he shrugs and orders another 320 pounds of zinc powder to keep the measurements even. Two days pass as Jonas mixes the components in his garage and sets them in place.

Jonas’ phone is blissfully ignored in his right front pocket as he walks the aisles of a hardware store. Its vibrating is incessant. Fingering the folded lined piece of paper in his left front pocket, he pauses at the counter, looking at the hammer and chisel. After bringing up a single extended index finger and making eye contact with the cashier, he walks away and comes back with another chisel. He pays with a credit card and walks out.

Finally confronting the house— but not acknowledging the silence — Jonas walks with speed and intent, gathering what he needs through the depressingly familiar arrangement of furniture. Refusing clearance to the sentimentality that challenges him with every inch he walks, fiber of carpet his feet touch, and every smell that reminds him this used to be his home, Jonas’ isolated stoicism eventually fails him. He doesn’t wipe the tears from his face.

Only the oldest and dingiest clothes will suffice. His old Army jacket, stripped of its CARLYLE tag. Originally tan, now brown work boots. Tattered painters pants over favorite jeans and a few layers of Christmas sweaters, cut down the center to prevent overheating, all consolidate onto his frame to paint a believable portrait of homelessness. Stashing the chisels in the side pockets of his jacket and tucking the hammer between his pants and lower back, Jonas walks out of his bedroom only to come back in a few seconds later, grabbing his guitar case.

Jonas slides his guitar into the backseat and flops behind the wheel, arms, body and face momentarily statuesque in absolute grief and determination. Before starting the engine, he
tires, unkempt, unshaven, unwashed in fearful disdain as the eyes that rest the center of four top lips curl up determination. is magma that is forging islands of door but stops and puts the cup to them and him. He starts toward the state or the shuffling steps customers open and maneuvers out. The bubbling chipped where Jonas slams the door east of the destination, in an alleyway where it'll stay until stolen or the buildings around it. He isn't sure of how long he'd going. He is always hungry now. A café comes up on his left, Oren's going. He is always hungry now.

A café comes up on his left, Oren's Daily Roast, and he enters, asking for a cup of hot water — no he doesn't need a lid, no he doesn't need the protective cup of hot water — no he doesn't need Daily Roast, and he enters, asking for a something pour scalding water down his throat. He doesn't drink it, just lets it fall. Pain is simply there, easily ignored, resting on the surface like a latex glove.

Out the door, three blocks to go, guitar strap beginning to dig in his shoulder and remind him it's there. Hollow grief burns in his chest, mocking the heat from the water. Jonas' pace slackens for a moment as he realizes the heat and the pain are the first things he's felt since watching his son be buried. He wants another cup, but his legs won't stop, the machine of his body operating its own gears and joints. Gravity isn't weighing him down anymore, only the rusty steel of old, decaffeinated emotions and the placid faces of everyone at the funeral. The waxen faces and lowered eyes render the hollow grief into a funeral. The waxen faces and lowered eyes render the hollow grief into a funeral. The waxen faces and lowered eyes render the hollow grief into a funeral.

Grabbing one of the chisels and reaching behind him for the hammer, Jonas for a moment appreciates the tools, their weight and their potential. He is about to start when he realizes he's made a stupid mistake: he'd sat too much in the middle of the stone and couldn't begin from there. For a moment, Jonas sits thinking of a way to not to be noticed shifting, then realizes how lost his actions are in the sea of people. He tosses his tools to his right, slides himself over, and drags his guitar and case with him.

He squeezes the hammer and the city disappears again. He is back in the delivery room: he has his (ex) wife's hand in both of his and they are screaming in tandem, excited to near hysteria, exuberant in blinding pain and celebrating the first seconds of their complete union. With the first infantile wails, Jonas' second half stops screaming and her vivacious spasms cease as she transcribes that energy into her newborn son, who takes the helm of noise-making. Jonas falls into a revelry of selflessness that he didn't know existed before this moment, a complete abandonment of his own ego possible only through dedication fueled by love. He tries to squeeze her hand and look at the first time mother, but instead Jonas is squeezing his tools and is staring into a listless mass of moving bodies.

With his back to the dead stone and the living sea in front of him, Jonas strikes the first vertical line, a diagonal one half the length of the vertical, then a connecting mirror image of the first two lines. It is an eternal tattoo that everyone will read, that everyone will remember. The spine of following letters are hammered out by the clay-faced artisan, the defeated ex-father, the ignored and the ignoring operating amidst each other, one fighting through transient faces and the other unable to forget one. Maxima is completed, and Jonas rewards himself with vibrations from his guitar. His fingers fall over the strings and his mind ventures inward through the labyrinth of memory, doors sealed shut with tears and hallways decorated with easy smiles and lazy Sunday afternoons.

It was Spring, Almost-Summer, when the delicately warm days that tease you with cool breezes on your forearms and sunny hugs from behind, and temperatures shifting and mixing and changing like tea steeping in a pot, leaving no one smileless. The three of them were in the backyard, Cynthia had made a lengthy, affectionate goodbye to run inside and check her email and would only be gone a few minutes. The sound of the door sliding shut was met with the boy asking, in his beautiful youth, what was in the brown bottle Jonas was holding, christened with the slightest glaze of condensation. Jonas let him hold the bottle and smiled at the surprise that passed through his eyes after he brought the bottle from his lips and handed it back, shaking his head violently. Cynthia walked back out, smiling, her hands anxious to get back around Jonas, who stifled a small laugh when he heard his boy burp.
Debetur is done. Jonas can’t remember when his hands stopped playing and started carving again, but things like these aren’t questioned anymore. Things just happen. Sometimes you know why, other times you can only raise your chin and eyes to the sky and ponder at the infinity. P, u, and e were just finished when one of the anonymous few who’ve unplugged from our game of money and cosmetic happiness steps out of the sea and notices Jonas.

“This ain’t yo fuckin cowana,” he says. “G’th ha fuck out.” The skin on his face is sun burnt and plagued with a perpetual look of slight confusion and derision. His eyes aren’t afraid to look and his mouth delights in describing what most don’t want to hear. It is his corner. Jonas pauses and lets the hammer and chisel fall to the ground. The Owner’s head tilts to the side and he asks “Choo gat there?” A pause. The Owner of the corner knows Jonas won’t respond, his mouth is as silent as his eyes. The Owner sees the guitar case, the crumpled bills and mingling change and takes the affront of Jonas taking his panhandling spot in stride, seizing an opportunity.

“Got a b’niss propagation f’ya. Ain’t nobody really gon pay you much ‘tension if you just sittin down n strummin them strings — you need a frontman, sumbody who can git that ‘tension and git mo silver n green in that case.” Jonas pauses for a second, understanding exactly what this ignored stranger is saying, and picks up the chisel and hammer and finishes the r and the o of puero. “Seasy. We jus split it, all, fifty-fifty, Deal? Deal.” The Owner clears his throat with dramatic flair and it’s a magnet to the two boys. Jonas doesn’t feel his hands stop or the anger in his belly evaporate into a mist of complete focus on every syllable and sound that flower through this stranger’s mouth. He can feel his son near, but his attention is forced upon the stranger to his right, placating his grief. The Owner’s voice rings out through the sea:

“Sit and search. The sand that sifts through fists once stood as the peaks of mountain top points, worn and broken by wind from Grandfather Clock’s Hands and their refusal to stop spinning.

Sit and ask: who can navigate the gears? Who tightens the Loosening bolt?

Sit and think: would you keep that mountain top for yourself in defiance of that One Truth? Or would your hands hold you humbled as hostage in the face of laws that weren’t written — of laws that simply are? Sit and Search.

Grab the bolt or grab the hammer? Tighten and save or swing and —defy All that came before and every strand that might have been.

But you cannot be the eternal rebel. We walk under the mercy of those Hands and mettle you may, for now. Wander in wonder and may you be merry, but you will never escape the need to stand and decide.”

Despite constant movement of the body and feet of the sea, silence manages to settle on the two boys and the Owner. The rhythm of Jonas’ chisel starting up again melts into the white noise of detail. He has finished the spine of all 28 letters and is retracing them with his fingers, finding nicks to smooth and honing exact lines, maneuvering both hands behind his back. The Owner’s shoulders liquefy back down to their normal, relaxed position and his slang-infused speech returns, trying to hustle a few cents.
out of the boys. They’re still transfixed in the moment, trying to understand what just happened and digest the system of words just spoken to them. The Hispanic boy reaches in his jeans pocket, the Owner already ignoring him — moving on to good old fashioned begging — and doesn’t see both sets of young eyes are still magnetized to his face. The boy drops in a soft piece of gum and a thick eraser, leaving his three quarters and a nickel in the opposite pocket. Both boys look at each other, bewildered, and walk away.

Jonas stops twice over the next five hours, swapping in fresh chisels for the finer details of the letters. Those two times and the mangled chords he strums on his high school guitar are the only things that keep the Owner around. Jonas barely notices the presence of this other, doesn’t register the money in the case or the cut that’s taken from his unsought-after confidant. He doesn’t feel himself sleep but assumes that he must. Whenever he swallowing and there’s a twang that he remembers is pain, he gingerly asks the Owner for a hot cup of water, which is placed at his side a few minutes after his request. Half the reason for the water drinking is to keep the blood flowing in his hands, the warmth triggering something in his blood vessels, reminding his body that it was still working somehow, somehow — and the other reason is to let the cup in its entirety fall down his throat and into his stomach so it can sit and burn. A few passers-by think this is part of his act, that it worked somehow into his guitar playing. They attribute his boiled, wretched stare to his acting ability, ignoring the shiver of fear that drips down their spine as they walk.

Maxima debetur puero reverentia is finished and Jonas is tired of doing everything behind his back — of hiding his work, concealing his art. He stands in the morning air, unaware how long he’d been sitting, and arches his back, his grey eyes pausing on an all-blue sky. His clogged memory drags up images of a time when that color and that sky and these people would bring him happiness, of a time when he could remember what feeling was. His hands trace over the few completed words. The (ex)father levels his eyes and sees Freddy’s face in the stone before making his first strike: noting the depth of the jaw, each line of hair, thin lips that curve on the right in a perpetual smirk, his mother’s nose. The lucidity of the face that Jonas sees in the lifeless stone stirs a moment that sits unblemished in his mind forever:

The three of them, late summer, when the nights are cool but the ground is still hot from the day, and the early morning leaves traces of breath in front of your face, no . . . at first it was the two of them — him and Cynthia — a Monday morning, both of them had called out to work with plans of making love. They did. Cynthia hugging her knees with her head turned to the side, cheek resting on kneecap, looking at Jonas who was half sitting half lying; the love was slow and warm and they hadn’t stopped staring each other in the eyes even now, almost twenty minutes after the act. Their gaze almost broke but the sound of Freddy waking up and talking to his action figures about what they were going to do for the day wouldn’t let them look at anything but each other, until the young king ran into the room. He knew they were still home because the housekeeper wasn’t there making his breakfast. Jonas wasn’t aware moments like this can exist, the perfect harmonic string of events with each silver thread wrapping around themselves just like those three sets of arms around those three separate but forever together bodies.

A horn brays and the Owner of the corner tells Jonas that it’s just a request for him to pick up his guitar. The only thing Jonas thinks about when he makes the first strike — almost diagonal, down from right to left — is how many feet of road Freddy was splattered over, how the boy turned to almost liquid on contact, and how it was he who’d called him across the street.

Something resembling days pass. The Owner gives a nudge whenever a cop comes within a block or so, and Jonas sits slowly, puts down his hammer and chisel to pick up his guitar. The cups of hot water become more frequent as general shapes begin to emerge from Jonas’ slow work into the stone. The water becomes tea when the Owner finally notices the fine detail of a cheek, the wisps of hair and the globe of an eye.

Four days are gone, and Jonas can feel the zinc and ammonium nitrate sitting across the street and around corners, can see the chemical reactions bouncing off of each other in his mind as he takes a half step back from his work. Only the details are left.

Two more days go by, and Jonas tells the Owner he should leave, should walk away and keep going, and the odd display of emotion from the brick-faced man is made serious by the complete lack of motion and life in his face. Jonas bends over and picks up the guitar to give it to the Owner of the corner, and nudges the case with his foot. Montgomery Melbo Jones nods and for a second they meet eyes.

Every line is smooth, every pore and fold of skin rendered perfectly. In Jonas’ pocket is the cordless home telephone, modified after the chemical purchases, ready to be used. He removes it and holds it in his hand. He runs his hand over his son’s face and puts his right hand over his top left breast pocket, and whispers “No one will ever forget you.”

When Jonas presses the TALK button, five separate explosions will detonate the intersection around his son. The explosives are loaded in large Rubbermaid bins; three are packed in a specific manner with a high density plastic that will deflect the explosion, pushing the force of memory and anguish and guilt in very specific, calculated directions. When Jonas presses the TALK button, two buildings will be completely razed and three partially destroyed; 1,732 people will die and 439 will be injured, 22 permanently crippled; 112 airports will be shut down; business on the entire planet will cease for a full 27 hours. When Jonas presses the TALK button, buildings will collapse in such a manner that standing in the center of a small crater will be the corner of a building with a young boys face etched into it, with the words maxima debetur puero reverentia resting below the serene countenance. When Jonas presses the TALK button, he will walk into a wall of flame bearing only his love for a lost child and the knowledge that the world will forever know he existed.
Cambridge: A Love Poem
Andrew Chenevert

For every scummy side street where the stench of rising sewage tarnishes the city’s beauty
— I will stand
For every piss-shoving, entitled, hipster, Ivy-League elitist suckling from Daddy’s wallet
— I will stand
For all the disenchanted night-shift CVS employees, listening to j-pop on their phone as
customers fumble with self check out machines
— I will stand
For every discordant, ear breaking melody played by this hissing of subway trains
— I will stand
For every ritzy clothing shop, charging 100 dollars for sweatshop products or tanned hides
— I will stand
For every Clear Channel billboard, a hulking behemoth blocking the skyline
— I will stand
For every empty permit-only parking lot, not willing to open its doors to travelers
— I will stand
For every flooded street accumulating dead leaves after a rain storm
— I will stand

Cambridge, my love, come, let me wash away your blemishes.
When all the dirt is off...
I will see your face, oh cultural Mecca, oh last refuge for the bookstore,
I have seen your face; your eyes are made of records

I have seen your face; the snaking Charles is your smile
I have seen your face; your nose is a marble bridge
I have seen your face; your beard is made of trees
I have seen who you are; your heart is our heart
I have known who you are.

Without a glance between them, he glides
up to her right side and projects over the coffeehouse
soundtrack,
“i insist on buying you a tea.”
The unnerved brunette twenty-something
orders a venti passion tea
and steps to the left.
The man in the electric wheelchair
maneuvers around the display of
insulated cold cups in pursuit
of a double tall nonfat cappuccino with two Splendas
and a phone number.
By now everyone has heard him identify the
remodeling since the last time he was here
five years ago.
Adjusting his direction
he follows shortly behind
and, detecting her fleeting interest,
confirms that there are
two Splendas in his coffee.

Observation, 1662
Mass. Ave.
Kasey Lingley
Thinking of you teaches me how to use a power drill. It walks me down the street to buy a snack and a broom to clean up the mess. It sends me on spur of the moment trips across the country and makes me new friends.

It makes me smell better. It takes me on blind dates. It runs up my phone bill. It helps me research the 1980s, the Pacific Northwest, and French cooking. It writes me a new-age nutrition plan. It takes me to the gym that I hate.

Thinking of you makes me sit in traffic. It sits with me in traffic. It buys me tequila. It buys me time. It puts the over-priced vegetables back in the fridge. It yells at the dog. It puts holes in my walls. It tells me exactly what is wrong with me.

It sends me to bed early and spends more time at work. It undresses me down to sinew and bone. It abandons me and chases me down. It devours generosity and licks at my tear ducts until they open. It nourishes me.

Thinking of you pleads insanity. It skins my knees and talks to me like a child. It criticizes and praises me. It walks my nerves like a tightrope. It flashes me a believable smile. It claws at my sides and leaves me with fault lines. It hates me. It tells me I am beautiful.

It is ugly. It spreads my ribcage apart and sets it on the nightstand by the bed. It slides down the staircase and out the door. It returns weeks later with flowery words. It is stronger than me. It is weak. It lies, then comes clean. It stands up for me. It lets me down.

Thinking of you does not love me.

Thinking of You
Christine Jozitis

The Sunsick Gardener
Tyler Burdwood

was weak and without spirit
when the planted started stirring and moaned to him.

His dry hands floated down
to tend to all these spirits
since the planet which had bore him had asked him to.
I Am, I Am
Phyllis Duff

I see blue eyes
dilated pupils,
a smile, suddenly a blank face

I’m not expecting anything more
And I’m certainly not expecting anything less

The reflection reveals someone else and suddenly,
I realize there is pain behind its eyes

There are invisible bruises underneath its skin,
There is fear inside of this reflection,
but what it fears I cannot tell.

The reflection’s face is calm like the sea after storm,
but waves always seem to disturb it

the maturity lies in the heart of the reflection
but confidence is written on the surface

music flows out of its fingers, and it inhales sarcasm
I feel connected to the reflection,
Conjoined like Siamese twins
but separated by glass.

A few seconds pass, eyebrows raise
Now I feel overwhelmed when I witness the truth,
I cannot hide anything from the reflection for it catches
every breath, every movement, and every thought that zips in and out of my mind.

This is who I am,

And I am one of a kind.

The Ultimate Destiny of the Elements as They Undergo Mankind’s Reliance Upon Providence
Kelly Tehan Jankauskas

And the earth will stay
And the sky will stay
And the ocean will stay
We sat in a circle and sang to you.  
Your best friend and his guitar,  
300 souls that saw behind your carelessness,  
found that magic inside you.  
Strung together, limbs and hands,  
squeeze tight enough maybe it’ll get better,  
sing loud enough maybe you’ll hear,  
pretend you left the way you wanted,  
maybe that will make it true.

Could you hear us singing, Or was it screaming?  
Cracked lips forced apart;  
every tired eye afraid to blink.  
Our un-kept minds running in circles,  
running in place.  
There is no start or finish,  
only your absence.

Your arrogant grin had teased us  
for years, we had laughed  
at the way you lived, the way you lived for nothing  
but the things that destroyed you.

Now you are a black and white photograph.  
You are a life summed up in five lines.  
You are the face on the front page.  
You are the shadow,  
following your first and only love.  
You are the word “Angel”  
washed away by the rain.

I’d Rather  
Live Than  
Live Forever

Brittany Johnson
Once upon a time I was a Catholic School girl,
memorizing The Apostle’s Creed,
The Lord’s Prayer.
“Lead me not into temptation”,
but tempted I remain.
You creep into my being.
Make me shiver,
make me moan.

Deliver me, deliver me,
tempt me to taste that fruit.
My daily bread.

Forgive me my trespasses,
but you are of mischief, of lust.
Your words, like wine,
sink deep into my mind.

Lead me not into depravation.
Thus, to Hell I will go,
lead me into temptation.
The best of sins
are those with a promise of passion, of pain.

Deliver us our evil.
Amen.

Our Sexuality,
Who Art in Guilt
Meaghan Lis

I remember everything about that night.
Her long fingers and how she held my face
while placing her warm lips upon mine.
The way our jaws aligned
the distinct smell of her skin
her neck
my warm breath
her, quivering;
the vision of her eyes closed as she created a rhythm moving her body
like sound waves traveling at decibels louder than an orchestra.

Speed
Parthena Lambrianidis
Ode to the Heart Shaped Leaf You Gave Me One Afternoon

Melissa Streffacio

You were so very green as you layed by the side of the curb.
And such a perfect, very perfect shade of green at that,
like the bright light green of a granny smith apple.
And your shape, what a unique and wonderful shape you were.
What a beautiful and funny thing nature did right there,
and created a thing such as you- oh you!
With the perfectly formed little humps, and a point opposite.
Like the little shapes school children draw all over there papers.
And the design was crisp and fresh, unlike any other!
You were the perfect little leaf on that long dark curb.
Out of all of the leaves you were probably the best.
And I watched as she bent right down and picked you up, oh glorious you,
and handed you to me, a grin on face “this is for you”.
And I took you in my hand, and brought you before my eyes,
you were so lovely than.
I twirled the stem and made you dance.
And your stem, was of just the perfect length.
Glanced at you, a pleased look on my face.
And together you sat in the palm of my hand,
and I could not hear a single thing said to me that day.
For you were perfect.
And you sat on my desk, for days on end.
I looked at you every now and then.
But you sat, and you curled, and you grew old.
You weren’t so perfect anymore.
But I still loved you, my perfect formed leaf.
You were still perfect in my mind.
Even the day I had to throw you away,
when you’d grown too old and gray, and didn’t have-
much of any form left at all.
It was a sad day, and I couldn’t help but remembering,
how perfectly green you once were.
In The Field the Stones are Sharp and Glimmering

James Nutter

He told me he hadn’t slept that night.
Had climbed a tree, found love in his sight
and scribed why in an essay; interesting flight.

In fifteen minutes he needs to work
but in the pines ahead continues to lurk;
the agony of repetition, finally he listens.

He takes leave halfway through the day.
His words and cafe’ cartwheel made us pray;
Temporary! Don’t let this stay!

Evidently he lost it, night before last.
Went bat-shit today, I’m told a bowl was passed;
A cruel potion had set all in motion fast.

Barely audible code, his enthrall,
Nonsense spewed upon the wall,
a mess strewn through the sister’s dolls.

That step-drunk continues his faulty spews;
His bullshit conspiracist news.
“Well, he needs to go to those money-grubbing,
step-son stealing doctors at the state hospital.
Douche.”

Summer

Kate Szumita

Your hair looks red underwater, long, slithering,
Medusa tendrils floating, light as smoke,
bright against the cyan-colored lining of your parents’ swimming pool.
Diamonds of light from the world above us are dancing on your cheeks, and
I don’t feel nearly as graceful as you look,
but soon we’ll have to go back to chlorine-scented towels,
tuna sandwiches,
and pitchers of too-sweet pink lemonade,
shivering knock-kneed beneath the patio umbrella
until the water and the sunlight
warm us up again.
Walking through the pines and maples,  
A cooling breeze flows through too.

They say a dozen young souls were lost,  
behind the hospital, in the brush;  
lost, forgotten, an unpleasant end.  
Families had thrown, disowned, abandoned:  
sons, nephews, brothers gone astray.  
We found the stones that day,  
creeping through a mess of branches,  
a century old tangle of brambles,  
the old plot map set us on our way;  
his father had bought it on eBay.  
So we bike, and hike, and mark the path,  
leaving disaster in our wake.  
The journey, the mission, afternoons spent:  
trudging, slashing, bashing through ruined walls.  
A chimney here, the foundation there,  
the lot out back the dead have shared;  
found, remembered, we can give praise  
to those who lost their later days.

A silent reflection on an afternoon breeze,  
shade slowly stretching from the trees,  
the purpose lost behind brutal reality;  
life has always had its casualties.  
...  
The sun will set in about an hour,  
we must go now, it may shower,  
the clouds have rolled, the sky rumbled;  
pass a last goodbye, they have been humbled.

Reaching Perfection
Chelsea Quackenbush

This is the moment every athlete dreams about. Blood, sweat,  
and tears are no longer and smiles take over. The gratitude on the faces  
of weary bodies illustrates a sign of relief of the hard work that is now over.  
staring out into the abyss of flashes and bright lights, trying to find that one  
central point to focus on. Loving arms and affections being ready to greet the  
champions. No matter the outcome the smiles would still be bittersweet. This  
signifies the end of greatness; the dynasty that has been built now changes.  
The new replaces the old and the cycle continues to search for this same feeling  
and this same moment captured in time. The emotions are real; those could never  
be replaced. The embraces and the gestures are reactions to happiness and each  
individual gets to keep that remembrance for now and forever. The feeling cannot be  
explained or mimicked; it happens as it happens, but isn’t that what being caught up in  
the moment is all about? The future is uncertain to those leaving, but this sisterhood  
is a forever kind of thing; the memories and the bonds could never be forgotten.

Lyman School for Boys
James Nutter
“Respect the process”
Who is this process anyway,
And what is it doing for me?

It’s trapped me
it’s become my process
to examine it.

When I try to get away from it
try a new thought pro...
see it almost got me again.

I’ll have a snack to clear my mind
but even my cheese is processed
nice try.

since you are not a Sunflower
And I am not a Rose,
I can grow to love you more
than all your fingers
and your toes.

Grow to Love
Leah Laplaca
I. On The End of a Recipe

To three cups of well-sifted all-purpose flour
Add liquid ingredients, stir to combine,
Then bake at three hundred degrees for an hour.

The egg yolk and butter and dollop of sour
Cream add a rich texture and decadent shine
To three cups of well-sifted all-purpose flour.

Store batter, well covered, in ice box for now, or,
If feeling impatient for something divine,
Then bake at three hundred degrees for an hour.

Your friends, when they try this, are likely to shower
Their praise on your head for the way you’ve refined
Your three cups of well-sifted all-purpose flour.

Bake longer if you think your oven lacks power,
But mostly this recipe comes out just fine
When baked at three hundred degrees for an hour.

It sounds very rich, but there’s no need to cower.
It’s heaven with coffee or sweet Muscat wine.
Use three cups of well-sifted all-purpose flour,
And bake at three hundred degrees for an hour.

II. Thoroughly Tiresome Advice

Don’t count up your chickens before they are hatched.
Don’t dump out the bathtub with baby still in.
It’s too late to lock up once horse has been snatched.

Don’t call kettles black if with pots you are matched
Or cast the first stone if you’re not without sin.
Don’t count up your chickens before they are hatched.

Don’t motor on tires that aren’t properly patched
Or when you’ve had too many ounces of gin.
It’s too late to lock up once horse has been snatched.

Don’t think a thing’s free, it may have strings attached.
Don’t handle things when you don’t know where they’ve been.
Don’t count up your chickens before they are hatched.

III. For James D.

A Romulan warbird sits off the port bow,
She’s arming disruptors, preparing to fire.
Scotty, we need those deflector shields now!

The bridge crew and I are all wondering how
We’ll avoid hearing harps and a heavenly choir.
A Romulan warbird sits off the port bow.

Those pointy-eared bastards are bidding us *ciao*
And hoping to fry us before they retire.
Scotty, we need those deflector shields now!

The admirals at Star Fleet will all have a cow
When they hear how the Enterprise came to expire
A Romulan warbird sits off the port bow.

Our exit the Romulans wouldn’t allow.
We have run out of time and are down to the wire.
Scotty, we need those deflector shields now!

Our side didn’t start this deplorable row
But now we must flee this predicament dire.
A Romulan warbird sits off the port bow
Scotty, we need those deflector shields now!

Three Villanelles

Richard Cranford
The Assassin

Anonymous

So there it sits, the dusty and damned wall clock
Condemned for all its foolishness and thievery.
And all that can be heard is the never-ending tick-tock,
Like the whistle of an unfair referee.

My fingers are gripping the insistent hour hand
As it slowly approaches the end of time.
My eyes detest the minute man
The lonely, little one with no companion.

The moments are going, gone— lost in the past,
Though their inevitable departure came as no surprise.
The images tattooed in my brain are all that will last,
Sepia tone memories rendering my unheard battle cries.

Causing my days, weeks, and years, to wear thin,
So seemingly innocent sits the assassin.

Unplug.
Jesus Christ.
Your head is full of noise
And your eyes are so full of bright.
You squint for the sun
And live for the red&blue-wires
Sssnaking (hal) their way
Through the real muscle of your bedroom wall.
Consider this: others exist.
Go find ‘em,
At least behold another pale face.
There’s cars and footsteps and the
Onomatopoeic sounds
You only see in pixilated comic books
Over your face-stained pillow case.
Open yourself up;
There’s so much.

0010110101
Kelly Tehan Jankauskas
Scene opens on an empty sidewalk. Riley quickly crosses the stage, hands stuffed in her coat pockets. She gets halfway across the stage when Nate appears running after her.

NATE
Riley! Wait! Riley!

RILEY
(Turns slightly and slows, visibly shaken at seeing Nate.)
Nate.
(Pause)
Hi.

NATE
Have you talked to Jeannie?

RILEY
Not for awhile.
(Pause)
Why?

NATE
Because I want to know why she’s doing it.

RILEY
(Uneasy)
I can’t
(Pause)
Why?

NATE
Because I want to know why she’s doing it. I’m not speaking on her behalf. And honestly, I don’t feel comfortable talking about it at all.

RILEY
(He reaches out and grabs her arm forcibly.)
Why can’t you talk about it?

RILEY
Nate, let go.
(She tries tugging her arm free and fails.)
Please.

NATE
No. Not until you tell me why the hell she won’t talk to me.

RILEY
That hurts!
(Looks down at her arm.)
NATE
I don’t give a damn.
(Hint of anger in his voice)
Why haven’t you talked to her?

RILEY
(Stumbling, trying to keep calm)
We’ve...
(Pause)
We’ve both been really busy.

NATE
That’s not good enough.
(Lets go of her arm)
Take out your phone.

RILEY
What?

NATE

RILEY
No. Nate.
(Becoming less scared and standing up to him)

NATE
(Pull a knife with a jet hilt from his pocket quickly)
Do it Riley.

RILEY
(Realizes she has heard about that knife before)
Nate
(Pause)
Don’t do this again. Please. Here.
(Takes out her phone)
See? I have it out.

NATE
(Frantic and choked up)
I don’t want the fucking thing! I want you to make her... to...
(He lowers the knife)

RILEY
(As if reassuring a child)
I can’t make her do anything.

NATE
(Yelling and raises the knife)
I want her to love me God damn it!
RILEY
I know
(Pause)
Give me the knife Nate. Please don’t do this to another person.

NATE
CALL HER!

RILEY
No. I can’t make her drop the charges; I can’t make her love you. I haven’t even talked to her in a few weeks!

NATE
(Grabs Riley’s arm again and brings her so close to him that her face is inches from his. Talks softly)
You’re... lying.

RILEY
No. I’m not.
(Voice trying to be calm)
Nate, just give me that thing and —
(Pause)
I’ll try.

NATE
(Icy tone)
I don’t believe you.

RILEY
Trust me.
(Puts her hand on his arm)

NATE
I couldn’t trust Jeannie either.
(Draws Riley closer, raises his arm and slits her throat)
That’s why I tried to do what I did to her.

Nate drops Riley’s body and walks calmly off stage. Riley’s phone, now an inch from her hand, goes off. “Genie in a Bottle” is the ringtone.
deep blue flowing waves
in and out,
the breath you cannot
wait to take.
the rough exposure
against vast colorful skies
serenity, peace of mind.

standing out against
words
no one understands
freedom from judgment
to lay in the sand.

Peace of Mind
Leah Laplaca

I can remember waking up and fighting the urge
To punch the nurse holding my arms down

The reminisce of anesthesia make me purge
What I wasn’t allowed to eat for breakfast

I could feel the bile bubbling in the bottom of my throat
It hurt to breathe

It felt like that man that sits on everyone’s chest
From time to time was jumping

I could see the ceiling tiles passing over my head
1...2...3...

I lose count

The drowsiness takes over; I succumb.

Resist
Rebecca Washburn
Shadowed scythe fades to grey, fades to white star.

Blue evening sky, a bell rings clear yet so far away.

Time transparent no longer use full.

Love whispers beyond the veil of identity.

Cats stare contentedly through the empty space.

I no longer wonder what they see.

Translucence
Roxan McKinnon

Hidden
Ashley Delgado

Hidden, Standing anxiously against a massive moral structure, Life’s mobility on hold, Communication shut, and furthermore locked away. Trapped and unseen, Seeking, seeking, seeking, an open world. Mundane is the lifestyle They wish upon us, It is what They have taught us, or so They think. Find your way. They mean nothing. I am here waiting.
when we first meet
it is summer
and i spot you at the town pool
your chiseled back arousing

and before i know it
you spot me too
tell me i'm cute

"here's my number" you say
and i blush

hard

everyone says we won't last
"you're too different" my girlfriends say over
steaming black cups of coffee
but somehow
violins at night and kisses under covers
make us work

you tell me you love me
on our twenty-seventh date
on my twenty-fifth birthday
a candle golden in a cake
you ordered
from my favorite bakery

things start to shake
like californian earthquakes
when we move in together
a little apartment in the dirtiest part of town
my mother does not approve

"you're living in sin" she yaps on the phone
i cover the speaker with my hand and sigh
"i don't give a shit" and hang up

thanksgiving and christmas are your two favorite holidays
so i try to make them special
but the family dinners we attend are horrible
the turkey is burnt
and the presents suck
questions of when you will propose
make me sick

i try not to notice
when you come home later and later

we crack ourselves
like china plates
on hard wood floors

we smash ourselves
until we can't
breathe
anymore

"i'm sorry"
you say
your cold fingertips on my shoulder
"sorry doesn't cut it"
i want to say
but instead i keep my mouth shut

i am raw from breaking
my skin aches
red and calloused

you once said
"you're perfect
just the way you are"
i gave you a full moon grin
my peacoat the color of your hair
and in response i said "thanks mr. hallmark card"

but tonight mr. hallmark card is
an angsty teen emo song
and i'm
a porcelain doll
played with too often

i fall asleep to the violin you still practice
don't know why
you suck at it
i dream of throwing all my clothes
in my suitcases
and getting the hell out of here
be done with you

but i know when
the sun rises orange like a creamsicle
i won't
i'll stay right here
legs entwined with yours
buried in white cotton sheets

i can't leave you
i love you
Hand in hand walks through city centers looking for war memorials

Staying in on Friday nights watching *Gilmore Girls* and old black and white movies

Having to think about the pain before you get up arthritis is a bitch.

Eating and liking all vegetables especially brussel sprouts and asparagus

Flannel nighties, to bed at ten-thirty, watching *Seinfeld* and *Murder She Wrote*

Without knowing the truth I’d guess I were sixty-five.

**Sixty-Five**

Rebecca Washburn
Star-crossed by your dilemma
from your new found ivory-sanguine
disposition. We know—we’re sick
of your cup half full ideals but you’ve
been pushed to the edge
of the diving board.
"Instead of jumping down,
I will jump up" is your decision
after applying your experimental
point of view. Truly you will
cross the stars if you jump up—
but when? When will you stop?
When will your shining optimism be
struck down by our shooting pessimism?
I imagine two gunslingers—
both in trench coats and adorned fedora
morphed cowboy hats. We are in black
and you are in white. 10 paces.
Back to back. We glance
over our shoulder. You do not.
9, 8, this dusty scene is too
cliché but it happens again
and again in different ways.
7, you did choose up, after all.
6, two whispers ring in both
of your ears, 5... It is a matter
of which you want to listen to?
4, 3, the angel, 2, or the
devil? 1, draw.

Crows Flew from the Trees
Chasing the Echoes of a Gunshot
Marcella Muscatell
Fall breathes
Into the last days of summer
Foreshadowing busy days to come

Anticipation seeps into my blood
As the wind tosses leaves
Towards the setting sun

The wind grows
Annoyed with the trees
The tiniest branches refuse to let go

They stand like resistant flames
On a birthday cake
Flicker and wink
But protest no matter how hard you blow

The chill kicks in
Nothing lasts forever
Torn apart
Even if they want to stay together

It won’t take much time
Till every leaf will have to fall
That’s how it always is
Yes, even stubborn leaves fall

Leaves decompose and mingle with the roots
And there may be mourning at the end
But they will return to their home
Be one with the tree again

Stubborn Leaves
Katie Zeitz

The oven is dilapidated with green peppers
That crawled out of the scalding saucepan.
Some may have escaped
For others, it’s too late.
The flames char their skin.
She comes in to remove the casualties.
She seems to be the only mourner.
Their final resting place: the trash can in the corner.

Mom’s Kitchen
Rebecca Washburn

Each phrase saturated with
declarations of spiny ardor,
your fondness sprouts
as if from
soggy paper towels
in the dark.

Plants Need Love to Grow But...
Nicki Blodgett
The Devil Went Down To Ashland

Jennifer Leavey

“I sold my soul for off-brand snack mix,” I told my sister in an online conversation a few weeks ago.

She was not fazed, given my situation. All she had to say was this: “At least it must have tasted better than a fiddle of gold.”

And she was right. Every savory square of rice cereal I ate that afternoon smacked of sweet rebellion.

I had suffered from temporomandibular joint (TMJ) problems ever since I was twelve, when my jaw locked at a friend’s birthday, and would not budge for an hour. The only real symptoms I noticed after that were the fascinatingly disgusting clicking noises I could make when I moved my jaw from side to side, and how I could crack my jaw both at a higher rate of volume and ease than anyone else I knew.

Matters with my jaw joint remained status quo until the summer of 2009, when my jaw pain climaxed at an extremely unfortunate moment, and I had the most awkward dentist’s appointment of my life. I got the diagnosis of a sprained jaw, and, fortunately, no one asked me the circumstances of my injury. The hygienist had either read the circumstances of my injury. The hygienist had either read the

“sprained jaws” in her shame on my face, or seen many

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circumstances of my injury.

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appointment of my life. I got the

most awkward dentist’s

unfortunate moment, and I had

pain climaxed at an extremely

summer of 2009, when my jaw

remained status quo until the

end of the second day on the soft

diet, I declared that I would throw
down for somebody’s pretzels. I
wasn’t kidding. I was riding the

bus back from school that day, and

someone sitting in front of me

had the nerve to eat a burrito on

the ride. The movements of eating

something solid were intoxicating.
The scents of pico de gallo and
rice and chicken made me want to

bowls the poor man over and steal

his food. I managed to restrain

myself then, but this incident

presaged my eventual fall to the

saltly temptation of snack mix.

A week after I was sadly
separated from solid foods, I
went to my parents’ house for the
weekend. This was no surprise.
They had free laundry and better
food than I bought on my bare-

bones student budget. I walked
between the pantry and the
refrigerator, mesmerized by all
of the forbidden options, for the
entire weekend. I finally cracked
on Sunday afternoon. I had taken
to snifffing the bags of chips,
crackers, and cookies. It was just
too much. I needed to act before
I reached a new level of crazy.
I called my parents over, and
brought them on what was about to
happen.

“The Devil Went Down To Ashland

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Dirty Carrots
Suzanne Cope

I am about to walk down the street with dirty carrots. It doesn’t seem like anything earth shattering — just me, at dusk, walking back from my community garden plot during a break in the clouds on a rainy late summer day. But now that I really think about it: today is the first time I have ever even seen a dirty carrot. Sure, I have bought carrots at the grocery store — organic carrots even. And carrots from the local farmer’s market with a bit of dirt still clinging to some crevices. And I have gotten carrots from my farm share in funny shapes and sizes. This fresh vegetable obsession might have even started with the carrots from my grandmother’s garden when I was young, surely eaten dipped in ranch dressing or shredded into cole slaw. Those carrots might have needed one last good washing to get the last bit of grime off, but I had still never seen a truly dirty carrot until a few minutes ago.

This is the third year of my community garden. The first year was the garden’s unveiling — its transformation from a defunct gas station, cleaned up and presented to the lucky twenty who made the list of inaugural gardeners. I lived one hundred yards away and walked by the once-deserted lot every day. I called as soon as a sign announcing the forming of a community garden was posted to the fence, snow still sitting in gray drifts along the avenue. After years of growing stunted cherry tomatoes on my shady back porch, I was excited at the chance for a better harvest and a replenishing herb supply for cooking. The garden opened on July first, with neat rows of raised beds filled with clean, trucked-in dirt, and my premier crop was tomatoes purchased as seedlings, repotted herbs from my window sill, and a late planting of eggplant — the only vegetable still clinging to life at the local nursery so long into the northeast’s brief growing season. I made friends with my plot neighbors. We had weeding parties fueled by donated scones from the bakery down the street before the crops ripened, and shared herbs and a few vegetables after the harvest.

The second year I vowed to start my plants early, so I purchased a small plastic greenhouse and a dozen packs of seeds. I watched as the clear top of the greenhouse fogged with life, and the new shoots push from the dirt. But when I introduced my seedlings to life out of doors, many became squirrel food or shriveled in the still cool evenings. They had outgrown their plastic home, but were not strong enough for the real world. I supplemented the few hearty survivors with seedlings again. My surprise was a growth of dill which had reseeded itself from the previous year. Vigorous, disorganized and still learning about its environment, much like myself. I had seen the sprouts in the early days of spring, but

thought for certain that they would be killed by the late frosts of New England. But they weren’t. Which got me thinking... if dill can survive the softer frosts of mid-spring, what else can?

The third year I did my homework. Kale, chard, onions, lettuce, peas, beets and carrots can all be planted in early spring. I filled the garden with these hearty seeds, the first to enter the lot of barren plots for the season. I watched as they sprouted, and steeled myself to thin my crop, knowing that it was the best, the only route to success, lest overcrowded kill my crops before squirrels or mother nature. My plot had lettuce before some gardeners even prepped for the season. I had kale and chard by late May. Beets began popping out of the soil by mid-June. Herbs — some had winted, some from an early seeding — were spreading. Zucchini plants from the previous year decided to finally show their bright yellow flowers. I felt that this garden was my best success yet. I would finally have a bounty to share with friends and advice to give my plot neighbors whom I sometimes saw on weekends as we collectively weeded and trimmed and harvested. My garden was a thriving mix of thick rows I had sown with bursts of surprise seedlings scattered randomly among them. Which was placed where by nature or my own careless planting I wasn’t certain, but my thriving unruliness gave me a sense of pride. And then there was the row of bushy green tops. I almost mistook them for parsley as they uniformly sprouted and started to grow. But the leaves did not widen as much as their flat-leaf neighbors and one day I saw the orange coin peeking from the dirt. I monitored the orange and watched it widen. Unlike beets you cannot see how large the root is until there is no opportunity to return it to the dirt to continue to grow.

Finally, today, I noticed an inch of orange begging to be plucked. I had gone to the garden for a handful of cilantro, specifically. But how could I resist poking beneath the squash leaves, watching the flowers morph into speckled green? How could I not notice the few orange roots that were getting so wide that they started to crowd their neighbor? I decided that one needed to go. I would shred it and add it to my salad tonight. If it was small, no harm done, the other carrots needed room. But I tugged at the leafy carrot top and it released itself only by another inch, exposing its true girth. Unlike beets you cannot see how large the root is until there is no opportunity to return it to the dirt to continue to grow.

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CONTINUED
Now I am standing in the garden with three large dirty carrots, their green foliage dramatic, their orange more cylindrical than conical, and one with a small round growth on its side where a thin wayward root had reached out for more nutrients. Damp dirt clings to their deep grooves. These are not supermarket carrots — they are too imperfect, too real, too much a product of a little seed planted in the middle of a little plot of soil in the middle of a city. My only small bag holds a bit of delicate cilantro, thus I will have to carry the carrots home gripping their tops. I contemplate washing them, but the rain means that no watering is needed and I don’t feel like unwinding the hose for a simple spray. So I walk home clutching my bunch of carrots. Past the biker on his way back from work. Past the firemen standing in front of a duplex whose alarm had been triggered. Past the hurrying drivers and pedestrians on their cell phones. Past the man standing outside waiting for his Chinese take-out. And as I walk I think about the fact that I am walking home with a bunch of imperfect yet perfectly dirty carrots. And who, of the people I had passed, has ever seen a bunch of dirty carrots? I know I hadn’t — not in the country nor the city — until that moment twenty minutes ago when I had pulled those carrots from the ground.
The sun rises, flooding the room with light
Eyes open, dreams chased away by a thought
Lay there half-sleeping for what feels like infinity
Only to be awoken by the bleating of the alarm, now cross
With a yawn and a stretch, silence it without an answer
One leg at a time, toe by toe, feet touch the ground

Heels, toes connected with the solid ground
Arms reach up to the sky and there is light
A deep breath in, a whisper and a silent answer
Body and mind unified into one pure thought
Feel the pull of tendons expanding as arms cross
Physically and mentally pulsing into infinity

Let go, loose the joints onto the world. Forget infinity.
Lengthen cervical, thoracic, lumbar, until phalanges brush the ground
A gentle bend to the knees, but do not allow them to cross
In through the window streams the morning light
Focus on the movement, do not allow thought
Heed no call, for the poses are the only answer

The question is not the only thing, do not forget the answer
Remember that what is true now will not outlast infinity
In the body but without as well, do not deny thought
Reach one leg back, lay it down, and touch fingertips to the ground
Switch them until and feel the gentle pull, bask in the early light
Bring feet together and stand straight up, arms out in a cross

Breathe in, breathe out. Again. Lengthen the arms of the cross
So that they grow like vines. If the body questions, the mind will answer
Raise the hands towards the sky, stretch the spine towards the light
Of the heavens. Keep reaching, stretching, growing to infinity
Let the heels and toes press down and grow roots into the ground
As the body expands to the clods and clouds and the mind loses all thought

Clasp hands and bring them down to the chest. Allow thought
to creep back into your mind. Revel in the slow ache from the cross
Feel the roots retract back into your heels and separate from the ground
When questions arise, there is no choice but to answer
We cannot stay this way forever, holding poses for infinity
The day must progress, with an ever-growing amount of light

Feel the light on your skin, marinate in it each thought
Recognize the reality of infinity and bear desire for its attainment like a cross
When the morning light calls, answer, for all you need is the ground.
The Tale of the Talking Corn
Cheryl Lawton

Early one morning, a young coyote was hunting in the desert. He had searched all night for food, but found nothing. The earth was red and dry. No rain had fallen for many days. When he spied a trail of ants, he followed them to a field where only one green corn stalk remained.

The coyote crept across the hard soil, sniffing the sweet corn and imagining its wonderful taste. He inched closer, and closer. But before he could sink his teeth into the silky tassels, he heard a sound.

"Hoka hey, na, na, na," the corn chanted. "If you wait, there will be plenty." 

The coyote cocked his head. He sniffed the air.

Hmmm, he thought. Perhaps the other animals will smell the corn, too. If I wait, I may be able to fill my belly. So, he hid under a pile of dry stalks to do just that.

Soon, a flock of black crows landed. They circled around the green ears with the golden silk, fighting over which one would eat first.

"Caw," said the biggest crow. "The corn is mine."

"No, no," said another. "Mine, mine," said a third. They flew closer, and closer, until their black feathers were so close, they almost tickled the coyote’s nose. He opened his eyes. He held his breath. He kept his legs still. Until it was just the right time....

But the crows were faster.

"Hoka hey, na, na, na," the corn sang, as the birds flew away. "If you wait, there will be plenty."

"AAAAahooooooo," the coyote howled. "I almost had them."

Before the sun grew hot, two jack rabbits pecked out of their hole. At the sight of the unguarded corn, the brothers raced across the field. When the older one reached the stalk first, the younger one got angry. He started a fight.

The brothers rolled and tumbled, the older teasing the younger, as they came closer to the coyote. Closer and closer, until their tails were almost in his mouth. This time, the coyote opened his eyes. He held his breath and he stayed very, very still.

Until the wind changed direction, and the brothers caught his scent.

"Hoka hey, na, na, na," the corn hummed after the rabbits raced home.

"I know, I know," the coyote barked. "If I wait, there will be plenty." Hungrier than ever, he found a new place to hide.

Soon, a large javelina trotted by looking for a spiky cactus to eat. Smelling the ripe corn, he headed for the field instead. "Oooohhhhh," he said, eying the single stalk. "I hope there is enough for me. I am very hungry."

While the javelina was busy thinking about the delicious corn, the coyote slinked closer, and closer, until he was only one foot away. This time, he stood very, very, very still, and when he opened his mouth, an ant crawled onto his tongue.

Coughing, the coyote poked his head through the dry stalks.

"Hoka hey, na, na, na," the corn said as the pig cantered away.

The coyote scratched his ear. "The very next animal that comes along will be my LUNCH."

Hours later, after the sun had traveled across the sky, a mule deer emerged from the canyon. Flicking her short tail, she stopped at the edge of the field. She walked toward the corn, sniffing with her nose and listening with her large ears.

Ever watchful, she walked closer, and closer, until she was close enough for the coyote to bite. And he would have! If he hadn’t drifted off to sleep.

"Hoka hey, na, na, na," the corn laughed, as the deer leaped over his curled body.

Meanwhile, the ants went about their work. They traveled in long lines, carrying dirt and grass, building hill after hill, fighting, working, marching and moving, hauling, towing and pulling, dragging kernels and bits of stalk one hundred times their size into the storerooms below ground, until, at last, the corn with the golden silk was gone.

The hungry coyote woke up. He sniffed the hole where the stalk had been. He stretched his paws. He even raised his nose to the rising moon.

"Yip, yip, yippee," he cried.

"Where are you now, clever corn?"

"Hoka, hey, na, na, na," the corn answered from deep within the soil. "If you wait, there will be plenty."

Growling, the coyote swished his tail and ran off to hunt in the canyon. But each day during the rainy season, he returned. Sometimes, he sniffed the quiet ant hills. Other times, he rooted through the dirt or nibbled on the wet stalks. All winter long, he remembered the corn and its song.

While he waited, the kernels slept in the ants’ storerooms, which were built over an underground spring of water. Finally, after days and days of rain and sun, they woke up. Tender shoots broke through the red desert soil. Soon, the field was, once again, filled with stalks of ripe, golden corn.

So many that, when the sun was high and the earth was not quite dry, the corn sang loudly, "Hoka hey, na, na, na."

"Come, my friend. There is plenty.... for now."

... for now."
In preschool or kindergarten,
I was creative, artistic,
beginning to discover the true versatility of
that scorned medium,
the humble Crayola crayon:
I could shade,
I could layer colors,
I could create texture.

Endless
possibilities, or
color inside the lines.

I never wanted to stay inside the lines.
Didn’t care about the lines.
I saw a page of a coloring book
not as a defined picture for me to fill in,
but a blank slate onto which I could pour
my own ideas.
Ignore the lines,
along with the reprimands
I received for my choice.

Color inside the lines.

They stifled the pictures in my head
of giant monsters
eating blueberries or
sassy princesses
fighting off pirates
in favor of

Winnie the Pooh
his paw inside a jar of hunny.
Slowly I relented,
self-expression restricted to
coloring Pooh with Razzle Dazzle Rose,
his shirt with Vivid Tangerine.
Still wrong.

No choice but to stifle myself,
recreate images from what I’d seen,
match the colors with the front of the book.

I never have quite remembered how to just
ignore the lines.
We’re both children trapped in these bodies,
masquerading in our grown-up clothes,
and I’m not sure you understand how young and scared we are.

Still finding, exploring; we hardly recognize ourselves.

How are we supposed to know another?

You think you have an idea about me—
how I love your hands around my waist,
I drink my coffee strong and black,
that I never mind when you kiss my neck to find the hidden ticklish spot there, though I laugh until I snort each time;

but don’t expect me to stay in stasis forever,
because I dream about the ownership ideal.

I want a fairytale. I want to belong to someone.

And is wanting so bad in the end?

I’ve been silent all my life, and now these leaves of grass are sprouting from my doormat,
and I must still bite my tongue, little boy, out of deference to you.

I wonder if the mail to God is bagged with the thousands of letters to Santa, if they end up together at the North Pole, or just logged somewhere and burned.

I do not believe in God but I believe in something big; I blow wishes into lost eyelashes and candle flames that don’t belong to birthdays

I kiss yellow traffic lights and find meaning in the line-up of leaves on the sidewalk. The clock seems to only show me consecutive digits, and my tiniest ideas turn up as motifs. I look for my initials and sure enough I’ll find them.

I’m alone in my looking, so alone in my finding? Or are the invisible just imagined?

I think too loud: Are the signs that I find just another symptom, neurons firing in desperation?
It’s then that I’m filled with: hating hypocrisy, saltwater, terror.
I close my eyes at 12:34, pretend not to notice, skip my counterfeit wish— And hope the shooting stars will not turn their guns on me.

The day my mom died at forty-four, I looked out the window to see the blustery storm breeze her away like Beth in Little Women but the sky was a cloudless blue; I closed the shades.

Born in 1913 along with the crossword puzzle, at fifteen, my great-grandma Sally saw the invention of sliced bread. She outlived Polaroid film, video tapes and floppy disks. If she hadn’t been in a nursing home, she might have seen an iPad. A long life lived, an observer of history, Her death’s night sky brought a rainbow— (open the shades)
Call me Ishmael. Or call me Lolita, for that matter. For though I shudder to think of myself as ever having been the light of someone’s life, I am certain that I have borne responsibility for the fire burning in someone’s loins. A great many someones, if I may be so bold. So, go ahead and call me a joker, call me a fool. Because, right at this moment, I’m totally cool. Clear as a crystal, sharp as a knife, I feel like I’m in the prime of my... Well, you get the point.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, and once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, I asked aloud, “When shall we three meet again—in thunder, lightning, or in rain?” And then a vagrant, in the street, turned her head, and answered me, “When the hurlyburly’s done, when the battle’s lost and won.”

I had a dream, I tell you! I had a dream where I told thousands of Germans that I was a jelly donut—Ich bin ein Berliner! I had a dream that I was not a crook, that there would be—Read my lips!—no new taxes. I had a dream that I was back in Berlin, asking Mr. Gorbachev to tear down the wall; that our American values were not luxuries, but necessities—not the salt on our bread, but the bread itself. I had a dream that our long national nightmare was over. But it’s never over, friend, not this one.

I place my left hand on the Bible, raise my right, and repeat after you, “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” So, help me God. Help me!

My name is Matthew Silver, and I am an alcoholic.

...and I am a nymphomaniac.

...and, at this point, on the seventh draft of this monstrosity whose pages you are leafing through ever faster, searching for the point, I have so little faith in my ability to construct a complete sentence that I must resort to cheap parlor tricks of language. I must pillage the words of others, remix them, and flip the script, if you will.

But leave me to my own devices, take away my bookshelves and leave me with a composition notebook and a box of sharpened number twos, and see what happens.

...Nothing, and a whole lot of it.

But I’ll try again, of course. Because I am a writer. And this is what I do.