A Quick Word From The Editorial Board

We, the editors, have endeavored to fill this Promised Land of blank pages with the distance between us.
Our single echoing soul will pull you into our poisoned minds.
It will begin with a throbbing hiss as we strip ourselves from the asphalt.
Covered with Spanish moss, an unblinking Eve will apply apple kisses with bittersweet lips, as she leads you to a slow torture.
When the pain begins in swollen holes a smoking gun’s bullet will search out your name.
We realize that this is peacefully insane.
But this is
our slice of simplicity.
For our silky shadows of dreams
mixed with a bottle of Southern Comfort
are not packageable
in the way that you wish.
The question remains:
how long will this take?
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FROM BEGINNING TO END

This is the beginning, the blank page,
eyes meeting for the first time.
Sun’s first light, a sipped cup of coffee.
A knife being sharpened.

This is the middle, the filler.
A rook takes a bishop, an alto sings.
A ringing lunch bell –
the playground brims with children.

A banner snaps. The finale is grand.
Dreamless, a mother listens for a child’s cry.
Runners file into the chute,
collapsing into one another’s arms.

Caitlin Krause
OMELETTES

Your focus when you crack the eggs
is mechanical: a flick against the counter’s edge
and each falls with a plop to the bowl,
a quivering yolk in clear suspension
perfectly insecure.
I whisk them with brisk intent,
proving this domestic moment is fitting:
you in plaid bathrobe, me in flannel pajamas.
We bump elbows in the kitchenette.
I don’t recognize the morning light,
the way it brightens things.
You measure the milk into my stir,
adding erratic dashes of pepper.
The pan crackles with pads of butter;
you tell me it’s time. I hesitate
before letting the runny egg spread and thicken,
turning opaque, then bubbly.
You test the eggs, coaxing the delicate fringe to yield,
telling me softly, this is never forced.

Caitlin Krause
Pass the beauty like butter.
The moist slices,
another piece of dangling waxy mouths,
parched and owned.
Wait for the churning.

Earning a brain when the leaves melt to
fire and the bumble bees
fall like swollen holes.
This is the topped off icing of a mobile soul,
the container a film of
form and structure,
dipped from wax and paper.
That I am a mortal to the vision of deceit,
a lie of a name
welded together by simple symbols.
Look down, not up.

The poppies turn rusty like toe nails, so
here comes the ragged rigged face of
puffy eyes and swollen nose.
Please a trumpet sound for
the entrance and the drum roles
better be deep.
IV.
Let us find the soul in feet or lungs or hands, one slice of simplicity.
Yet still the scaled skies turn to silky shadows of dreams
Here sitting, standing on a porch with the hairs plucked out from a distant tree...
This yellow waxy mouth, could I please for reasons that are wrong?
For I have caressed nothing I own.

Amanda Fitzpatrick
Together we marched, our virtues in hand -
For love's evident lures and the right reason,
To nurture the bond through the growing season.
A timeless tale-LOVE IS SO GRAND-
What could we know, of this Promised Land,
Armed with love's declarations and knowing no treason?
Summer solstice delivered and with it one son,
A perennial scion to love, rule and command.
With autumn the evolution, a new bounty planted
Of duplicitous seeds bearing no fruit.
United but Separate-Love's painful paradox.
Blind faith, trust, and hope, those gifts never granted-
Jealous lies and betrayal brought death to the root
Too long, the lonely wait—for the equinox.
To end all my grief.

Laura Noble
Tree Framing the Moon
Jessica Teague
MY UNCONSCIOUS

How can you leave me here? I feel like I’m the only one who cares. Don’t you wanna talk? How come you haven’t called? Do you just love me that much? I know I have never loved someone like you. I have never wanted to be held by someone so constantly, never wanted to kiss someone so hard. I want to marry you. I want to live with you this summer while we can. The distance between us is driving me crazy. I love you more then anything; I want to see you more than anyone and I can’t. I need you in my life I need you to make me a better person. You have changed so much and I want to have the faith to let go and know we are going to be ok. I guess that is too much to ask. I only know how I feel and right now I feel like I’m about to explode. I want to just sit and cry. I want to be happy for me and what I’m doing and I want to be happy for us. I’m not in a good place, but I don’t know how to move to a better one. I’m changing so fast and so much; I’m trying to make meaning of everything all at once and things just aren’t packageable in that way. Life is confusing and I know doing my best is the best that can be done but even when I try and succeed to my standards I feel empty without you. I barely talk to you. Do you just trust me so well? I feel like I’m becoming too needy. Maybe I’m just crazy. Maybe I don’t deserve this love. This amazing scary “over the top” love of ours. My babe, my lover. I want to spread my love on your body with my lips. I want to grab you close so that you’ll grab me closer. Can we go swimming together at the reservoir so you can call me your little “water rat”? God, I love you. I know we need this time to grow up. I feel like my feelings are spewing from my pores and I have no one to tell. You are my best friend and the love of my life. Maybe you are in a place in your life where you can barely help yourself so how can I expect you to be here for me? Can I curl up on
your lap and put my arms around your neck? I just need to know you are here; you are as in this as I am. Do you miss me? Words are so easy, but the follow-through is what worries me. Why can’t I just know? I saw how you look at me. I need you and I hope you need me.

Andrea Proimos
The room seemed like a dream, a mirage, there was an awkward silence, I felt so alone.
I gazed upon her, my sister, the cute but independent, ex-brace face, she hid her insecurities with the MAC makeup, Revlon lipstick and kitten heels.

No one knew how deep her problems were nor would they ever,
No therapy session could fix the pain that she felt.
She committed the worst sin known to man,

He lied,
he told her they would always be together,
he said she would not have to worry about post partum depression
he said he would always be there.
He lied.

He laughed when she said they were equally responsible
The baby on the way was a mistake he said.
Maybe that is why I saw her
on the bathroom floor surrounded in blood?

Deanndra Howard
GOODBYE LOVE

I pulled myself out of the purple minivan to join Logan and his family in the parking lot of the airport. I took a deep breath as a plane roared above us and wondered how the worst day of my life had come so quickly. As the tears began to push forward, I closed my eyes and urged them to disappear. I crossed my arms tightly over my chest, praying I would wake from the nightmare.

I watched Logan and his father remove the luggage from the trunk of the minivan. Logan slung the large duffle bag over his shoulder and took my hand. He gave it a gentle squeeze, almost to attempt to pass strength my way; so I attempted to smile for him. The effort fell short.

Logan’s parents and two sisters walked ahead of us towards the gate of the plane that was taking my best friend to California. As the walk progressed, we let ourselves fall further behind. The thought of Logan on the other side of the country while I remained in Massachusetts remained unfathomable. I knew the slower I walked, the longer it would take until we parted.

We arrived at his gate and he dropped my hand. He hugged and said goodbye to each member of his family. Watching, it seemed as if his mother, Mrs. McKay, might never let go. Deep down, I hoped that she wouldn’t. Her eyes appeared red and puffy when she did release Logan from her grips. Mrs. McKay seemed to cry nonstop since the day Logan decided that he was going to California for graduate school. Then again, I felt like I hadn’t stopped crying as well.

His father pulled Logan into a bear hug and was beaming. I never saw Mr. McKay as ecstatic and proud as he appeared in that moment. Logan then kissed each of his sisters, who were both crying softly, but with mirroring smiles on their faces. I could see how happy Linda and Emma were for their brother and it made me feel selfish that I could not get past my sorrows to be happy for him.

He turned to me and started to approach me. My heart shattered more with each step that he took. I knew that the moment his arms enclosed around me, there would be no stopping the tears that threatened to burst out at any moment.

Logan stood in front of me for a moment and gazed into my face. He took one more step forward and framed my face with his hands. One tear escaped. He wiped it away with the pad of his thumb
and for the first time since he made his decision to leave, he looked distraught.

Logan pulled me against him, then lifted me up so my legs wrapped around his waist. He looked into my eyes; his deep hazel eyes swallowed me whole. Logan always struggled with expressing how he felt verbally, but one glance into his eyes and I knew everything I needed to know.

He kissed me softly on my lips, which deepened more than either of us expected. The kiss went deeper than it had in over a year. I poured all of my fears, all the love I felt for him, everything that I could not say into the kiss, knowing that it was my last chance. When our lips finally separated, he pressed his forehead against mine;

“Pipsqueak, you know you are the hardest person to say goodbye to, right?” he spoke in a whisper.

I nodded. My throat closed up and no words escaped. I tasted salt and realized that the tears I held on to tightly fell freely.

“I’m going to miss you so much,” I finally got out.

This time he nodded, “We’ll visit each other. It’s only two years. Everything will work itself out.”

Logan put me down quickly, kissed me on the cheek, picked up his bag and hurried down the terminal. I watched him walk away. I watched my lifeline slip away. I was lost. Empty.

Linda came over and held my hand. I sighed and let her guide me back to the car. Linda and I went to school together since elementary school and knew each other before I met Logan. At that moment, I was grateful to have her as a friend. Letting my thoughts wander, I remembered the time that Logan, Linda, and I all hung out together for the first time. That was six years ago. Linda screamed at Logan about how I was her friend not his. It did not take long for the three of us to be inseparable.

I gazed out the window as we got further and further from the airplane. I wondered if someone looked into my eyes that they would be able to see through to my soul. I felt as if I was stripped to nothing without him. The entire trip back to my apartment zoomed by in a blur. The spot in my chest meant for my heart seemed vacant.

By the time I got to my apartment, it had surpassed midnight. I climbed the three flights of stairs to my room, but as I got ready for bed, I felt empty and lost. Instead of crawling into my bed and tossing and turning for the rest of the night, I grabbed a blanket and sweatshirt
and hustled back down the stairs. I sat on the front porch through the rest of the night.

The blistery weather sent chills down my spine as day began to break. My breath came out in puffs of clouds as I pulled the leopard blanket tighter around my shoulders. I craved the quiet of the early morning. I wanted the solitude to never end, but I knew in mere moments that my roommates would be running around, preparing for class and asking me endless questions on why I obviously stayed up all night. I knew deep down acceptance had not occurred yet; therefore, I did not want to talk about it to anyone yet. I loved living with my four closest friends in an apartment in Cambridge, MA rather than the dorms for senior year, but one misfortune of living with four other girls is the lack of secrets. Nothing is sacred. I managed to keep from them that Logan decided to leave at all, but there was no chance to keep it from them anymore; however, admitting it would make it real and I did not want to believe that it actually happened.

I breathed in the crisp air of early fall and stood up to go inside. Fall was his favorite season. The back of my throat began to burn at the thought of him. No thinking. Not yet. I, the zombie, walked hack into the apartment once I managed to pull myself off of the steps, I made my way up the stairs and into the living room and collapsed on the couch. My eyes ached from the endless streams of tears that had fallen in the last couple of days. The eerie feeling of desertion crept over me.

As I slouched on the uncomfortable, deep purple couch, I saw a flash of leg and pink sweep past the doorway. She must have caught a glimpse of me because she stopped short and backtracked into the room.

Radiant auburn red hair flowing down her back, creamy white skin and deep brown eyes that look as if they belonged to a cat; Arissa was the most exquisite person I ever met - all 5'9" of her.

“Hello Miss Taina! What are you doing up at this obscene hour?” She stretched herself out on the couch next to me and it struck me that even immediately upon awakening, she still looked perfect. I gave her a small smile, as I tried to form words, her eyes narrowed, “What did he do to you?”

I just sighed as the tears slowly fell down my cheeks once again, “He’s gone. That’s all that matters.” I then explained what I neglected to tell her for months now and about the night I had saying goodbye to
Logan.

She huffed, leaned back and put her arms around my shoulders, “Well, men suck anyway.”

A dry laugh escaped my lips as I gave into the embrace, “That’s the truest damn statement I have ever heard.”

One thing about Arissa, I did not have to explain how devastating it was for me that Logan moved to the other side of the country. She witnessed the majority of our relationship. My freshman year in college, his sophomore year, after being friends for three years, I visited him at his college in Worcester, MA and we ended up deciding to become more than friends. Arissa came with me to Worcester every week I went to party with the boys there, and she witnessed the relationship growing deeper and my fears mounting as it did. She warned me that if I did not enjoy what we had while we had it, that I would lose him quicker than I was supposed to. I ignored her advice and began to give into my fears, claiming that I did not think that either or us were into the relationship. I knew deep down that we had something special; however, my fear of commitment and the idea that he could break my heart took over and allowed me to convince myself that I was restless and did not want to be tied down anymore. I ruined the best thing that ever happened to me.

We were together for eight months, and then three months after we broke up, we began the year of being friends with benefits. The end of my freshman year and throughout my sophomore year, we were together without commitment. I pushed for us to try it again, but I hurt him badly enough that he never trusted giving himself fully to me again. We remained best friends and grew closer and since neither could deny the attraction that we had for each other, we did not ignore it, but Logan never allowed it to develop more than just friendship with sex.

Arissa let me vent about the situation before she forced me to get dressed and go to class. I went through my classes in a daze. I could not concentrate on what the professors were saying. My mind kept wandering to the days when Logan and I were together. My heart ached, and I knew more now than ever that I had made a massive mistake breaking us apart.

I walked from class back to my apartment when the infamous song by the Ramones, “I Wanna be Sedated” began to chime from my cell phone. I looked at the caller ID and saw it was my sister. That
could only be bad news.

"Hello Mary-Ellen."

"Don't sound so thrilled to hear from me."

"Mary-Ellen, that has nothing to do with you. I haven't slept all night and I had a rough couple of days."

"Hung over again?"

"Sis, what are you calling for?"

"Mamma is in rehab again. She supposedly put herself in again, which means she got pulled over drunk again and the cops brought her to a detox. Just wanted to let you know that I am home alone again."

"Well, why don't you come here after your classes tomorrow? I don't want you to stay in the house by yourself."

"Fuck that Taina. You don't want me there. Antonio is going to stay with me."

"What the hell May! I do not feel comfortable with him staying there."

"Oh, like I give a shit. You just don't like him because your jealous I got into his pants and you didn't."

"Bullshit May. You're sixteen and his ten years older than you. He deals drugs and is using you. You need to wake up."

"Don't call me May as if you're my friend. I can live my own life. I just wanted you to know where mom is. Don't visit her; she doesn't want to see you and neither do I."

"Mary-Ellen. Give me a break. I want to help and be there for you."

"Like how you were there for me every time mom was passed out when you lived with us? By getting high, getting drunk, or never coming home? That's ok. I'll figure this one out on my own."

I heard the phone disconnect and suppressed the guilt I felt anytime I talked to Mary-Ellen. I walked into my apartment and closed the door to my room. My roommate was still in class, so it gave me time to sort through my thoughts. I picked up the picture frame by my bed. The picture held a younger version of my sister and me. It amazed me how much we looked alike. Our identical brown eyes and olive skin. We were both under 5'2" and under 115lbs with identical smiles. The only difference between the two of us was while I wore my thick black hair long, hers was cut in spiky do at her chin. Our father had left the family when I was only four and Mary-Ellen was still a bundle
in our mother’s arms. His desertion left us with an alcoholic mother who loved to use her fists as well as her words when the whiskey hit her lips.

I never dealt with our mother’s abuse and instead of overcoming the cycle, I fell into the escape of drugs and alcohol. Meeting Logan saved me from a complete waste of life. Logan and Linda distracted me from my hell of a life. Logan after awhile became whom I could go to whenever my life got out of control. The new outlet allowed me to see that I was heading in the same direction as my mother and that I needed to change how I released my anger and disappointment. I realized now that he was gone, that he was my diversion and I did not know what to do without him.

I got up from my bed and went into Arissa’s room, “We are going out tonight.”

She looked at me through narrowed eyes, “You sure?”

I just nodded and walked back into my room and got ready. I put on a black mini skirt and black knee high boots. For a top, I chose a pink long sleeved shirt that dipped at the chest. Once I finished applying makeup, I looked at the full affect in the mirror. Dark and exotic, just as I planned. I threw in silver dangle earrings and joined Arissa in her room. Arissa looked up at me and laughed.

“Damn girl, you look Dangerous.”

I smiled and felt a pang of jealousy looking over Arissa. Her thick auburn hair flowed down her back and the ends were curled mysteriously. Her makeup was flawless and the eyeliner that she applied made her similarity to a cat more apparent. She was radiant while I was eccentric. We were completely opposite, yet eerily similar. We both had our moments where spiraling out of control was not far out of reach, yet somehow we managed to hold on with a pinky.

Before we left, we took shots of Southern Comfort and begged our other roommates to join us. Colleen, the girl who lived in my room with me, declined and left to go to her boyfriend’s as usual. Nelly and Selena sat on the couch watching Sex and the City, but when we mentioned going out, they quickly got dressed and ready.

The three of us left our campus and headed to a party in Boston. A friend of Logan’s and mine from back home went to Boston University and was throwing a party at his apartment. Before getting there, I finished the alcohol that I put in a water bottle and began to feel the buzzing of pleasure and heat that comes with finishing more
than a quarter of a bottle of Southern Comfort.

Walking to his apartment, Nelly passed me the rest of her Southern Comfort. Nelly had always been a lightweight and began to feel buzzed after only a couple of shots. I drowned another half bottle of the alcohol before we got to the apartment. I started to feel numb and embraced the reaction.

We rang the bell to Jordan’s apartment and when he answered the door I hugged him with excitement. It had been almost a year since Jordan and I hung out.

“Hey gorgeous! I missed my second half!” he laughed and gave into the enthusiastic hug.

As soon as we were through the door, Jordan handed us double shots of Barcardi and made the toast to old friends. He watched me as Arissa and I danced to one of our favorite songs. After dancing and more shots, I realized that my bladder was going to explode at any moment, so I dragged Arissa to the bathroom with me. I could tell from what I could see that Arissa was as drunk as me. I began to laugh as I sat on the toilet because Arissa could barely stand up straight. When we came out of the bathroom, Jordan was standing by the door. His blue eyes seemed to be glued to me. He ran his hand through his blonde hair and introduced us to a tall guy standing next to him. I tried as hard as I could but the name escaped me. The guy had to be at least 6'4" and looked as if he played football.

The two guided Arissa and me into Jordan’s bedroom and offered us shots of Tequila. I knew that I should not drink any more, but when I saw Arissa reaching for the shot glass, I joined in eagerly. After the warm liquid passed through my throat, I wrapped my arms around Arissa’s waist and pulled her onto Jordan’s big bed. I could not stop laughing as Arissa and I rolled around. In the background I swore I heard “I Wanna be Sedated” playing the back of my head.

While we continued to roll, I rammed into something else on the bed and when I turned to see what it was, I found myself looking at Jordan. I turned to Arissa and noticed that not only had Jordan come into the bed, but the anonymous friend had also climbed onto the other side of the bed. My heart began to pump faster and I grabbed Arissa’s hand. Arissa did not grab my hand in anticipation, but began to rub the inside of my hand and up my arm. I could sense Jordan’s mouth on my neck although I could not feel anything anymore. My skin felt numb and clammy.
Deep down I knew something was not right but I could not vocalize my protest. Arissa began making out with the random friend, while she continued to rub my arm. I felt Jordan taking off my shirt and my boots and continue kissing parts of my body. I kept trying to say no, but then a thought popped into my mind, did I want him to stop? I could not be sure anymore. It felt good. It felt wrong. I slipped in and out of awareness, but would hear a moan and an intake of breath and soon came to understanding that it was myself that I heard. I went through the motions that I knew so well, and others that I did not with Arissa. The four of us tangled in and out of one another. Most of the time I would not recall how I got from one spot to another, from one person to another, but at this point my body was just doing what it knew how while my mind watched from afar.

I awoke the next morning with a pounding head and a nauseous stomach. I threw on the first t-shirt I could find, crawled over naked bodies and found the bathroom. I puked and puked until my stomach emptied itself of everything it consumed in the last week. I sat on the cool bathroom floor listening to the twirl of the toilet pound through my skull and I asked myself what kind of role model I was for Mary-Ellen. When I could not handle my life, I still turned to another substance to numb everything around me. I may be grateful that it was not anything like cocaine and heroin anymore, but alcohol was still no better. Slow tears began to fall down my cheek as I though of what I did last night.

I snuck back into the room, put my clothes back on, awoke Arissa, helped her get ready, grabbed our belongings and left the apartment. Sitting on the subway, she looked at me through squinting eyes, “Maybe we should not have drank so much.”

I laughed bitterly, “Maybe not. I am sorry Arissa.” She chuckled and claimed that shit happens. How she was calm about what happened baffled me, but then again I was hiding how distressed I felt about it. I looked up to find her wide eyes looking at me with amusement, “Taina, at least they were good-looking.”

I shook my head. Only Arissa would find something like their looks as a positive, “We still need to get tested love.”

“Damn. I hate needles.”

I pulled out my cell phone and noticed I had a voicemail. On the walk back to the apartment I listened to the message Logan left me while we were at the party, “Hey beautiful. I have been thinking about
this situation between the two of us for awhile now. Maybe I was wrong this whole time. I really think that maybe we should be together again. I know it is extremely hard with me in California, but I would be willing to wait until I came home. I mean we can make it work with the distance. We can visit each other, but, um, well, I want to do what makes you happy. I kind of realized that being apart from you is killing me because I know we are meant to be together. I love you, Taina, I always have. If you are willing to take the risk, then so am I. Love is all about taking that leap is it not? Well, I miss you already. Call me when you get this.”

My heart dropped. While I was giving into sex that I could not even really remember, the one person I truly love was finally confessing that he loved me. I looked up at Arissa in shock, “I am a terrible person.”

I handed her my phone and had her listen to the message, “Well it is about time.”

“Arissa, what the hell am I going to do?”

“Well, I’ll tell you one thing. You are not allowed to tell him what happened last night.”

“I cannot lie to him. I have to tell him,” I could imagine the look of hurt and disgust that would come onto his face if I told him what happened, I did not want to disappoint him again.

“Babe. You are going to blow a second chance with your soul mate if you tell him about something that did not even matter to you. He sees sex as sacred and if he knows all about you sleeping around, he’ll never look at you the same again.”

I nodded, but had a crushing feeling that not telling him would backfire. We walked up to the apartment to find Nelly and Selena sprawled on the couch. Selena hung her head over the arm of the couch while her fire-red hair was as wavy and out of control as always. Her pale skin seemed to illuminate over the dark purple couch. On the other side of the long couch, Nelly lay with one arm over her face, but I could still see her face scrunched in pain. One of her tan legs hung over the edge of the couch and touched the floor, while she laid in her pink booty shorts and baggy t-shirt.

Arissa and I laughed softly at our two hung-over roommates and crept up behind them. Each of us took a pillow from underneath the girls and began to attack the two with them. Each girl screeched in surprise.
“You assholes! My head hurts!” Nelly huffed between fits of laughter.

“Yeah, we couldn’t tell by the painful expression on your face,” Arissa claimed with a smile on her face.

Nelly’s sharp blue eyes that contrasted the rest of her dark features glared at Arissa. I joined the girls on the couch and smiled. No matter what went on in my life, I had my girls. I knew I had to think about what to say to Logan and more what I wanted and needed to come from that message. I understood for the first time in my life, that I tended to lean on people and blame them for my problems rather than face myself. I held my mother responsible for how I turned out my entire life, yet here I was out from under her claws and I still did the same shit. I blamed my sister for holding me responsible for how she turned out when I was so young and not ready to raise her, yet now that she was all grown up I allowed her to continue to blame me for how she behaves. Then there came Logan. My knight on a white horse. I let him block out everything bad in my life and let him protect me and fix everything for me rather than mending my gaps on my own. My girls are there for me, but they let me discover everything without doing it for me. They listen, but are not afraid to tell me when I have been stupid. My girls allow me to act my age rather than like I am still twelve. I knew what was necessary for me to survive the whirlwind of my life.

I shut myself into my room and dialed the familiar number, “Hello. Don’t say anything ok. I know what I need to say and I have to get it out before you say a single thing. I already am expecting this conversation to be painful, but it is what it is. You’ve been there for me when no one else has and I am hoping that you will be for the rest of my life. I agree that we are meant to be together and I do love you; however, this is neither the time nor the situation in which we are to get back together. I need to fix the mess I have made myself into. I know you think you’re helping when you try to fix everything for me, but for me to be able to stand on my own two feet I need to do it on my own. I am going to start seeing a therapist and maybe mend things with my family, but most importantly I need to restore who I am. If we were to get back together right now, I would find a way to mess things up because I am not emotionally stable enough to handle the passions and sentiments that involve the two of us. I know that given time, I
will be the best thing to happen to you, but first I need to grow up. Give me time and then we’ll be able to live the life we are meant to have. No more excuses or delays. I am ready to take the steps necessary to be with you, but you need to be patient and understanding of what I have gone through my entire life and with my fear of abandonment. I am aware that I am asking a lot, but hope you have it in you to understand and to be my leaning post, but not my fix-it-all. I love you more than life itself…goodbye love”

Jaqueline Trayers
Winer Roads
Rebecca Swiller
ENORMOUS SPINELESS CREATURES

Under water, smothered by the ocean, sound moves more quickly than it ever can on land. The density of water, thicker than air, lets the noises move more swiftly. My screams would travel more than four thousand feet in one second in shallow water, faster the deeper I went.

The ceiling was coated in the same downy fabric that covered the seats, like sealskin, warm storm gray. He had switched off the interior light, but some neon glowing dial in the dashboard showed his chin bobbing just above eye level. He had shaved that evening, clearly, probably just before he left the house — he still smelled like Gillette shave gel. The door was open and my feet were on the ground, one shoeless, and the grit from the pavement crept between my toes like moist sand. He cocked his hand across my throat and spread his fingers to press me to the seat.

It’s impossible to scream in that position. I heard my shrieking, battered by the blockage of his fingers, broken by the shortness of my breath, materializing as nothing more than moaning past my lips. I could feel the frustration of the neighbors, locked behind suburban shutters, the thought of damn teenagers and their hormones, fucking in their parked Volkswagen, and I knew they’d never even look beyond their windows. I could feel the collective ears of fifty people shutting me out as I whispered against the drenched air.

I banged my wrist against the seat of the car, watching it bounce impotently off the cushions. The connection of flesh and fabric made a whooshing sound, like the release of held breath or a punctured lung, and dissipated among the songs of crickets and settling houses. I thrust my legs into the air, kicking off the ground, but his bulk was pressing my torso, my thighs, pressing my hips against the square of metal that gripped the safety belt. He brought his elbow against my chest and held it where my ribs met and leaned against me. My coughs sounded like children’s giggling in the air, the tinkling of half-breaths and exertion.
I started reaching for the gently gray ceiling. I moved my arms in a swimmer’s backstroke, desperate for the air to propel me forward. I brought down cupped handfuls of the sky, as if to grasp a bigger share, and then squeezed it out as my hands formed weakly tightened fists. I reached my arms up to hit his skull, pounding the top of his head, his neck, his sharp scapula. His shoulder blade shifted under my knuckles and suddenly there was an arm, a hand, reaching for mine and crushing it against the seat. He twisted my wrist to the side to make me hurt, to show me how an expert hurts a person. He must have known that I would fight him. His thick tongue was darting from between his lips in slippery punctuation of his nearly soundless grunts. His fingers, impossibly large fingers, had abandoned my throat but their imprint held me. There was nothing but the image of his child’s face, his beardless chin. I couldn’t draw breath – I couldn’t howl against the weight of him. I was softer than the brush of two stranger’s arms, softer than a murmur. Softer than warm limbs slipping through slick waves.

In some deep, buried corner of my mind, I thought of swimming, under the surface, where no one could see more than my outline. I blurred into the ocean, broken by the ripples of the surface, sliding into nothing. Hundreds of pounds of pressure squeezed my torso, my thighs, squeezed my hips as if the ocean itself was grateful for my presence. So grateful it couldn’t stop clutching me, pulling me deeper. Deep enough that someone might hear me through the choking. Someone might hear me fast enough.

He felt my hand go limp, numb from his pressure, and shoved his fist under my shirt. He pushed my bra up so that the under-wire slid over the peak of my nipples, placing his fingers across the newly vacant flesh. The butt of his hand kneaded the crease where my breasts curved away from my chest, forcing them upwards. I felt the skin between my legs tearing. There were thick waves rushing over me, smoothing my skin into gentle slopes. I turned to sandstone – I was frozen in gentle, peaceful ripples.
I brought my head up like a horse rebelling, breaking away from his rider, trying to throw him off. I tried to catch his teeth with the crown of my head and instead watched him swing away. He brought his forearm across my neck and leaned, pausing his pelvis for a moment, spitting, maybe drooling, in my face. He hit me on the slope of my nose — I watched the saliva ease closer to the inside corner of my eye. He twisted my head to face the inside seat, pressing my mouth into the gray. I was swimming through murky water; I was invisible in the darkness. I had sunk too deep for the sun to reach me. Flashes of light, headlights that could not quite see us from the road — or maybe enormous spineless creatures lighting their own way along the ocean floor — washed just within my sight.

His thick knuckles landed against the base of my skull, and he leaned until my eyes refused to focus. His body landed against mine with the slapping sound of low tide against wooden pylons.

Pinned between him and the bench seat, I gasped for breath. In the saturated air, I hear the subtle sounds of drowning.

Rachel Hodges
SHADOW
Jane Ferris Richardson
“Stay Gold.”
Keep your innocence alive. Experience brightens everything but also can be damaging.
When we know nothing, we feel nothing... of hate, jealously, depression, melancholy.
We don't know what it is like to fail and to lose hope...
when we are children...when we are innocent.
There is nothing like the feeling of pure happiness like when you were a child.
There is nothing like innocence.
STAY GOLD.

Roldine Joseph
Electric and jagged

flash:

Colors fade to a BLiNDing WHITE

The stillness... W V O E N in fibers

Quietness – but, the vertical drops;

P Es U d d 27

Steven Fineman
You are living

in a fantasy,

what is you cannot

FOOTSTEP

into the

ucny

nan

truth.

What... em (oh) tion

can be !!!!!HELD!!!!!

sacred?
HIS YOU

You don't have to be
What he wants you to be.

You can be yourself,
Lay the memories of his you on a shelf.

Strip yourself
Of what he covered you to be.

Be the real you
For the rest of the world to see.

If he doesn't like it,
Too bad, you're done.

You owe that to yourself,
You don't have to run.

Melissa Cartwright
UNTITLED LOVE

My mind is poisoned
The knowledge
Leaves me no rest
Forbidden to go
Any further
Kept alone
In my echoing soul

So aware that I shouldn’t
But my mind
Does something else
Obsession is building
A Wall
Even with force
It will not break

I’m not invisible
You know me
Passion between us
Prohibits me
From letting go
All I want is your heart
Please hand it to me
Unable to accept
A no

Marianna Sokoutis
I am not the nice life-sized doll
Here for your enjoyment.
Not an object,
the vague dyke blond, with my identity.
Not an object,
for pulling out as needed, a thrill.
I never meant to pull you in.
A thing to shock friends and acquaintances.
I hate to imagine the words you used to describe me,
‘got a girlfriend, athlete, skinny dips.’
A sensation.
Emotion at the other end of a wire.
Call when needed, for a shock.
Object.
Convenient, perhaps. Grants bragging rights.
An expensive good luck charm.
Object.
Half crazy,
Easier to claim, for you, than possess.
Object.
Don’t say you love me.
Love is something alive, something painful, not given lightly.
Object.
I am not, easily claimed, easily broken.
What the hell was I thinking?
Object.
You missed the person, liked the idea,
I can’t live with the hypocrisy.
Object.
I’m not a doll, not a possession, not something.
Don’t use my surety to pretend with.
I am not an object,
here for your experimentation.

Dana Cadwell - Frost
GRAVESTONE

Never a saint,
When Making love to sinners.
In Cape Cod,
Making blonde sand castles.
Ruined hair, laughter,
Caught in a storm.
Not picturesque pretty,
The unconventional beauty.
Fragile, part broken,
Peacefully insane.
Falling asleep in the grass,
Saw the stars through closed eyes.
She loves all animals,
Just like Saint Francis,
But he never lay with sinners.

Elise Higgins-Steele
SISTER

I anticipated you
The broken figure at my door
Warm steel, the smoking gun still in my hand
As your life seeps out onto the floor

I understood you
As you cut and tore my will away
Culled my thoughts to your every word
My sight was changing day by day

I loved you
For your protection during the dark times
But the kindness that you showed me
Won't make up for your past crimes

I knew you
The mental heretic on my lawn
Now I live above your words
I saw you there and wanted you gone

I killed you
Blew your words from my head
Watched you fall upon my porch
And wept beside you when you were dead

Gillian Helman
"It will be just about five years ago now," I tell myself as I pull my long johns up over the scar on my leg. Well, five and a half years if we are counting when the pain began. I was going to school in Vermont and had come back from a winter hike. When the pain began I thought it was just because I had fallen and done something to my leg. I took some Tylenol and did homework, but the pain did not really go away. As the days went on, the pain continued and started to become so great the Tylenol became an every day thing. I started taking the back steps up to my room because the steps were narrow and had two railings so I could use my arms to pull my body up to my room. It was the kind of pain that I knew was not right. I did not tell anyone about it because I knew if I did someone would say I should not go to London for the summer semester. For me, being in pain was worth it if I got to go see Big Ben.

When I got back from my summer overseas, I told my Mom about my hip pain. We ended up going to see a doctor near my hometown in New Jersey. He suggested I go to see a specialist in either Long Island or at the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) in New York City. When they send you into New York you know it is not a good sign. My mother decided that we should go to HSS because she did not know how to get to Long Island. We were afraid that it would take a long time for a doctor to have a time when he could see me and by that time maybe the pain would be gone and I would be back in Vermont. But, as it turned out, my brother had a friend whose dad worked at HSS and was a hip surgeon. He recommended a colleague and made it possible for me to see one of the top doctors in pediatric orthopedics who also specialized in kids who had Cerebral Palsy.

Since my mother did not really know how to drive in New York City, she got our friend, Mrs. Unger, to take us the first time. My mom sat in the front seat with her notepad and pen taking detailed notes on how to get to the hospital, so if we had to go again, maybe she could do it on her own. On Aug 12, 2000 Mrs. Unger, my mother, and I went to see Dr. Widmann at HSS. His office was in the hospital on the pediatric floor. During the forty-five minute drive I sat in the back seat and kept telling myself I would be ok; it was just a bit of pain. The doctor would just look at me, say it looked good, give me some meds and I would be on my way. When we finally got there and found the
office, I was a bit nervous. I gave the nurse my name as my mom started filling out all of the paperwork. I looked around and discovered the waiting room was designed for little kids. I felt just a little bit old. After all, I was twenty-one! After Mom give the paperwork back to the nurse, we all went in to see the doctor. Dr. Widmann was very nice. He seemed pretty young and made me feel at ease. He explained that we needed to do x-rays and then we would know why I was in pain. Maybe he could tell me why it hurt so much to lift my leg into my pants.

I was sent down to the x-ray floor. Little did I know that I would become very familiar with the area. After the x-rays had been taken, we all met back at a room that had two chairs and bed. I sat on the bed as Dr. Widmann put the x-rays up and showed me what was going on with my hip. My hip did not fit into my hip socket correctly. My hip was pulling out of the socket. This is actually very common with kids who have Cerebral Palsy. The only difference between most of the kids and me was I could walk. This is most likely why no one thought to look at my hip until I had pain. The pain was because the cartilage was disintegrating from all the wear and tear I was putting on it.

At the age of twenty-one, I was being told I had hip dysplasia. We would not know how bad it was or how fast I was losing the cartilage until an MRI was done. I thought, “Bad? How could this get any worse? I am twenty-one and being told something I thought I might hear when I was sixty!”

Dr. Widmann gave me Celebrex for the pain. Before I could be on my way and have time on my own when I did not have to put on my brave face, he mentioned an operation. It sound long and involved, but I didn’t need it yet. I told myself I did not need it at all.

It was decided that I would have an MRI. Dr. Widmann prescribed Valium for the MRI. I would take one pill one hour prior to my MRI so my muscles would relax and they would be able to get a more accurate reading. I knew the MRI was going to show that things were not well with my hip. The Celebrex that I was only supposed to take once a day for pain, had become a twice-a-day routine for me. I had a captain’s bed in my dorm room and had started sleeping with my phone. I had my RD’s number on the wall in case one day I couldn’t get up out of bed. Sometimes the pain would be so great in the morning that I would count to ten, gathering my strength and courage to sit up and jump out of bed.
You know that your body is really in pain when you are sitting in class and sweat starts running down your face and you don’t even realize it. This is how numb I made myself become to the pain. I made myself keep going to my classes and doing my twenty credit workload. I wanted to at least get through graduation in December and then my body could disintegrate however it liked. But I was going to get my Associates Degree no matter what it took.

I went home a week before Thanksgiving break and had the MRI done then. I don’t remember too much about it, probably because of the valium. The technicians were very nice. My mom was allowed to be in the room with me which helped me to relax. She was even able to hold my hand, which I held over my head, as the MRI was being done. This time the results were easier to read. The radiologist was able to point out to Dr. Widmann where the problem was and how the cartilage was wearing away.

After that we went back to Dr. Widmann’s office with two chairs and the examining table. He explained to my mother and I that the cartilage was wearing away faster than we first suspected. I was basically walking with some bone on bone. An operation was inevitable, but I was too young for a “replacement” hip. Dr. Widmann told me we would do kind of an experiment. He could cut my pelvis and widen my hip socket and reposition my hip. This would require, in his words, “some heavy-duty hardware.” He usually performed this surgery on children as young as a year old. Usually he put a cast on the hip from waist to knee and let the bones heal. But because I was “so old” this was probably not a good option. So it was decided right then and there, that I was going to have a right hip osteotomy done on February 12, 2001. I would have to start taking iron pills a month and a half before the surgery so that in January I could start to donate two pints of my own blood to be used after the surgery if need be.

Christina Tedesco
As a child, my brother Andy and I had a love hate relationship. Andy loved to play with me if I served a purpose to him. I would play Robert Parish to his Larry Bird when he wanted to play basketball in the front yard. Andy loved basketball and the Celtics were his favorite team. He would always show off and beat me when we had our basketball games on the lowered basketball hoop. He also would try to help my technique, as long as his technique was still better. Sometimes we would play together if he needed someone else to play his Thunder Cats action figures with and help move them around. Once we even recorded a tape full of Christmas songs and songs such as the “Hokey Pokey”. Despite these fun filled afternoons of peaceful enjoyment, we did not always get along.

Andy could not help but to give me a hard time. He picked on me ruthlessly. Often times he would pin me down and tickle me until I couldn’t breathe and was red in the face. He stole my stuffed animals and would place them just out of reach on top of a shelf. He had an array of scary Halloween masks that he would put on, and leap out from behind a corner as I was coming into a room, just to hear my terrified cries. One time, as we were on a rough boat ride coming across Casco Bay in my Uncle’s boat, he convinced me that we were going to sink before we had reached the harbor. He loved to find new ways to frighten me.

The Christmas morning of 1989 I was four years old and my brother was seven. We waited impatiently on the stairs unable to see our parents organizing our traditional Christmas atmosphere. My father loved to video tape all holidays, birthdays, and family gatherings. We have what seems to be millions of tapes in our family collection of these events. As we waited on the stairs, our father was setting up brighter lighting in order for the video recorder to catch every last ripping of paper. Our mother was putting on soft holiday music to set the Christmas ambiance and setting out our traditional Christmas breakfast of english muffin loaf, a family recipe. I knew nothing of the unknown horror, which lay un-expectantly beneath the festively decorated Christmas tree.

Finally our parents came to the stairs; my father had his video
recorded in hand, and told us that everything was ready. Every year Andy and I went through this. It seemed to take forever to make everything perfect for Christmas morning. All we cared about was getting presents, seeing family, and eating lots of good food. We did not want to spend the first half hour of our Christmas morning sitting restlessly on the carpeted stairs knowing what awaited us in the next room. With the camera positioned to get every last shot, we were given the OK and we lunged toward our stockings.

Simultaneously, Andy and I began to empty our stockings. It was very similar every year. We got toothbrushes and travel sized toothpaste for sleepovers, lots of candy and some school supplies. We always knew what we were going to get, but it didn’t matter. As we rummaged through our stockings, we also found some hidden treasures. I pulled out a small package of costume jewelry and Andy became excited about his Ninja Turtle action figure. With the stockings unstuffed, we stopped for some english muffin loaf before we headed for the presents under the tree; I was still naive to what was yet to come.

One by one we took turns opening presents so we could all see what the other had received from Santa or Mom and Dad. “Wow! What did you get?” my father would always ask us after we had unwrapped one of our gifts. “Hold it up for the camera to see Julie.” Proudly I held up my new stuffed animal. I had asked Santa for a white bear with a pink nose, and I was thrilled to find him propped underneath the tree. Skipping with happiness I stopped and looked down at him.

“I am going to call you Skippy!” I said excitedly. Santa had been good to me this year; nothing could bring my spirits down this wonderful Christmas morn.

With so much joy surrounding the day, how was I to fathom that lurking at the bottom of our mound of presents was a dark figure. It dwelled in the gloomy and dismal packaging, which hid it from the light, which it did not deserve to receive. It was settled down just waiting for the moment when it could release its terror on humanity, or to be more specific, on me. Looking back, I wonder if while inside its temporary residence, the beast knew whom it would cripple with its ill doing.

“Hold up the new basketball Andy.”

“No playing with that in the house though,” my mother chimed
There were only a few presents left, and after other members of the family opened their remaining gifts it was Andy's turn once more. Overly excited to have received the last present, Andy ripped the wrapping paper off the box. Having the last present represented having the most presents in Andy's mind. Throwing the paper aside Andy turned over the box and I got my first view of the mechanical tyrannosaurus. Over a foot high in all its glory, it glared at me, smelling my distaste for it and targeting me for its prey. Its green plastic scales shimmered in the Christmas tree's lights and its white teeth gleamed.

As I looked at it, I was unsure of this "toy" and if I could reside with something as hideous and menacing as it was. Andy was positively thrilled with this new gift so I decided to give it a fair try. I decided this before I became acquainted with the beast, and before it was released from its box to be "played with". The batteries were in place and the creature's button was switched to on.

"ERRRAHHHH!" The noise was terrifying. Startled, I looked up. The tyrannosaurus was walking toward me, its arms were stretched out in front of it, its sharp fang filled jaws opened and closed in anticipation of clamping down upon my flesh, and its legs kept moving it closer and closer to me all while letting out its tremendous roar.

For a moment I was unsure of what I should do. I sat there innocently in my Minnie Mouse nightgown frozen in my spot with my brown eyes as big as I could make them, my heart beating frantically, and my forehead beginning to perspire. After a moment of sitting there as though I were a deer in the headlights, I gathered myself together and jumped up before the reptile could get any closer. I ran to the kitchen and in one leap, sprang up onto a chair out of the monster's reach. I was safe.

From the other room I could hear the squeals of delight from Andy, clearly pleased with the added benefits of his new present. It was only seconds later before my mother followed me into the kitchen. I was huddled on the chair and leaning against the wall. My heart was still beating hard. My mother picked me up and soothed me by stroking my hair and tried to convince me that I had nothing to worry about. I realized that I could no longer hear the terrible screech of the tyrannosaurus and I was slightly calmed.

"The tyrannosaurus is harmless," my mother tried to assure me. I did not believe her; I knew better.

Quickly I got over my morning fright but not my fear or the
monsters. We had family to visit on this Christmas day and later on a Christmas feast. These festive events helped to free my mind from my near death experience and become my happy self once more. After we had opened more presents from aunts, uncles and grandparents, and we had a hearty holiday meal, the day was over and it was late. My parents, Andy, and I headed home to go to bed.

Bidding its time the tyrannosaurus waited for my return. Maybe he did some research and looked through my room while I was away enjoying the day. Maybe he marked out his plan of attack and waited, just waited until the right moment for his ambush.

What a day it had been. I unloaded the presents from my extended family and brought it all up to my room. There was no time now to put my newly acquired things away and I stood for awhile looking at my booty. As a child I never realized how nice it was to have such a close extended family. Today it is nice to have such a great support system, back then it was nice to receive so many presents.

I laid in my bed feeling secure and clutching Skippy ready to fall to sleep and get up early the next morning to organize and play with my new toys, books, and clothes. Every night I requested that my door be left open so that the glow from the night light in the hall would be allowed to flow into my room and shine on my door, which was very good at displaying the shadows of oncoming visitors. I would be sure to see any creepy crawlers that might come to pay me a visit in the middle of the night. As I snuggled down underneath my Beatrix Potter sheets, I turned onto my side and faced my illuminated door when I heard it.

"ERRRAHHHH!" The mind numbing noise shot through the air. It was close, very close. Fear shot through my body. I began plotting my escape. If the beast was coming into my room through the door, my only escape would be to jump out the window. I realized that this was a drastic action that could be fatal, but if I decided to stay and encounter the tyrannosaurus, my life would most definitely be cut short.

Intently staring at the door, I saw the tyrannosaurus' shadow. His short arms were outstretched as though he were reaching for me, ready to fasten his strong jaws around me and sink his formidable teeth into my neck. The shadow captured each individual bloodthirsty fang as its mouth opened and closed in anticipation. Its massive, ugly head entered my room and I could not move. I was too afraid to stay in my
bed, but I was also too afraid to make my escape through my window. So I did the only thing a four year old can do: Scream. A bloodcurdling scream came out of my mouth as I saw the tyrannosaurus complete his entry into my room.

"Help! Mom! Dad! AHHHH!"

Fear was pulsing through me, I was sure that this was how I was going to die. A gruesome death at the claws and jaws of this monster. I continued to wail for someone to come to my rescue wondering if anyone was brave enough to face the tyrannosaurus and save my life. I clutched Skippy with all my four year old might and I saw another shadow appear on my door.

In burst my father, who grabbed the foot high menace, flipped it over, and switched the button to off. I was safe. He quickly put the tyrannosaurus down and picked me up and rubbed my back as he carried me away from the scene of the crime. My face was streaked with tears, as my father kissed my cheek. After a few minutes of continuous crying, I began to calm down and observe my surroundings. It was then that I noticed my brother.

Andy was on the floor in a fit of giggles at his masterful trick. He was elated at his clever scheme and took pride in the chaos he had created. His glory was short lived, and he was scolded for being so cruel to me. He was sent right to bed and told that he would not be able to play the tyrannosaurus for several days. I was transferred to my mother’s arms as my father retrieved the tyrannosaurus and transported it downstairs, a safe distance away.

After calming down and a lot of comforting from both my parents, I was put back to bed. I hugged Skippy even closer to me now for safety, just in case the beast found a way to torment me again.

The next day Andy and I were playing side by side with our new toys. Well, some of our new toys. I did not remember that he was the reason for my series of attacks the day before. In my mind I knew that the tyrannosaurus had acted on its own free will and that my brother was innocent. After that night I rarely saw the vicious tyrannosaurus. Once Andy was allowed to play with it again, it was under the condition that I was a safe distance away.

Julie Pease
"Getting my first bra was terrible. I was eleven and had a chest like a chubby boy. The whole idea seemed dumb. But my mom took me here, to Macy’s, anyway. When we arrived, in response to my glum expression, she announced, ‘It’s a coming of age celebration!’ Her words seemed to echo throughout the department. People stopped and stared. Noticing their eyes on her, she substantiated her proclamation, ‘It is for her transformation into womanhood.’ The shopping mothers nodded with a creepy sense of communal agreement, ‘Ah, yes,’ they seemed to say, while their children snickered. I wanted to melt into that ugly linoleum floor and stay there until the late night janitor could mop me up, put me back together and send me home with dignity intact. I tried to fade into the racks behind me, only to become tangled in a lacy negligee. I felt trapped."

"Darling, what do you think about this color for our new bathroom?"

"Anyway, my mother ignored my shame and toured the department with the piles of sporty and sexy bras of various colors on her arms, the piles growing with every rack passed like the homework on my desk that I would have rather been doing. In the dressing room a flurry of hands and tailor’s measuring tape flew about me; I stood, half naked, with a swarm of fashion monsters picking and pulling, measuring and tugging the upper half of what I considered a perfectly fine little frame.

“When the storm briefly subsided, it was decided that I needed one of each color, as well as a sports bra for gym and a velveteen bra that my mother said with a wink, ‘will make you feel like a woman.’ Ugh, it fit tightly and made me feel claustrophobic. ‘If this is what transformation into womanhood is all about,’ I thought, ‘forget it’.”
“Oh darling, that’s awful - what a terrible color of orange for that terracotta platter. I would just hate to use that in the new apartment.”

“I had seen my older sister ‘transform,’ which looked more like an explosion. The realization that she was a Woman came upon me with sudden shock as I watched her through the finger-smeared windows of our Dodge Ram Van running frantically, shouting, ‘Wait! You forgot me!’ as we left our school parking lot. My amazement of the new additions to her body seemed to render the scene in slow motion. When she rose in the air, the mammoth mass protruding from her chest rose higher and higher until they covered first her neck, then chin and finally both lips; her landing made my eyebrows tense as her melon breasts were stretched into zucchini before their plumpness returned.

“Standing in that very dressing room of Macy’s—yes, right over there—half clothed and overwhelmed, I imagined that I was much like the Velveteen Rabbit asking the Skin Horse of my favorite childhood story, ‘What is real?’ But I wondered: ‘What is it to be me, a girl, emerging into a woman? Does it happen all at once, like being wound up, or bit by bit? I thought that, like my sister, I would explode into a large, fleshy body, and—poof!—be a woman. ‘It doesn’t happen all at once,’ replied the Skin Horse, ‘You become’. ‘But how long will it take? And how do I know when it is finished; how will I know when I am a real woman?’ Like minnows darting through a disturbed pond, my thoughts scrambled to find solace in the chaos of continual change. I remembered the Skin Horse’s reply to the Velveteen Rabbit, ‘It takes a long time...but once you are Real you can’t be ugly.’ Through the imaginary dialogue, I realized that I couldn’t evolve without some brutal moments.

“Clearly, I accepted the physical change within my body. And now? At twenty-three, back at Macy’s, this time with you, my love,
and our wedding registry, I know I am a Woman. Although some of the struggles in life are endearing, like getting big tits and finding the right underwire, some will be really hard. I am ready to go through the rest of the brutal moments together."

"By the way, did you like the Vera Wang or Calvin Klein dish set?"

Sonya Kendall
The sound of participants rustling about on their blankets fills the low lit room and our instructor, Raj begins.

"We are going to start tonight with some breathing."

It seems easy enough though I wonder how simply breathing can condition my body. Besides, doesn’t breathing just happen? I had never given my breath that much thought before, but I was game.

So the group sucks air in and out in unison ten times. At first, I feel a bit silly, and after three completions, my limbs begin to tingle like they do when they fall asleep independent of the rest of my body. Around the sixth breath, I find it difficult to focus my eyes; by breath ten, I am totally lightheaded. I turned victorious to Susan, a woman who had graciously welcomed me when I first arrived,

"My head is spinning."

I expect her to congratulate me about catching on so quickly, but instead she tips her head slightly.

"Oh dear, you must lock your bondas."

Huh? What the heck is a bonda, I thought, and how does one lock it?

Observing the mix of disappointment and confusion on my pale face, Susan turns towards Raj and requests a review of the term "bonda." Relieved that she posed the question because I was much too shy to, I blink my eyes several times to focus front on Raj’s explanation.

"The bondas represent the gateway for the breath. By locking selective bondas, you push the breath up the chakra system" — ah, another term I do not know — "We have been working with the first bonda called mula. Mula means root; therefore, we are closing off the root chakra to push the breath, and subsequently, the energy up."

Raj proceeds to describe how to lock mula bonda, but he has already lost me. Then he leads the class in adding various movements called "asanas," to the breathing. For the next hour we reach, stretch, balance, twist and combine them all. By the end, I am exhausted.

Finally, Raj instructs us to lay on our backs for relaxation. He speaks methodically as he roams throughout the room in random patterns among our blanket oasis.
“Close your eyes and imagine a golden light surrounds you. Allow yourself to surrender to that light; feel it seep into every bone, muscle, and cell of your body and let go.”

As Raj continues speaking, my body becomes weightless, my mind becomes an abyss and his voice fades into nothingness. I do not know how long I have been lying there semi-conscious. All of a sudden, I am aware of Raj rocking me and I open my eyes.

“Are you alright?” He asks.

“I don’t know, I can’t feel my body.”

“Take your time; pull your knees into your chest.” I do as Raj instructs as he gingerly pushes my knees onto the floor to my right and helps me to sit up.

“How do you feel now?”

“Good. Like jelly. My mind is blank.”

“That’s about right. Welcome to the practice of yoga.”

I still study, practice, and teach yoga and most people laugh when I tell the story of my first class. But in 1978, yoga remained unknown and suspect. It made a migration east from the west coast in the 1970’s, even being shown on public television, but it was presented primarily as a form of exercise. Terms like bonda, enlightenment and collective consciousness were either lost along the way or purposely pushed aside not to offend or scare mainstream society. Much of the general public still thought that, with its contortionist postures, deep breathing, and “aum” chanting, yoga equaled devil worship.

Some believe yoga cannot be beneficial because it is slow and focused, but that is actually the point of the practice. The basis of any form of yoga is to cajole the body into surrendering to the pose thereby releasing not only the body, but also liberating the mind from attachment. Its main purpose is to quiet the mind and prepare the body for meditation.

On that day of my very first class, I was concerned with getting it “right.” It was for me a foreign concept that a main tenet of yoga was to release any expectations of the practice and of myself. This was difficult to do. Popular, pretty, successful – I wanted to be all these things - maybe even more than other little girls because of the sense of isolation my gift caused.

But on that day when I noticed the twenty or so patrons moving about the softly lit, rectangular room, a low buzzing generating from their chatter, I finally felt a security about myself that I never
thought possible. The much guarded password granted me entrance into the most welcoming environment I had ever known. As I stepped in and scanned the room for the perfect place to uncurl the embroidered blanket resting over my arm, I felt the sense of being home. Up to that point in my life I remained sidelined by a difference of perspective and paralyzed by the fear of not being accepted. Until that moment I had been dipping in one toe to test the waters and now I'd found a place to submerge both feet.

I chose a spot and set my blanket down below a multicolored, stained glass window creating a slight breeze as it unraveled to the floor. Kneeling onto the blanket, I felt feathery slips of sunlight across my face and noticed the shadowed-shapes from the stain-glass windows surrounding me. I smiled involuntarily, believing this was a divine sign that I was meant to be here.

I returned to that class week after week and each time Raj gently struck that small metal chime and the room fell silent, an incredible sense of belonging immediately engulfed me. Over time I began to feel that calmness that a consistent yoga practice provides. I was also beginning to understand some of the concepts Raj defined and asked him how he came to the practice of yoga.

"I am Indian; yoga is part of my heritage. I learned yoga and meditation as a natural part of my childhood. It is a way of life for me; as much a part of me as olive skin or an Indian name."

I asked Raj to explain the chakra system, the term I remembered from that first class.

“Well chakra is a Sanskrit word meaning spinning wheel. There are seven major chakras in the body and they carry energy much like the veins carry blood. Energy moves from the base chakra up to the crown chakra. If one of the chakras is blocked, the energy cannot flow any further. The blockage causes dis-ease in the body and illness results."

I would learn that there was much more to the chakra system and its function, but Raj instinctively knew that was all I was ready to know then.

I enjoyed speaking with Raj, and was warmed by his gladness to advise me. Because I felt strength and self-confidence from yoga, I suspected that it would be with me for the rest of my life and I was grateful to have Raj as a mentor. In retrospect, I suppose that I had a crush on him. He personified all the romantic qualities every young
woman fantasizes about in a man.

Raj was at least ten years my senior and although he did not disclose much about his personal life, I felt as though I knew him well. He told me that the feeling of familiarity indicated that we were members of the same soul group and were destined to find each other in every lifetime. I didn’t quite understand this statement, but since I trusted Raj, I accepted that one day I would.

After a year of attending his yoga class, Raj asked me if I wanted to teach a new beginners class. I was flattered, but reluctant.

“Oh, I don’t know if I am ready for that.”

“Sure you are, but I will not put pressure on you. Think about it over the week and we will discuss it again after next week’s class.”

I had been teaching and choreographing dance since age fifteen, so I did not have any reservations about teaching itself. But yoga? Yoga wasn’t any class; it was a sacred belief system and a spiritual tradition; could I convey all that it embodied? On some level, I felt that it was a disservice, almost blasphemous, for a teenaged, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, American to teach a 5,000 year-old Indian ritual.

How had I come to this point?

As a young girl I took my portable record player into the basement of our house and danced for hours to 45 records like Tommy James, Dizzy or The Association’s “Along Comes Mary”. And my older sister Roberta introduced me to music by other popular groups like The Grass Roots and The Supremes. Those damp cement walls turned into a ballroom adorned with icy chandeliers or a Broadway theatre flooded with hot, white lights and imitation fog. Pretending I was the star of the show, I repeated the steps I saw dancers do in movies like Singing in the Rain and the Sound of Music. In my teens, as disco music pushed its way by the 60’s hits, I snuck into dance clubs and tried the steps I saw the Solid Gold Dancers do on television.

Once when I was dancing at a disco, the owner of the club asked me if I wanted a job dancing in one of the cages suspended above the dance floor.

“Good moves, you’ll get the crowd going. You’re eighteen right?”

I was barely seventeen but I danced in that cage to the pulsing staccato music and flashing strobe lights without inhibition. Two people lived within me and my alter-ego wasn’t the least bit shy.

Dancing came naturally to me and it was easy to get lost in the
movement. It was an extraction of my suppressed emotion – the turns and leaps releasing my anger and frustration. Like a book that sits on the shelf for years and then one day you are ready to read it, music sat in the background until I realized its power to soothe and transform me. I didn’t understand the meditative quality of dance - all I knew was the compulsion to move. But my surrender to dance was my intuition at work.

I never had dance lessons when I was a child so when I was old enough to pay for them I was way behind the other dancers in my class. After my first formal jazz class the teacher asked me if I had any dance training.

“You are far behind in technique,” She said.

My heart sank.

“You have talent. If you come to class early and stay late, I can help you catch up.”

The following year I started teaching dance at the studio where I studied. A year after that I was dancing and choreographing with a local company on a state-wide tour. The transition from novice dancer to teacher was unexpected but welcome. Low self-esteem invited me to believe whatever anyone else said about me. The upside of this blind faith is that when my teacher told me she was giving me a class and sending me on an audition, I believed I was ready simply because she did. Ignorance really can be bliss.

When I told Raj my concerns after the following week’s class, he listened carefully, then paternally took my hand in his, “If your intention is pure, and I know that yours is, you cannot dishonor the ancients who founded the practice of yoga. You are a natural, trust yourself.”

The smoke from the incense spirals toward the ceiling as it fills the room with a musky scent of cedar wood. Sixteen participants have shown up for my first teaching attempt. I am thrilled. Thrilled and scared beyond belief. I think about all the concepts I learned the year before, rapidly running through them in my mind to choose one with which to begin. There are so many choices – yoga has literally an inexhaustible number of asanas. And what about breathing? Should I begin with the breath? Should we sit? Stand? As the students are chatting, I remember the incredible year that led to this moment and a rush of joy explodes in me. All at once, sixteen faces attached to stout,
lanky, hairy, smooth, suntanned, and pale bodies, turn towards me. Thirty-two hopeful eyes looking at me.

The way I figure it I have two choices: run, or take a chance.

I lead my sixteen supporters through my inaugural class with an enthusiasm that, hopefully, makes up for any lack of knowledge. Finally, I guide my trusty followers in a relaxation meditation as I stroll through the room, weaving in and out of their relaxed bodies lying about the blanketed floor. At the end of class, as all the students are collecting their things and exchanging comments, I notice a woman in the middle of the room who remains flat on her back, her feet turned out pointing to the corners, her arms straight out to her sides with her fingers curled half up. I walk the length of the creaky floor until I reach her, but I am not sure what to do. I kneel down beside her.

"Are you alright?" I ask.

"I don’t know, I can’t feel my body."

My logical mind doesn’t know how to respond, but something else inside me does. “Take your time, pull your knees into your chest.” She accepts my suggestion and I help her around to sit up.

“How do you feel now?”

“Good. Like jelly. My mind is blank.”

“That’s about right. Welcome to the practice of yoga.”

Cheryl Caruolo
Swans
Rebecca Swiller
The shadow never magically disappeared from her CAT scans because I wished it gone. That dark smudge is a constant reminder of the impending doom that is almost certain in any statistic. This evil entity is eating away her life, pushing away her friends, stealing her joys, her ability to walk downstairs or sit, the ability to hold a normal conversation, the ability to eat anything without instantly regretting it, the time to fulfill dreams, or even just the chance to make small talk. People have a hard time knowing what to say to you when you have cancer.

I do not have that ominous black hole in my CAT scans, but my mother does. She has endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, fallopian cancer, and vulvar cancer, generally known as cancer of the reproductive organs. She was diagnosed last year after a radical hysterectomy, and she just finished her radiation and chemotherapy treatments three months ago. She’s ecstatic that her hair is growing back thick and curly.

Recently, her doctors have told her that the CA125 count in her blood is higher than average. The most recent information we’ve received is that there are slight shadows appearing again in her CAT scans. My family all knows what that means, we’ve heard it before.

It means she is not in remission. It means that she has a reoccurring cancer. It means that this disease is a permanent fixture in our lives. It means that this first circle of hell is only the beginning.

Seven months ago the first rounds of chemotherapy and radiation treatments had almost killed her. Mom had always reacted strongly to any kind of medication and her body reacted strongly when they slowly dripped poison into her blood and then burned her insides. Now she has to do it all over again. This slow torture will cure her.

Her hair will fall out, she’ll throw up for weeks, the radiation will leave third degree burns in her vagina and anus, and the weakened state of helplessness will beat on her heart the way no disease ever could. My mommy.
She had wondered out loud, *What if my hair grows back thin and straight this time?*

I can only wonder, *What if it doesn’t.*

Suddenly, the most innocent conversations are the most significant, even when they’re about nothing.

By casually saying *What if my hair grows back thin and straight this time?* she expresses her fear that she will be bald when she dies? Does she want an open or closed casket? Her skin sags over her flesh and I watch from the doorway as she kneels heavily to the ground. She desperately clasps her shaking hands together in prayer as her body eats her alive and the millions of doctors coolly shuffle mayhem and chaos like the best of dealers.

She sees me in the doorway and smiles as tears flood her pallid cheeks. I slowly help her into her hospital bed and the smile becomes a grimace as she whispers continuously through the tears, begging for help from a God who has yet to hear a single plea. She clenches her jaw suddenly, but I’m ready for what comes next. I hold her head as she vomits into a basin and quickly dispose of the mass of hair that comes off in tangles around my fingers so as not to upset her. I hide my tears with the thin strands and soothe her with a warm washcloth as she sobs her exhaustion into unconsciousness. I empty the basin, sterilize my arms before holding her hand. I hold back the tears with a sigh as I clasp my Mom with one hand and try to do homework with the other. The most basic actions of every day life become unbearable and I put down my schoolwork to hold onto my Mommy with every ounce of strength I have left. My Mommy.

When I was very young I would be scared and cry hysterically whenever my parents left a babysitter in charge. I must have been about four years old, but I will never forget what my Mom said to soothe me. She would hold me close and say, *Oh, my baby girl! Don’t worry! I will always come back. I will never ever leave you. I promise. Nothing could ever keep me away. I promise.*

Sara Tobias
The phone rang. I heard it through the throbbing hiss of the shower water, that beat down upon my head and shoulders, slid off my frame, and then cascaded into the lukewarm pool around my feet. Usually, if I was in the shower, I would have let it ring out, leaving whoever was calling at the mercy of the answer phone. No one in my house ever checks it for messages. But tonight was different, I was going out, and was expecting a call from a friend whom I was to meet later that evening. It had been a hot, happy, July day, the kind that people who are fond of clichés, like to describe as “seemingly endless”. In England, where those kinds of days are few and far between, they rush by, leaving you with the same feeling that you get, when you drive past a pretty girl, and wish, as you drive on, that you could have gazed at her for longer. Nevertheless, it had been the kind of day, that usually segued effortlessly into a bustling and buoyant night in town, in which the mild night air draws out sun kissed revelers to the bars and clubs, and even the football hooligans seem pacified by the rare warmth that surrounds them. As I stepped from the shower and wrapped a towel around my waist, I felt the familiar twang of anticipation, that occurs in the hours leading up to the moment that you step from the front door, feeling brand new and ready to become a part of the simmering night.

I fumbled the receiver, my wet hands unable to grip the shiny plastic. I eventually gained a hold, and lifted the earpiece to a distance far enough from my head to prevent it getting covered in the shampoo that remained in my hair, but close enough to hear the voice at the other end of the line.

Before I could utter a ‘hello’, the voice of my Aunt Susan cut in; her voice sounded unusually urgent, and tinted with the desperate and unmistakable hue of tragedy.

“Sam?” she knew it would be me answering the phone, as the rest of my family were away on holiday in Cornwall.

“Yes, it’s me... are you ok?” I knew the answer to this question but I asked it anyway, perhaps subconsciously, to delay the inevitable receipt of whatever news I knew would soon sting my ears. She didn’t answer my question directly.
“I’m at the hospital …” my gut twisted, and the droplets of water that hung from the slick black fingers of my fringe, were joined by beads of sweat that wept from my suddenly hot skin. “Granny’s been brought in; she’s very ill; I think you should come down to the hospital, she might not be here much longer.”

Panic gripped me like a vice around my very being; I immediately thought of my family, a good six hour drive away and almost unreachable due to the poor mobile phone service in the area they were camped, and how they wouldn’t be able to say goodbye if our family’s queen passed tonight. I tried to maintain my composure as I promised my aunt I would be there soon. I placed the phone back into it’s cradle and rushed back to the shower, anxious to rinse the suds from my hair and get to the hospital.

In the few steps between the phone in the hallway and the bathroom, where the absence of my body beneath the shower head, was causing the water to pound loudly off the surface of the bath, tears had sprung swiftly from my eyes, and as I stood again under the relentless torrent, I watched them amble down my cheek before being engulfed by the water from above, and swept way, useless.

As I stood, I thought about how, although we knew Granny was old, and frail, and had been taken ill before, I could never have prepared myself for the news that her God may be ready to take her. Not anytime soon anyway, not tonight.

God please, not tonight.

Now…The doorbell rings. My mind briefly cuts through the shroud of angst in which it is swathed, to remember that my friend, Rob, was due to pick me up at ten and drive us into town, and that this must be him at the door now. I hop out of the shower, quickly towel off, and pull on a pair of black sweatpants. I feel a strange pang of guilt at the hurried nature of my actions, somehow feeling that I should be moving in a somber and considered way. I reach the door and open it.

It must be obvious that I have been crying, as a look of concern, immediately comes across my friend’s face,

“What’s happened?” he asks, my body starts to convulse again with emotion and I struggle to utter a reply,

“It’s my Gran, she’s really ill, I’ve got to go to the hospital” I get the words out, before the sobbing overwhelms me, and I reach out to him to hold me. I cry onto the shoulder of his freshly ironed button
down shirt, and as I smell the aftershave on his neck feel guilty for ruining his night like this.

He tells me I am in no fit state to drive, and that he will take me to the hospital. We walk out to the car, and I feel strange that I don’t know what to say to him, one of my closest friends; I want to thank him for doing this, but somehow it doesn’t seem appropriate. I want to say something light-hearted, for his sake, but I can’t. I feel bad for him, as I imagine that he is trying to think of something to say too, but then he looks at me and I know he doesn’t expect me to say anything; he understands.

The drive to the hospital is a short one, and we sit in silence throughout the journey. In my mind, I am thinking about what I will see when I get there, and as the night rushes by outside the car window, I pray that she is still there when I arrive.

We pull up to the entrance of the Accident and Emergency department just as my Aunt rings me on my mobile to find out where I am, and to let me know that my Gran is still with us, but that I should hurry. I thank Rob for the ride. He says that he hopes she is ok, and I say I hope so too, and he drives away back to his life. Alone on the asphalt, before I go into the brightly lit waiting area, I suddenly feel the weight of responsibility, as I realize that I may now be present during the last moments of our Grandmother’s life, and hope that I am able to convey the love of seven other grandchildren to her on my own. I feel this is the responsibility of a man, and wonder if that’s what I am.

I walk in, the triage receptionist is cold and formal, and asks which patient I am here to see, I tell her, and she sends an uncaring security guard to find my aunt, who hurries into the waiting area and embraces me with a hug that we both need. She is trying to appear upbeat and wears a fragile smile that hides a tide of grief waiting to break.

“How is she?” I ask.

“Not so good,” replies my Aunt. “Would you like to see her?”

The question disarms me, I had not expected to be given the option of not seeing her, but the fact that she asks implies that my Gran may be in a state that I may want to avoid; then my Aunt says as much.

“She doesn’t look too good; you don’t have to go in.” The boy in me is relieved, and wants to stay sitting in the sparse and non-comforting ‘relatives room’, that the hospital provides, thumbing through the dog-eared Woman’s Own magazines on the table in front of him,
trying to block out the attack of real life that he is living through. But I send the boy back, back to Saturday morning cartoons, and ten pence bags of penny sweets, and I hear the man in me reply,

“I’ll go in.”

The emergency ward is a terrible place, an atmosphere of suffering, shock and helplessness hangs in the air, as I stare at the floor, and follow the clicking of my Aunt’s shoes, towards the bed where my Grandmother, her Mother, lies. The life support machines emit a constant low drone, and the doctors speak in grave, businesslike voices to one another, and to relatives of the afflicted in an affected ‘sympathetic’ tone that sounds so practiced you can imagine them rehearsing it in front of a mirror.

We approach the curtain that surrounds the bed, and a nurse pulls it open a little so that we can go in. There she is.

She looks so small, her face is gaunt, and her skin looks grey and translucent. She has an oxygen mask over her face, and a drip into her arm. I don’t know her like this. I know her in the kitchen on Monday afternoons, when we would go to her house after school to have tea, cooking us mince and mashed potato and the extra sweet corn that my Mother refuses to buy because they add sugar to it. I know her at the head of our table, on a Sunday afternoon, pouring out the elderberry presse that she always brought with her, making sure we all got the same amount, and then sitting with my parents, long into the evening, doing the crossword. That is how I know her, and as she lies before me now, in the final chapter of her life, I want to run away and forget the way that I see her now.

My aunt tells me that she is going to go outside, and try to get through to my mother again on her mobile phone; she pushes out through the curtains and leaves me at the bedside. As soon as she goes, the tears that I have been holding back flow freely and I reach out to hold her hand. Her nails are painted like always, and the beautiful rings on her fingers, smile in the harsh lights of the ward.

I cry for the times me and my brothers and sister would play badminton in her garden, and she would bring us out drinks on a tray, like at Wimbledon. I cry for the times she cut out the sports section of her newspaper for me, and how she would always offer to drive us home from her house, even though it was only a five minute walk.

Then I cry harder, for the times, after she got ill for the first time and moved in with us, that I got frustrated with her for not re-
membering how to lock the back door when I went out to work. And for the times that I drove past the nursing home that we moved her to, on the way elsewhere, when I could have gone in and made her day. I cry because she loved us so much, and I love her so much.

"Granny?" I say, and I squeeze her hand, "It's Sam, can you hear me?"

Her eyes open and she looks at me; in them I see the pure joy that I always did, whenever I did come to see her,

"I love you Granny," I say, and in that moment I know she is happy and through my pain and tears, so am I.

Sam Mead
there is silence
mutually between us all.
our bodies hold each other up
in our own right. a melting pot
of attitudes, stories, exhaustions and open hearts.

the outside world does not matter
inside our circle. you jump and i will
jump with you. you jump,
and i will jump with you so you are not alone
as we swirl around into thin air.
we all have a place-

out there, in here.
our intertwined presence will radiate the earth,
and heal all things broken,
when we are ready. each of us
a different color

splashing against the white walls
leaving an almost annoyingly optimistic mark
on a world that may never see our worth.
bending together we are never ugly.

shh... listen
it’s almost over, take my hand.

Erin McGreevy
The wine caressed my lips
As your hands embrace mine
Slowly we rock back and forth
To the beat and sway of our music
My feet dancing on yours to reach your bittersweet lips
One more drink before the night will end

Ashley Howard
to be a woman.
Eve
fell.
downwards, and inwards, and upwards
taking
Adam
with her.

The sins of Eve
are visited upon her daughters.
She who was made, not of his skull
to be above him
nor of his feet
to be below him
but of his rib - to be beside him
a helpmeet for all the days to come
she who would toil and bear his burdens
who would scream in agony, bleeding
blood red as the pomegranate
the sins of Eve.
they twist inside our bodies, turn them
into masses, nothing more
than flesh and blood and soil and more blood still.
while Adam, still unknowing
demands his helpmeet come.

Kate Ryan
INFERTILITY

Dreamt of a world of infertility.
I paddle through the muddy waters of a bayou.

Dawn does not exist,
twilight never comes;
perpetually dusk where soulless creatures live.

Spanish moss on silver trees breathe dry air.
Brown tips of tall grass show early signs of death.

Bubbles rise from a dead bog, whirl around the line trolling through lifeless water.
No flies dance along the surface or fish tug at the line.

Death’s presence flows through the water;
swirl in the branches-
aroma of mold and dirt linger in the air.

Gentle touch brought the living to be barren.
Eerie silence consumes the environment-
depression rests heavy.
Creatures lay wasteful and dormant.
Unfruitful watermelon tower
seventeen feet high;
sliced vertically.
The pink flesh inside
turned gray and shriveled
unsprouted seeds float;
on the surface.

Searching for truth
to the emptiness
set in my bowels-
journey was unrewarding.

Alexis Del Viscio
LIPSTICK

My womanhood
began
alone
in a bathroom.
Despite my
mother rushing in,
big sister rushing in still—I was—
Alone.
(we women were all born alone in bathrooms).

The blood is normal, they said, normal as Sin
Now you are
A Woman
Don’t let people call you
cute
anymore
(if you don’t want them to).
You don’t have to wear their
makeup or kitten heels,
don’t have to wear their
Postpartum Depression
or Therapy.
Remember—
YOU are not a walking double-standard.
YOU are independent and equal.
YOU are deep, deep, deep!
I stood in silence, unblinking at them until they became a mirage to my tearing eyes

I am A Woman, I thought. I can finally wear lipstick.

Sarah Ricketson
Love in an awkward place...
Face down,
Twisted to one side,
On the underbelly of Yesterday
Pull me up,
Out of the wet
And dance me awake,
Till my dress is dry...
Decadent frills
With sublime chills,
As our symmetry
Floods the well...
Your warmth on my cheek-
My eyes are open...
With your gaze along side,
As we dream into our ocean

Under the nurtured honey tree,
I sit at the ocean's edge...
The water's limit welcomes me,
Dive off this heightened ledge.
Leaping from diluted perfection,
Happily drowning in scented lust...
Standing near the warmth of your reflection,
My heart holds a rhythm of trust.
Fill my thoughts with apple kisses,
I've dusted off my browning lace
Watch the dance, a memory wishes,
Ventured this far to see your face

Will you hold the lamplight so I can see?
The pulsating path of this hungry bee?

Valerie Heron-Duranti
Ode To Modern Elixirs

Rainy or sunny
Humid or dry?
Critical questions
When you have hair such as I.

To possess curly hair
Is not always a blessing
Sometimes my needs
Are unpleasantly pressing.

No cause for concern
The solutions are many

Gone
Are the days
When rain
Would cause damage
Fuzzy,
Frizzy, fly-aways
Are easy to manage.

Contained in my cabinet
And much to my relief
A plethora of products
To end all my grief.

O Modern Elixirs
Today’s medicine for hair
Yesteryear’s crème rinses
Do not compare!
Shimmer
Shine
Superior hold
Glimmer
Gleam
And mega
Control

Vibrancy
Volume
Aloe-Vera milk
Style
Durability
And soft
As silk

This
No less
from natural botanicals
and
Never,
Never, never
Tested
On animals!

O Modern Elixirs
Are complex potions
But why
Must there be
So
Many
Lotions?

Laura Noble
SONNET

When mothers lived in sacred land, bare feet; laughter sweet,
With sanity and love fruitful tied in bare bosoms,
While bullets search name and greet
Then, pleasantly traveled north where midnight stars soothe.
Careless chatter cooking comforting soul
As time ceased playful ways, a trend,
Tender rich memory, tales elders told,
Fireflies romancing sky the restful night ends.
Now mothers permeate spacious sky, search for new divine
As laughter engulfs southern smile;
With clouds swaying foreign eyes, striking master’s pine
And the heavens embrace with endeavors wild.

Now young essence from aging sorrows part willfully
Awakening new divide, still the smiles spring brightly.

Paul Cossier
A SOUTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE SONG

This drought scarred land
Believes it has quenched its thirst
When it sinks its vampire fangs into you.
Sons of the soil of Afrika
Mothered in a nursery of injustice
Schooled on a curriculum of oppression
You left your alma mater of exploitation
For the University of Freedom.
Your graduation heralded a new dawn,
The hope of a people awaiting their Messiah.
Brave gladiators,
Sons of the impis of Shaka
Thrust into the arena of your people’s lament.
You faced the power crazed wolves
As only men could.
Alas, brothers you did not see the quivering jays of encircling hyenas
Transmuted by an insanity gone mad.

Priscilla Dass-Brailsford
Resurrection

I saw him while moving through time and space. Among the morning rush of men and women, styrofoam and paper coffee cups in hand, eyes glued to disheartening newspaper headlines, he stood before me. With one hand in his pocket and the other clasped tightly to a metal pole, he appeared like a ghost that had materialized out of thin air. I examined every inch of his face; same brown eyes, round nose, and small mouth. The trace of a beard covering his full face. I had known him all my life. He was as much of a brother to me as the ones that shared my blood. Yet, I felt as though I was in the presence of a stranger. Somehow I managed to stretch a smile across my face as I realized that once again I knew his exact location in the world. He was with me. He was safe. I thought to myself: he still exists, he still lives, he still breaths.

Our eyes met. He smiled. More of a grin, barely parting his lips. It was as if he expected to see me there.

“How are you? How’s everyone, your mom?” I sung through a smile.

“Huh?” he asked.

“Your mom,” I began, barely raising my voice above the roaring train carrying us. I feared a fellow passenger would overhear me. Feared there would be a witness to our chance encounter. “Your family, how are they?”

“They’re all good, all the same, ya know,” his voice, the same husky, mischievous voice I’d always known. It still carried that familiar hint of second-hand smoke that saturated the dark corners of his house.

“I saw your mother not too long ago; she was exactly the same. It’s like she doesn’t get old or something,” I chirped. Not quite sure what to say, I pieced together fragments of truths that could be spoken to anyone. But it was true. I had seen his mother a few months ago. Time had stopped for her. Her face and smile, exactly as I remembered, the clouds of cigarette smoke floating from her lips as she spoke. We didn’t speak for long. There wasn’t much to say. There wasn’t much she could say.

“Yeah. People be thinkin’ she’s my girl, I’m like naw, yo. That’s my mother,” he laughed. There it was. That same laugh I had longed
to hear for years: a welcome thunderstorm that rumbles through his 
body. The flash of white lightning as his mouth opened wide to allow 
those beautifully familiar sounds to engulf my ears and take me back 
to days of childish laughter and death.

86 Burdette Rd. was unlike any other, and my house was by far the 
best on the street. Sitting atop a winding hill, it was a white run-down castle 
that hovered over its neighbors. Surrounded by trees, rocks, ant farms, jungles, 
treasure trails, and wild beasts it was where childhood imagination originated 
and died. It was in front of my house that all innocent childhood activities 
took place. Where a stolen milk crate from the corner store became an NBA 
basketball hoop. Smeared chalk covered the asphalt of our streets. Lines, curves, 
and boxes determined where a foul was, a touchdown, or a 3-point-shot. It 
was where everything happened, and I had the glorious privilege of waking up 
every Saturday morning, planting myself on my porch, and watching the 
world pass me by until the street lights came on.

From my perch I surveyed the activities of my small domain. Lean-
ing over the right side of the wooden porch, paint peeling and splinters dig-
ging into my small fingers, I could see all the way down the street where 
Death lurked. Burdette Rd. intersected with Green St. There was something 
about the point at which those two streets converged that caused cars to spin 
out of control and hit each other or unsuspecting trees nearby. On any given 
night I could hear the sounds of infinite numbers of broken glass dance across 
the ground like fallen wind chimes.

My brother Warren lived across the street. He’s not really my brother. 
But he bossed me around and played with me like he was. He was pigeontood 
and I liked the way he walked. I’d giggle to myself as I watched the pigeons 
congregate in my neighbor’s backyard. I loved the way they looked down at 
their toes and buried their small heads and sharp beaks into the necks of their 
fellow flying partners. Watching Warren play with my neighborhood broth-
ers, I was convinced that they had all been pigeons in a former life.

Warren’s house was known for many things, but most importantly 
for Sunday cook-outs. I can still smell the warm scent of burning coal, the 
heavy smoke creating a blanket of happiness where none truly existed. It was 
in-between our two houses, on the asphalt covered with chalk that Warren 
was struck by a car. He didn’t die, though. Just broke a leg. When he got home 
from the hospital he gave me a ride on the back of his wheelchair and we rolled 
down the hill with his white leg sticking out as the brakes.

I have the tendency of saying “we” but it was never “we”. It was 
them: Warren, my real brother who lived with me, my cousins, and all my
other surrogate brothers that lived on Burdette Rd. I had the privilege of watching everything from my perch, whether it be my porch or the gray curb that sparkled with diamonds. I watched as fights ensued after a nasty play during football. I watched everyone scramble to make it home before the street lights came on; even big boys like that got beatings. I watched as they took their sweat-soaked undershirts off and tossed them on the side of the curb.

More than anything else, I watched for cars. It was my job to peer down towards Death to see if it was coming. Seeing a car as it began to mount our hill, I'd yell with all my strength, "CAR!!" In unison my brothers would make their hands into a T and call "Timeout..." Someone would grab the ball and they'd move to the side of the street. That single image of my brothers still haunts me today: bare-chested, skin glowing in the sun that bore them, sweat dripping down their salty cheeks, and that expression they gave themselves as they watched their faces roll by in a passing car window: who is that?

Life stopped for the ten seconds it took Death to enter and leave our lives. But the game would resume and I'd take my seat again. They may have been older, but they had no idea how to watch out for themselves. Their eyes were focused on the game and mine were focused on their lives.

One scorching day the sky cracked from the weight of the world and poured out its contents. Shadows of what would become strong Black men ran into a dry haven: a garage where my cat deposited the tails of squirrels he had tired of playing with. But I stood outside. I wanted to feel the rain pelt against my face and wash away all that was there. I wanted to see the sky light up as it reveled in its anger. But they called to me "Come in! Come in!" With my eyes full of heaven's secrets, teeth reflecting the burst of the world's fury, I smiled back at them and felt my heavy braids sway from side to side, smacking me in my face as I refused their pleadings. Finally, Warren ran out into the rain, and in one seamless motion threw me over his shoulder and brought me into the garage. I pounded my fists into the small of his back, feeling his sweat mixed with rain. He plopped me down on the cool cement floor as I scowled back at him. He looked at me with those tired eyes, shook his head and turned to watch the rain fall. They stood there, looking out into the world, grey, and blurred. Frozen in time. As I sat behind them, peering out into the rain-smearred world through their legs, the houses and yards of Burdette Rd. became distorted; I barely recognized any of it. I realized how small I was. How much we didn't know about the world.

We moved from my white castle, my jungle of a thousand adventures. It was getting bad. "The wrong kinds of people are moving in," my dad said. So we left. Our new home had no porch, my greatest disappointment,
and there was no one across the street. No corner store to steal milk crates from. No chalk on the asphalt. No sounds of shattering glass at the end of the street. I longed for the days of being the protector of ten Black boys whose sole purpose in life was to play, fight, and breathe.

“So when did you get back?” The words got caught in my throat. And I can’t be sure I ever really said them, but I must have because he answered me.

“A couple of months ago. Just been chillin’, you know.”

“You workin’?”

“Naw. Not right now.” He looked down at his feet.

“So what have you been doing?”

“I’ve been going to school. I’m tryin’ to be a medical assistant or somethin’. I’ll be out in like nine months. I’ll get a job. I’ll be all set.” He smiled to himself. I couldn’t help but smile back as he got lost in his future. A headline on the Metro in the hands of the man standing next to me caught my eye: “Deadly Drive-by in Melbourne.” It brought back the anonymous voice I heard on the radio more than a year ago: “A black male was gunned down last night in Garrett... Today in sports...”

I remember the first time I heard those words. I screamed back at the stranger’s voice: “He’s not just a Black male. He’s a person. He was a person. He had a walk, a talk, a smile, a life!” Although Andre’s death was announced to the world that morning, I had known about it hours before. My cousin came home to our house without a porch and told me that Warren had been in a shooting. He was ok, but Andre had died at the bottom of Burdette Rd. in the back seat of a car.

“Warren said he looked next to him after the smoke cleared and the other car sped away and he said Andre was just lying there. Dead. Said he got shot in the back of his head. That was it.” My cousin told me everything so matter of factly, like the voice on the radio. He shook his head and turned away from me. “I gotta go call some people.” I sat there imagining the moonlight reflecting off the millions of pieces of glass that covered Andre’s lifeless body. I could see Warren, his eyes wide, resting his head on the shoulder of his fallen brother.

I followed my cousin into the kitchen.

“How’s Warren?” I asked.

“I don’t know. The cops took him away. Whoever was after Dre is probably gonna go lookin’ for him too.”

“So, is he at the police station or what?” The instability of my voice
echoed in the empty room.

“Now. They took him away. His mother don’t even know where he’s at.”
“Well, when is he coming back?”

My cousin looked me in the eyes and shrugged his shoulders. That’s when I knew for certain I should have never left Burdette Rd. I should have never left my perch.

“Yeah, but ya know, you and your brother, and Steven and Ramone, ya’ll gotta come over. We’re havin’ a cookout Sunday.”

I snapped back to my present position in time. “Yeah? Yeah, we’ll definitely come by.”

“Alright. This is my stop. I’ll see you Sunday though. Tell your fam I said hi.”

“Definitely. I’ll see you Sunday, Warren.”

“Yeah. I’ll see you”.

I watched him walk through the doors and up the dark stairs of the subway station. In the bustling crowd he blended in with the doctors and nurses, lawyers and teachers, a sea of success and opportunity. He was grown.

As a child I imagined that those boys - my boys - needed me. That their world and their lives would cease to exist if I wasn’t carefully positioned to warn them of impending dangers. I had been so convinced all my childhood that my boys were just that. Boys. Stuck in the neverland of Burdette Rd. Convinced that our small microcosm of the world was all there was. For so many months I had wondered if it had all been a dream. Burdette Rd., my white castle, Death. I began to believe that my memories were merely a figment of my imagination: a world I had created for the necessity of childhood.

But seeing Warren revived my faith. He had survived. He had remained intact. Still pigeon-toed and playful. He proved to me that the world never stops, even when your own life does. He proved that your life can start over, you can pick up where you left off. He proved that people rise from the dead.

India Warner

77
HERE WE ARE

Crammed inside the sacred square
of spires and squires,
long ago acquired from those
figureheads of history-
there lies a story in each,
stone statue of saints.

They pose in postulating postures
in equal spaces atop the church.
Looking not down, not up - but
straight ahead, with steely eyes
of sapient marble - directing with their stare our future,
as we stand beneath the shadows of their figures.

While we all look silently on
at the window,
like Romeo beneath Juliet’s
silver mooned sill.
We hold our breath, with hopes racing
as those statues have done for ages.

At last, there is a parting in the red folds as parties
cheer on, shortles of “hurrah’s” from
the huddled masses down below.
Relieved leaders grin,
their old lives are to lead us now.
But the statues shiver in their stillness

from the newness,
of this afternoon’s foreign sun.

Sandy Ho
38763 FT. OVER LARAMIE

There is a blue sunset that you can only see
from a plane
that starts light and soft on a wispy horizon
held up by dusk
As the light darkens, it rises, as if morning is
night
The clouds become gray becomes land
And in the billowed shadows
as the pilot drives west
I see forever

Brian Schwartz
HAKIU

Single Sparrow Sublets—
En Masse—Black, Power Rising—
Redem. Own the Sky.

Laura Noble
PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is the bulk of days
Or so I'm told by people I believe
We stumble through existence in a haze
We waste the time we know we can't retrieve
I never let myself sit still at rest
I always force myself to work with speed
But I assume I'm prepping for some test
That what I'm doing cannot be the deed
So if I look at life with those dulled eyes
I guess it's true I've failed along the way
The years that I was given at my rise
Will fall with me before I've lived a day
So when I'm done and people ask "content?"
I'll have to say I want the time I spent.

Rachel Hodges
Prologue

For Sergei Brushko

Give me your glasses
then you eyes – a second sight
necessary to envision what I have
not lived – and that by mere chance
my mother confessed – god spoke to her
Go to America – where you were born.
My father – the war was his adventure
and me - the first generation of this family
I escaped Chernobyl – but must be the west
witness – lest we forget the complications
of modern life – of empire and heat of energy
and human frailty. Sergei – even from the grave
your photos haunt and chronicle – the quick and
the dead – wake them all with your eyes
bring us not to commemoration, or to remembrance
but to action and diligence
bring us home.

Anne Elezabeth Pluto
Dana Cadwell-Frost is a sophomore majoring in English and Secondary Education.

Melissa Cartwright is a senior majoring in Elementary Education and English. She has been writing since her freshman year of high school.

Cheryl Caruolo's first Hatha yoga class in 1978 was the beginning of years of training in the healing arts. She is a graduate of the inaugural class of the MFA in Creative Writing program at Lesley University, writes extensively about holistic therapies and psychic phenomena and is currently completing her first book about reconciling her own psychic gifts.

Paul Cossier is a junior at Lesley College, majoring in English.

Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, a native of South Africa, is core faculty in the Division of Counseling and Psychology at Lesley University. Prior to teaching she coordinated a statewide Community Crisis Response team that responded in the aftermath of violence and trauma. She has also worked extensively with trauma victims in the inner city of Boston and has conducted court ordered sexual abuse evaluations. Dr. Dass-Brailsford facilitates an ongoing faculty group that focuses on multicultural competence and is a trained SEED (Seeking Equity in Educational Diversity) leader. She has ongoing research projects on resiliency among trauma survivors and white racial identity development, and has published on child abuse and neglect, resiliency and the effects of trauma on psychotherapists. The first draft of her book on trauma is being reviewed for publication. She is currently chair of the Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs of the American Psychological Association, has made presentations in trauma to over 50 organizations both nationally and internationally and has a consulting practice called "Empowering Interventions."
Alexis Del Viscio is a senior majoring in Global Studies with an Individual Professional Minor in Women, Health and Social Policy. This was her first published poem and she will continue to explore new styles of poetry.

Steven Fineman is a freshman majoring in Global Studies. He has been writing for several years.

Amanda Fitzpatrick is a freshman at Lesley College, majoring in English. She has been writing poetry since she was seven years old and likes to take long walks on the beach.

Gillian Helman is a sophomore majoring in English. She has been writing poetry, short stories, and novels since the sixth grade.

Valerie Heron-Duranti was a member of CWWRT 2430 in the fall of 2005. She is now majoring in English at UMASS Amherst.

Elise Higgins-Steele grew up in Ashby Massachusetts, is 20 years old, and now lives in Dorchester. She is studying Secondary English Education. She loves to read and write.

Sandy Ho is a freshman at Lesley College who currently plans on being a Global Studies major. She first began writing poetry as a freshman in high school. At first struggled under the demands of its precision, but with practice became fond of the writing style. The poem “Here We Are” is her first published poem in a literary magazine.

Rachel Hodges is currently a senior at Lesley College, where she is majoring in English and Secondary Education. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and an Editor for www.staticandfeedback.com. She believes that literature will be the weapon of choice in the coming revolution.
Ashley Howard is a freshman, who was studying Education and is now transferring into the Photography department at AIB. Her poem was written last year as a final poem for the Beverly poetry contest and is one of her favorites. Hopefully, she will someday have a poetry/photography book published.

Deanndra Howard is a sophomore majoring in Counseling Psychology. She has been writing poetry since high school.

Roldine Joseph was born in Haiti and grew up in Cambridge. She is a 19-year-old sophomore at Lesley College, studying Communications Technology, and pursuing a French minor.

Sonya Kendall is a senior English Literature major with an individual professional minor in Writing and Non-Profit Management for the Arts. With fingers dipped in many jars, she writes music reviews, composes music, reads not enough, attempts world travel and is obsessed with the original Law and Order. After Lesley she will be moving back to the West Coast with her favorite person in the world to pursue more studies in Literature with the ultimate goal of teaching at a Junior College.

Caitlin Krause attended Duke University, earning a B.A. in English and a certificate in Interdisciplinary Art. She now teaches English at La Salle Academy in Providence, Rhode Island, and is pursuing an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Lesley University.

Erin McGreevy is currently a graduate student in Expressive Therapies at Lesley University and has spent many years devoted to the creative arts. Poetry, and writing, have become an appendage for her, and like brushing her teeth are a part of her daily life. Since she enrolled in the Expressive Therapies program, her eyes have opened so much more and she has drawn inspiration from the people she meets in class and on the streets of Boston. Originally from Vermont, these busy streets, subways, honking
horns, and city lit skylines are new and magical to her; they have given her a new life and a new way of writing.

**Sam Mead** is a freshman from England majoring in Writing. He began writing at the age of five.

**Laura Noble** graduated from the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale in 1981 with an Associates Degree in Arts and Sciences in Commercial Advertising. Presently, she resides in Winchester MA with her two teenage sons. She is an undergraduate student at Lesley University in the Adult Learning Division and will graduate in May 2006 with a BS in Psychology with a focus on Expressive Therapies. As the mother of a son with a developmental disability, Laura has a strong interest in promoting disability awareness and sensitivity as well as advocating for disability related issues.

**Julie Pease** is a member of the class of 2008 at Lesley College majoring in English and Secondary Education. She loves writing and had a lot of fun working with her classmates on this volume of *Commonthought*.

**Anne Elizabeth Pluto** was promoted to Full Professor this year. She started *Commonthought Magazine* in 1988. She was a poetry participant at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference in 2005 – her most recent publications are in *88 A Journal of Contemporary American Poetry*, *Facets – Winter 2006*, and *Quadrangle*. Her poem, “Lantern Festival” was showcased for the Poetry and Prose Program in Boston City Hall during the winter and spring 2006.

**Andrea Proimos** is a freshman, majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in Computer Graphics. When Andrea takes time from ruling the world, she waitresses and bartends.

**Jane Ferris Richardson** is an Art Therapist and a faculty member in Art Therapy at Lesley College, where she received her MA. Her private practice specializes in art therapy with children.
with a focus on autism spectrum disorders. She consults regularly with schools and trains clinicians and teachers to use the arts in therapy and learning. She received her EdD from Boston University School of Education, where she held an academic fellowship as managing editor of the *Journal of Education*, and published work on the role of the arts in development and learning. She exhibits her work regularly, and has studied drawing and painting at the Lacoste School of the Arts in the Vaucluse region of France, the Brooklyn Museum Art School, and Bennington College where she received her BA. Her early arts training and experience was as a dancer.

**Sarah Ricketson** is a junior majoring in Creative Writing. Her favorite poem is Anne Sexton’s “Morning Song.”

**Kate Ryan** graduated from Lesley University in May 2006. She is now pursuing her Master’s Degree in disability advocacy.

**Brian Schwartz** completed his Master’s Degree in Intercultural Relations from Lesley University on May 21, 2006. He serves as assistant to ethnographic filmmaker Robert Gardner and has completed many short films. His written work has been published in *What’s Up, The Wash, Outspoken, The Re-View, Passwords* and *Unbound*. He received a Bachelor’s Degree from Pomona College in Media Studies and worked at the Multicultural Center and Campus Life Office at Williams College as well.

**Marianna Sokoutis** was a member of CCRWT 2430 in Fall 2005, as an exchange student from Sweden.

**Rebecca Swiller** is a photographer, a potter, an artist, and a teacher. Art is a part of every moment of life it should be celebrated, encouraged and taught throughout life; this is her goal.

**Jessica Teague** is a graduate student in the Intercultural Relations program and is focusing on a career in international education.
Originally from Newburyport, MA, she first developed a love of photography when she began taking pictures with a point and click camera on a family vacation to the Grand Canyon. She was amazed at how rich the colors were and how the memories were forever etched in her mind through simply snapping photos of what she was looking at. Jessica gradually advanced to using manual settings on a new 35mm camera and has recently made the inevitable progression to digital photography. She now carries her digital camera around with her everyday to make sure she captures every perfect subject she encounters.

Christina Tedesco received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Art Institute of Boston and is hoping to one day earn a Master of Fine Arts. For now, she will be attending the Post – Bac program at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She desires to educate others on how to capture life through print film and digital media. Miss Tedesco’s primary loves are within the photography world are documentary, portrait, and commercial photography. Her latest project involved the multi-media aspect of photography. This is an area that Miss Tedesco plans to explore more with her personal projects.

Sara Tobias is a sophomore at Lesley College majoring in English/Creative Writing track. She plans on becoming rich after college, but has yet to find out how. She’ll let you know in her next published novel.

Jacqueline Trayers is a junior majoring in Early Childhood Education and English. She plans of being a reading and writing specialist for young students.

Ashley B. Tripp is a senior majoring in Communications at Lesley College. She is planning a career in print journalism.

India Warner is a senior majoring in English with an IPM in Writing.