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Commonthought (2018)

Commonthought Staff

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OVERGROWTH
OLIVIA MACDONALD
Three weeks ago
Donald Trump hates
me and my family
was a Muslim fourth grader’s
contribution to a Venn diagram
lesson on the candidates’ lives.
He’s absent today.

At lunch, there’s more food
on the floor than in
their mouths.
Chairs in disarray—
overturned like the rules
they’ve respected for months.

Their white teacher scolds them
for the messy cafeteria,
ignores the election…
(her assistant’s quiet reminder).
No, no, no, it’s not that.
She can’t imagine why
they’re not themselves.

At recess, a wall along
the playground cries
I’m going to be deported.
The cement replies:
Goodbye, America.
THOSE BIRDS
CHARLIE CLEMENT

We watched a video in
Science class today.
Tornadoes twirled around on screen.
Great winds blew
“Like a freight train”
They said.
Once the storm had passed over,
Out came those birds.
Bodies were carried away
In black bags.

I keep thinking about those birds.
Traffic jams of wreckage
Lined up in the streets.
But those birds kept singing.

I remember the mornings
After the worst thing would happen.
Those birds
Went on chirping.
Filling up the skies.
I thought
*How could they?*
Once,
I tried singing with them. I
Couldn’t make a sound.
Bumper stickers on cars are super nifty things.
Was Big Sur actually a fun trip?
Is your child an honor student?
Do you love Jesus?
Gosh, I’m just dying to get answers.
The safety of knowing what’s in a person’s head without asking for it,
something I’ve come to treasure.
Because you really got me with your “Life is good”
“Coexist”
“Clinton-Kaine”
and now I’m watching your ugly Prius drive away,
stickers and all,
wondering if “love”
really is “the answer”
Square A: Radiant grins on an overpass, knees tastefully exposed. She grips onto her mother’s shoulder. So alike, dressed black and blue.

Square B: New suite mates who pass boys to her like half-full mango vaporizers. Flash burns salt stains to life on the mirror.

Square C: “They all laughed when I showed them how fat you are. One of them looks like you. So much fun—come visit me this weekend—”

Square D: On turf, she stands beside all the friends who hadn’t reported her to the superintendent for defamation or harassment. The cap is white and covered in daisies.

Square E: Making sport of it in uniform. Near the chain-linked brink, she grand slams past fences where she had not too long ago slammed through walls.

NO LONGER AVAILABLE: Two sisters on the beach. Their version of embrace is facing a camera. The night before, they had stood waist-deep in the ocean.

Through the dark, the younger one slung mud into the older one’s eyes. Aruban water was lukewarm and foggy like a bathtub of saline, limescale shared toothpaste.
GARDEN PARTY
OLIMPIA A. CARIAS

wind down the
haze of roses
till full blooms
are on your chest

eat the thorns
till botflies
are set free
from your belly

drip sweet water
on your tongue
and carry crushed
petals in your palm

follow the scent till
you can see the scratchy
brown sky of your coffin.
Old man asleep beside
a bowl of wild strawberries,
hand on the table, holding
the newspaper down
as his wire-rimmed glasses dip lower.
His bare toes like tiny hills
turned upwards.
His ears crackled and yellow like sun-
blistered tomatoes.
A procession
of ants march amongst the flattened grass
to the sound of the rusty saw teetering against
the window shutter.
Birds fly to their house
nailed on the wooden post above
six dripping watering cans.

His wife wakes under
the shade and shadow
of their garden shed.
She steps out to walk down
the aisle with slow, careful
steps, a memory dug up
like a little well,
afraid of tripping as she walks into
the sunlight.
Her hands now seamed with wrinkles,
carry a bouquet of roses picked
from their beds.
She smiles, seeing him at the end
of the gravel footpath.

He awakens to pick
up the newspaper
on the fraying tablecloth,
leaving off where he started,
a hollow chuckle
as he looks up at her,
belly deeply rising
and falling
like the mountains in the distance
taken by sunset.
Don’t you see each scar, each freckle
that dances across your skin
is a star,
one that abandoned the sky
for your cheeks, your shoulders—
why would I gaze at constellations,
when I can gaze at you?
BOSTON EDITORIAL
NICHOLAS CATALANO
“You shouldn’t stare at the sun, sweetie.”

“Why not?” You ask, as your vision begins to overflow with splotches of red and purple. You blink and more appear, so you keep blinking as fast as you can. She laughs quietly against the soft tunes of the car radio as colors burst and fade, like fireworks.

“You’ll go blind, eventually.” She said, as she takes a long drag of something sweet. “Maybe you already have,” she teases. You try to look at her, but your eyes burn behind thick curtains of red.

I’m sitting in a scratchy blue chair and looking at my flip-flops; my stubby kid-toes, painted pink, scrunch and uncurl mindlessly as I try to distract myself from the other people in the room. There are exactly ten of us, but I’m the only one sitting alone. I feel curious eyes lingering as I study the shiny tiled floor: Blue square, white square, yellow square. The ugly pattern repeats over and over until it disappears beneath two mysterious blue doors. I wasn’t allowed in there.

Suddenly, a nurse dressed in a pale gray uniform emerges. She briskly squeaks down the aisle of chairs in glistening white tennis shoes until stopping at an elderly couple. The pair sit slumped together like a blob of Jell-O. Holding each other’s wrinkled, veiny hands, the woman speaks to them in hushed tones:

“Doctor Lewinsky wanted me to inform you your daughter’s health is improving. She’d like to see you, if you’ll follow me…” I wonder if the cafeteria has Jell-O? I thought, as the pair shuffles past me behind the nurse. They disappear into the unknown. In their wake, a stench of powder and old soap seeps into my nostrils. I hold my breath and try to remember the taste of smooth cherry sweetness on my tongue…

You’re five years old and the air is sticky and hot like a lollipop left to melt in the sun. Kids shriek and giggle as they chase each other around a sparkling pool while mothers cackle carelessly to the sound of clinking glasses. You’re wearing a tiny polka-dot bikini and sitting in an oversized deck chair. It’s giant wooden planks are swallowing you up, but your content with a tiny container of Cherry Jell-O. You take little
nibbles off a plastic white spoon and let the sweet flavor melt in your mouth. You secretly hope it will stain your lips red.

“Aren’t you gonna swim, cutie-pie?” You swallow a bite as your mom, Miss Darla, crouches next to you. People often said you two didn’t look alike, but you didn’t mind; your mom is beautiful. In contrast to your light blonde locks and pale, freckled skin, she has curly brown hair and a tanned olive complexion. Today she wears big sunglasses and her unruly hair is pushed back by a thin summer scarf. Just above her rosy lips, a dark black beauty-mark sits oddly as if it were drawn on with a fine-tipped marker. You keep chewing, thinking.

“Are mine red?” You ask, pointing to your mouth. She laughs and gently rubs your arm.

“Not yet, sweetie.” You warm to her touch. Miss Darla likes to show affection and you didn’t mind most of the time. It makes you feel good.

Contemplating the tiny cup in your hands, you realize you want to be in the pool. All of the kids have jumped in now, except you, so you hold it out to Miss Darla.

“Will you watch my Jell-O, mom?”

“Oh course,” she says, as you hand her the cherry goodness.

A moment later, you stand at the concrete edge wringing your hands and swaying like a paper doll in the wind. Miss Darla watches you closely, with a strange look in her eyes. Then, you jump. It’s refreshing, at first, as the water cools you, until you realize your feet no longer touch. Flailing wildly, the floaty is just out of reach. Summer sounds fade as you start sinking. Your lungs grow heavy…

I gasp for air, causing a stir in the waiting room. A man in a tweed suit sitting across the way peers over his copy of the Times. His dull blue eyes lock with mine - searching my features for what felt like an eternity - before retreating to his articles. Creep, I thought as I put my head in my hands to hide my burning face. Maybe if I sit here long enough, Miss Darla will take me to the gift shop. I imagine rows of plush animals stacked on top of one another, waiting to be picked up and cuddled by some lucky girl. Not me, I sigh and rest my head against the hard wall behind me. Maybe I’m getting too old for toys? I’m eleven, now, after all. On the ceiling, two thin strips of lights race each other from one end of the hall to the other. I stare at them until floating purple dots dance across my eyelids.
“Where are we going, mom?” You ask, as the thick curtains of red and purple finally begin to part. The world is spread out before you again and shadows flicker above as we race along the freeway.

“I don’t know, honey.” Miss Darla looks ahead, engrossed in her thoughts. You often wonder what she thinks about, when she stares off like that. It’s almost like something’s eating her up on the inside, like an evil monster; maybe that’s why her olive complexion was starting to fade yellow and lines began to crease her skin.

Sighing, you trace the fleeting landscape with your fingers pressed against the warm glass. The car feels cramped all of a sudden. Piled high with everything we owned, this wasn’t the first time you’d been shuffled from one place to another. You were beginning to despise it all. Outside, tall green trees, tiny houses, and far-off mountains speed by in a blur as your aching eyes try to keep up. Then, in the distance, you notice something familiar. It gleams and sparkles against the hot sun. Miss Darla’s hands tighten on the wheel.

“It’s a fucking Barney,” she mutters under her breath. You look at her wide-eyed. Miss Darla didn’t curse much, but when she did you knew to listen. She let her foot off the gas, slowing the car slightly. It was getting closer. “Let’s play our game,” she says suddenly, pulling her sunglasses down over her blue eyes.

“Do we have to?” you say. You’d been playing it for as long as you can remember and you’re tired of hiding; you want to see one for real this time.

“Don’t talk back to me,” she snaps. Her face darkens and you quickly unbuckle your seatbelt. Scrunching down below the dashboard, eventually all you can see is a small sliver of blue sky. You watch as a single puff of white clouds rolls across the emptiness, like a sleepy snail; then it’s gone. Wondering how long you’ll play this time, you rest your head against the tan cloth seat and close your eyes…

I open my eyes to the sound of swinging doors. The woman in gray appears again, except this time she carries a clipboard and surveys the room carefully. Her brown eyes settle on mine. My heart swells tight in my chest. I should have stayed in the car.
You watch Miss Darla carefully as she pulls a blanket around her bony shoulders. The dull red fabric is stained and torn in places, but it's thick and warm. She curls up tightly in the back seat.

“Are you okay, mom?” You ask, sitting up in the front.

“Yes, darling.” You don’t believe her. Over the past few months, Miss Darla seems to have shrunken in size. A violent coughing fit shakes her.


“What can I do!” you lean over the seat, screaming in her face, but she won’t look at you. Turning a small black lever, she rolls her window down and pulls out a pack of L&M's from her pocket. She grasps a slender white joint and puffs out steady streams of gray into the night sky. It smells bitter. Turning forward, you close your eyes and pray.

Click, click.

Miss Darla’s gone. A bright luminescent building stands before you; it’s a hospital. You’ve never been in one before. Curious, you look to the back seat and smile as a gentle breeze caresses your cheeks.

As the nurse strides forward in her squeaky shoes, my body tenses and I anchor myself to the prickly blue chair. At the same time, I notice that something about the room has changed. Specifically, the man sitting across from me is gone and he’d left the Times discarded on the floor. It looks like he’d ripped a page out of it. The woman sees my eyes glued to the crumpled newspaper and her pace quickens.

“Hi there,” she said, purposely positioning herself to block my view. I cross my arms over my chest, eyeing her carefully.

“My mom tells me not to talk to strangers,” I said, even though I knew I was more than capable of holding an adult conversation.

“Aren’t you a bit old for that?” She asks. I blink. She looks at her clipboard, back at me, and then nods slowly as if coming to some conclusion. “Alright,” she said. “My name is Susan.” She bends down to my level and puts her hand out. “What’s your name, so we’re not strangers anymore?” I hesitate.

“Where’s my mom…” “Miss Darla, you mean?” “Yes.” She looks conflicted. “I want to see her.” “I understand.”
The blue doors open abruptly, revealing Miss Darla’s tear-striken face.

“Give me my child!” She screams, hobbling towards us. A coughing fit seizes her and her scrawny body trembles.

“Mom!” The nurse jumps in front of me. People in the waiting room scatter like ants.

“Stay away from her!” Susan yells. Two male nurses burst into the room.

“Mom!” The nurses grab her, but she fights them, viscously clawing at their skin. Susan holds my arms and I’m hitting her, over and over, but I can’t break free.

“She’s not your mother!” Susan said, but I didn’t hear her. Everything seems to move in slow motion as the man with the cold eyes emerges from the blue doors. He has a badge pinned on his chest. A real life Barney. The nurses shove Miss Darla to the floor.

“Please, I beg you!” She yells. Her voice is ragged from coughing. The officer pulls out a set of irons and cuffs her.

“Don’t you know what you’ve done?” the officer said. He gets to his feet and rummages for something in his pocket. He pulls out the article he’d found earlier and shoves it at Miss Darla. Her eyes widen as she recognizes the fine print.

“Please!” she wails. He looks at Miss Darla, then to me. His blue eyes are somber as he walks towards me. Susan steps aside and he hands me the gray paper. It’s light in my hands. He points to an image on the page, towards the bottom.

I don’t recognize myself, at first. I didn’t expect to see my face, drawn out and expertly shaded in charcoal to show what some artist expected I’d look like by now. I don’t understand.

“I’m sorry,” the officer said. I watch in horror as the nurses drag her away.

“Mom!” I cry out. She looks back at me, still struggling against the strength of the two men, and our eyes meet. Disappointment, rage, and sadness flicker in them, but mostly love.

She vanishes behind the blue doors. The insignificant paper flutters to the floor without a sound.

I should have stayed in the car.
NEW YEAR
ERIN O’SHEA

September:
she wears the same sweater
every day
soft black cotton
clinging to her chest

October:
she hides behind
thick black locks
which fall
ever so gently
right before her face

November:
she fidgets
with black
hair entwined elastics
sitting upon
her tiny pale wrists

December:
she slips on
stiff and over worn
black combat boots
tucking in
frayed laces
which continue to fall
out of place

January:
she steps outside and
looks up to take in
the bright and
blueness of
the sky above

and a clear tear
dribbles down her cheek
as not a drop
of blackness
stands in
her sight
That Quiet Place,
a library of my own, surrounded by books,
in a big arm chair, in my favorite section,
with my cat purring on my lap
and a big cup of hot something.
No papers to write, no boring
documents to read, just me,
in a cavern, home to a dragon,
my friend and my companion.

She sleeps beneath me,
her breath lulling me to peace
with every slight rise and fall.
I rest my head on her hard
warm belly and skim adventure
through pages that offer freedom
instead of stress and deadlines.
When inspiration hits I take up
pen and paper, write lines
that only we shall see.

Maybe I will share or
more likely I’ll crinkle up
the pages and toss them
into the air and she will toast
the pages with the fire from
her heart, whisking all the bad
dreams away. You can’t
do that with a computer. The heady
smell of paper and musky acid char
mixes with her deep scent,
clear skies and pine needles.

When there is no more to
write, I lean my head back,  
meld my mind with hers’   
and together we remember,  
all the times together we  
took up sword and shield  
instead of pen and paper.  
But for now, we are home,  
safe from the outside world,  
safe from human society and all  
their rules, their must dos,  
and impossibilities.  

A place where tomorrow does not  
need guarantees or future worries.  
In my library it there is only me,  
my books, my cat, and my daydreams.  
Tomorrow is not allowed here.
ANOTHER MILE
MABRY GRIFFIN

Eggshell diplomas framed about our place.
A couple grand spent on facts I didn't know I knew, chasing textbook entries I had yet to write.
There are moments I wonder what another me would be feeling in another life
if another you hadn't stretched my limbs, expanded my mind, doubled my pace.
There are moments I look at the level-up card XYZ University branded me with and wonder if the quality of my sneakers determine the length of this run or I do.
So, when the questions arise that no Hopkins grad could begin to grapple with, I look to my side and find peace in what I see: you falling in stride like you first did a long time ago, in another year, with another me.
Expanding, contracting.
Breathing in, breathing out.
Inhale, exhale.
Another release.
they say you are not supposed to stay in bed too long
but who cares, i’ll be up with you tonight
you’ll have our two am,
and in the meantime i’ll try, quietly, to write you in a song again
something soft to share with the world so they know that i love you

i’ll fail, i’ll end with papers crumbled on the floor
i’ll go online and
i’ll post the pictures that my mind hides behind instead
i’ll paste them up high, so you can see
i’ll turn off the guitar rift we keep running, running, running
because you hate silence, now there are no distractions

and you can see me, see me, see me
why don’t you see me?

now i’m making forest fires, i’m a human hurricane
and i don’t know if this wetness is from last night or the tears or the rain
now i’m fighting too hard
my knuckles are bleeding from punching the mirror
but i won’t stop until and all my blood runs out
this love is violence, but today i tell myself it is only in my head

then,
when the minutes pass and you write too late
i’ll be lying over wilted gardens
and you’ll ask why all our plants look… like that
and i’ll say i’m not sure
but something may have killed them
while you were out
JUST SCREENS
NICHOLAS CATALANO

The pride of humanity quivers in slumps to
a worldwide phenomenon, completely trumps politics
as thick, oily glands rub over lit panels
people act and treat others anonymously
Chicken pox and termites would cry in sympathy
for there may not be a proper cure put into place.

On the bus, on the subway
in a car, at a restaurant
even churches, office rooms, weddings and funerals
breakfast, lunch, and dinner,

hey girl, meet me outside by 9. love you <3
omg can you believe steffany wor THAT

these specimens devour more than people make, and
time lets loose in accordance to the mind.

The kind of malfunction that would occur
on the sidewalk in the city park
without any precautions
suddenly bumping into some hooded hog
whose eardrums held hostage by cheap earphones
snapped back to reality, but only to
look up and mumble ... Oh, sorry man,
before returning once more to a life of self-torture

Geez wat a @hole amr?

Sunlight fades behind the horizon, signaling
a proper time to get some shut-eye.
Yet for some the day seize to end
the electronic demons
while curled under the sheets, fluff
and the clock hits six ‘clock to the fatigued,
unfortunate chumps reek of bad breath
and eyes red enough to halt streets during rush hour.

ugh idk if i wanna go to class.
    u see the new rick and morty? it was
    fukin cool ,sriusly man

Would it truly kill a man to depart
from his device?

Are the children of the new
generation destined to fail
thousands in years of human communication?
A youngen of the modern youth
seems to have found a solution:     dude jus go outside lmao :P
THE TRUTH OF THE NIGHT
MABRY GRIFFIN

I’m sorry
If my imperfections
Make you stop and face yours.
On the first day of preschool, accented English is your only language and you don’t know that it is. You love ketchup on your leftover *knedlíky* and fresh cherries in *bublanina* topped with Ben & Jerry’s.

Your Ws sound like their Vs but you don’t speak your grandmother’s *jazyk* (and you never will).

Education brought you here, saved you from the old country, but from the top of the treehouse you’re too afraid to climb down and when your mother comes to rescue you they only ask her where she’s from.
The Californian cliffs overlooked the living room from inside a wooden frame, light hitting the blue mountainsides at the most perfect angle. The picture had hung on the white walls for forty years and for forty more it would stay. Norah sat beneath it—beneath them—cradling a glass of tea and listening to her neighbor tell her the caffeine in it might finally wake her up. But she was already awake when she took the tea water off the flame earlier. She was awake when she first hung the paintings on the wall, all those years ago. The wrinkles around her mouth had deepened with age and the ends of her hair had coarsened, but her eyes had always remained open.

“I mean really awake, Norah.” Her neighbor, visiting from the ranch-style home next door, leaned forwards in her leather armchair, her hands tight on her bony knees. “It’s time to go.”

“I’m staying here,” Norah said in a low voice, sipping her black iced tea. “I need to.”

“But you can’t. Why don’t you come with us?” her neighbor said. Her sandals rubbed farther forwards on the Jute rug. She and her family were leaving that afternoon, driving out onto the winding highway, as far away from Ventura as they could. She flung her sandy hair over her shoulders and watched Norah shrug. The morning news hummed in the background. They said the blaze was spreading. They said to get out. Norah reached for the remote on the wooden coffee table, sliding it towards her to click the power button.

“Thanks for the offer Casey,” Norah said. “But I’m staying.” She crossed her leg over the other and sunk into the fraying couch. “Don’t worry so much about me.” She flattened her thinning hair down over her ear and took another sip.

“Norah, I’m worrying if you’re going to be alive when I get back here!” Her neighbor stood up, parting the Venetian blinds aside of her with one hand and pointing out with the other. Houses led to cliffs grounded under hazy skies in the distance. Ancient sycamores and oaks reached up.

“Well, I’ve started a pile of things in case,” Norah lied. “But it’s not going to reach here. They haven’t reached here since the 30’s.” She set
down her glass of tea and stood up slow. She motioned to the stack of books on the lower shelf of the ceiling-high bookcase that she said she intended to bring. Books were packed tight into the upper shelves with tiny trinkets balancing on the uneven tops: a mini globe, a glass paperweight, a picture frame of a young boy, smiling. She slid her finger across the top pages of a book in the lower stack and wiped the dust off it before her neighbor could see. The books had all been untouched for years and all formed a dusty sheath. *Has it really been this long?*

“Just a few books? Let me help you gather some more things,” her neighbor said. Norah gave a nod, tired of her neighbor’s repetitive lectures on leaving, hoping that once a few things were gathered she might leave her alone. Her neighbor started pulling out books piling them in her hands.

“Leave those there!” Norah said. “I’ll do those myself.” Norah tugged on a drawer on the floor of the bookcase and pulled it out, dragging it over to the leather chair. Loose papers intermingled through the jumble. Her neighbor put the stack of books back into a shelf horizontally, on top of all the books in a row.

“Needs a good cleaning too, doesn’t it?” her neighbor said, picking up a sheet. Norah gave a little grin and turned back around, gathering more books and stacking them down loud on the shelf. Cowboy tales, a guide to human anatomy, an atlas. Dust erupting from the pages and falling. Her neighbor sat shuffling through the drawer. She pulled out a handful of crumpled blank pages, balling them up and tossing them in the woven wastebasket near the window. “You don’t need this anymore either,” she chuckled, holding a metal paint tube. It was overflowing and crusted in blues and yellows. Her arm, fishing through the clutter, surfaced with another. The shiny tube was almost squeezed flat.

Norah turned around gripping a dusty book in her hands. “Don’t touch those!” she said. She grabbed the tubes from her neighbor’s hands, her head falling low to them.

“I didn’t know it meant anything to you, sorry. Just old paint,” her neighbor said.

“Just let me gather my stuff myself,” Norah whispered.

“You can’t stay here Norah. The fires will eat you alive.”

“So let them,” she said under an exhale, gripping the paint tubes tighter in her hands. They were starting to spot with age. The metal paint tubes brushed her thoughts back. She remembered her son sitting

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at the lamp-lit coffee table, hands paint-splotched as he dipped a brush in water. She had just returned from a day’s work waiting tables, still wearing her food-splattered apron and heavy eyeshadow. “Mommy look what I made,” he had said with a little masterpiece before him.

Her neighbor now stood up and kicked the drawer to the side. She walked over to snatch the remote and turn the television back on. “You don’t see how urgent this is, Norah. You’ve gotta evacuate.”

“Just give me time.” She squeezed the paint tubes in her fist. “I know where the door is.”

Her neighbor shook her head with closed eyes, mumbling something under her breath. “I don’t think you do Norah.”

They opened back up in slits. Norah walked over to her, her burgundy skirt dragging on the floor behind her. She nudged her back. “Ok, ok, but when you change your mind,” her neighbor began and then stopped. “We’ll be next door for an hour longer.” Then she reached for her glass of iced tea and swallowed the last mouthful. She set it back down and slung her tote bag over her shoulder. Norah followed her to the door beside the open living room. Her neighbor flung it open. The door handle was already half-broken as it was. “Pack it up, Norah. You need to leave. Hurry.” Norah watched as she ambled back to her house and up the steps to the porch. She breathed a breath of humid air. The smell of smoky creosote. Norah looked above the flat houses, up to the yellow and green mountain patches. No rain for weeks.

Norah closed the wooden door. It was dented and scratched from years of coming and going. She moved the floral curtain draped over the small square window to peek out again, then moved it back to where it belonged. She strode back to the living room, where her television replayed newscasts of bright orange bursts against the silhouettes of palm trees. Glowing mountains and skies that charred acres upon acres now. Norah powered it off again and sat beneath the painted Californian cliffs on the wall. The melting ice cubes in her tea clanked as she took her last sips. She rubbed the paint tubes together in her hand. My boy, never did make it to art school.

Norah rose with her and her neighbor’s glass and crossed the living room to the kitchen sink. A white dish smeared with jam and a pan crusted in egg yolks sat in it. She turned the tap on, a steady stream of clear water filled the sink until covered. Norah scrubbed the dishes and
dunked them under the water, then drained the sink dry. She wished she had more dishes. She dried them off with an old rag hanging from the knob of a wooden cabinet.

The doorbell rang, then a pounding on the door came, but it wasn’t her neighbor. She cracked it open and peeked out, her hand on the warm doorknob. A portly man in a black button up with the Ventura volunteer badge on the sleeve stood there. “Hello, ma’am,” he said. “I am a Wildfire Prevention volunteer from down the street. I got news that you don’t plan to evacuate for the fire,” he said in a gruff voice. “I came to tell you that this is a high risk area. The winds pick up unexpectedly and it spreads the fire extremely quickly.”

The light on Norah’s face drew attention to its softness. “I want to stay,” she said.

“I don’t know if you heard or not, but Ventura is issuing mandatory evacuations at this point. Firefighters can’t keep up with it. You could face a fine or misdemeanor if officials find out.”

“I can’t leave.”

“For what reason? Ma’am, this is seriou—”

“It’s my—our—house.”

“Well you and everyone who lives here runs a great risk if choosing not to leave.” He stood there with crossed arms. “The firefighters do their best to save homes.”

“I know, thank you,” Norah said. But she didn’t know, just didn’t want to believe it. She pressed the door shut as the man tried to hand her a pamphlet from his pocket, but it stuck in-between the heavy door frame.

Norah waited until he knocked twice more, then gave up and walked off, beyond the lawn. She didn’t care if he called the police. She turned back around, her eyes meeting the paint tubes wedged in the couch cushions. She stepped over the drawer on the rug and took them into her hands. We will stay. They felt smooth as she held them and looked back up to the Californian cliffs on the wall. Norah took a seat on the sagging cushions, then laid down, her slippers dangling over the armrest.

She remembered coming home from the café, most nights finding her son asleep on the couch. Quilted blankets pulled up to his cheeks, animated characters on television. She wiggled his glasses off and set them on the coffee table, stroking his black bangs to the side. Her
goodnight kiss left a tint of pink on his forehead. She didn’t know he had artistic talent until she came home to find him painting one night. He had found her paints and canvases stored away in her bedroom closet. The living room needed something, he told her. The Californian cliffs. But this was before he passed. A school bus crash on the way to school. They told her the bus burst into flames. Norah imagined he was up there now, in those Californian cliffs, standing on those blue and golden rocks, looking down on her. She didn’t think the wildfires were real now, didn’t think anything could hurt her more than the loss of her son. Her eyes melted shut, her field of vision closing slow.

Norah stiffened to the sound of a pinned-down car horn. It came and went in recurring eruptions. She knew it was her neighbor, her husband, two kids, and their dog, all stuffed in the car together with their belongings. She knew they cared about her, but she didn’t move. She held the metal paint tubes on her stomach, waiting for the honking to stop and to be in the sleepy solitude of the living room.

She faced the window. From the couch, Norah could now see a faint cloud of dust, an ash gray mass wafting above. She saw the head of a woman leaving her house with her t-shirt pulled over her nose. Norah kneeled up on the couch, her eyes fixed as she watched the woman darting from her steps. She was carrying a guitar under her arm with the neck of it sticking out like a spear. Norah stood up and stepped around the coffee table to the window, the woman now out of view. Norah wanted to knock. The gray cloud loomed over the mountain tops. It covered the sky in a dusty sheath. Pockets of auburn light glowed down. It’ll pass. It wouldn’t come to the house she bought when her son was born, she thought.

A plane was flying low now, aiming for a mountainside. Her quiet eyes fell on the powder that trailed out from it and sank down. A red plume of fire retardant. It settled, then particles swept up again against the wind.

“Would you just imagine red mountains?” she asked, looking over to the cliffs above the couch. She laughed. “They’re painting them red!” she said, striding back to the coffee table for the remote. “Gotta see this.”

“5,000 more acres burned. Mandatory evacuations still in place,” scrolled across the bottom of the screen in bold type. She didn’t see purely red mountains until she looked outside the window again.
Wildfire flames at the peaks of the cliffs. Illuminating the landscape like volcanic rock. Burning a slow, uncontrolled burn. Norah’s eyes widened. Her hands melted into the cold windowsill. She pressed her face up to the glass.

“No,” she whispered, her eyelids flickering. She didn’t believe it, couldn’t believe it before. The flames consumed the blue rocks. They radiated red so brilliantly in front of her, charring the skies above. A thousand little sparklers whose flames grew bigger and bigger. She pictured the fire rushing down the cliffs and up to her glass window, shattering it. The crash. The burn. She pictured her home, everything she owned, all she worked for, swelling aflame. She pictured it, but couldn’t. She didn’t want to, but she had to. *I need to save you.*

Norah scooped the crumpled paint tubes off the couch and stepped up on it. The Californian cliffs before her eyes, soaring up into azure. The dripping paint dried up on the canvas, molding the rocks. A golden glaze lighting up the mountainside. She ran her finger across the mountain’s ruggedness. “Oh, my boy.” She jerked the artwork off the wall, revealing a rectangle of preserved white. She pressed her palm against it, feeling its smoothness. Norah stepped down with the framed canvas under her arm and scooped up the crumpled paint tubes on the couch, gripping them tight. She stuffed a tattering couch cushion under her arm. She stumbled over to the bookcase and reached up for her smiling son in the frame. Layers of dust had collected on the glass.

Norah staggered across the hardwood floors, her arms full and heavy. She held them tight at her side until she reached the front door. She set the cushion and painting down on the stone kitchen countertop, just long enough to heave the door open and wedge her toe in between. She jammed the cushion and painting back under her arm. A wildfire pamphlet drifted down to the floor as she kicked the door open. She stepped over it as she squeezed through the doorway, the canvas hitting the door when she emerged on the other side.

The winds of smoke stung her eyes. Tried to choke her lungs. She walked out to the sidewalk, hot concrete under her slippers. Her ranch home with yellow siding, shaded by an ancient sycamore, stood before her when she turned. Just the way it was described to her when she first saw the listing for the home in the paper. A cozy fireplace, one-story, two-bedroom. She remembered reading how it was just five blocks away from Monroe Elementary in the center of town. Breathtaking
panoramas, they said. She looked up at her home. She could see the fire now at the cliff peaks. Her neighbor’s car wasn’t in the driveway. She hugged her belongings close to her. *I’ll keep you safe,* Norah thought. *Me and you.* She stepped down onto the street. Fire-lit skies above her, Norah began to walk. Her skirt dragging. Her arms filled. In the distance of the street, she saw the back of the woman with the guitar, its strap wrapped around her. She was almost disappearing into the haze. “Hey!” Norah said in-between breaths. “Wait!”
MAIDEN NAMES
KERRIN MANGAN

Mangan makes me lost,
makes me Irish, when I’m more French,
my mother’s heritage lost in the name of the man.
It makes me unpronounceable,
when it’s so easy to just listen.
Mangan is my grandfather sick with worry,
from famine, from poverty,
from having to leave your son’s wedding—
I’m so sorry, son.
It’s generational
Is breá liom tú

North End, we see the celebration,
Anthony of Lisbon.
My father says,
This was the language of my mother.
He recalls music festivals with
his grandfather Manuel,
Words once spoken, now untraceable;
Silva follows me home at night, my grandmother
she blessed me sadness,
and when I pray to the saint of lost things,
I feel her finally.
I wish I could be there for you—
Eu te amo muito.

Morency is hidden behind the lonely language
in which my grandmother still prays.
My mother fondly remembers
her mémé’s home in Lawrence, her favorite dinner
“Fried pasta.”
My grandmother now only speaks French
to her Haitian nurse.
She thinks we can’t hear her say,
Je t’aime tellement.

Provencher is all the gifts from my mother, kindness, loving, and insecure, she left it in her middle name, gone but not forgotten. She tells me every day, but I’d know anyway, 

*I love you so much.*
LUCA
DALIA MIRÉ

the purest kind of love
is the way he grabs onto your shirt
tiny fingers squeezing
half asleep
but still aware

i have loved many things
and yet
i’ve almost never felt loved
that much
that desperately
in return
XL
your calloused fingers waltz across the tag of my shirt
jagged nails scraping my freckled neck
you fold it under the hem
heat rises in my cheeks

L
you hold my hips and grin
i feel like the whole world is crashing down
your palms seem so small
flushed against the curve of my stomach

M
“you look beautiful today.”
“thank you.”
“is that a new shirt?”
the tag itches, burns, claws at the nape of my neck
“yes.”

S
stretch marks like fireworks sizzling out
red and white ridges against my skin
valleys and peaks where my stomach
suffocates my ribs

XS
you put your hands on my hip bones
rosy fingers wrap around my sallow waist
you are smiling
i am smiling too
A PREDICAMENT AT 4 A.M.
SAM MANNING

Tell me WHY

THERE'S

NO
dAAANG’ol SAUCE in
my house?
O COSMIC SOUND!

BENJAMIN GORELICK

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass

O cosmic sound! O sweet strings and pipes of the night!
Your soft plucks and gently sweeping movements unbend and unhinge me,
And I find myself able to do nothing but listen to you,
O Music that lulls even the flowers into slumber...
Yet how strange that not a thing moves,
But the mellow wind through the boughs and limbs of trees and leaves of grass.

The tendrils of the rising sun play for me a glorious fanfare!
The stringendo of a new day immerses my body in warmth, and I am steeped in strength.
O cosmic sound! O trumpets and horns of winged messengers!
You fill my very being with your saccharine vibrations! I am jolted awake!
This is the music of the scholar in his study, poring over his books as a bee to flowers,
This is the music of markets, great centers and sub-centers of commerce,
This is the music of ships at sea, with their tall pennants raised and intrepid sailors readying sails,
This is the music of wagons, of people bustling to and fro from place to place and errand to errand,
This is the music of tall buildings, of churning homes, of youths at play! (I may play with them!)
This is the great Sinfonia della Civiltà!

Yet even in the grandiose melodies, I am able to hear a faint wisp of the tranquil strings,
I hear it still in the heart of the orchestral cacophony, calling to me.
I wander far from the center, and find myself where He once lay with me.
It is here where the gratifying music is, here where all instruments can be heard,
Yet nothing stirs.
Not even my own breath disturbs the air.

The strings and pipes and brass fade away, and I am left with bells,
O cosmic sound! O wonderful, striking, glorious bells!
They chime with such fervor I would fear going deaf, yet I listen unworried!
My heart is thrust through!
My body split into pieces and scattered!
My blood spilt into the earth that it may feed the grass!
My mind is ascended to the heavens!
I have one desire, one singular Thought!
I wish to hear these sounds forever!

But, as if with the setting sun, the majestic chiming of the bells draws ever farther away,
And I find myself reforming,
Content to listen once again, to the strings and pipes of the night.
Yet how strange that not a thing moves,
But the mellow wind through the boughs of trees and leaves of grass.

(Are you here with me as I listen?
Do I hear the same music as you?
I think it is the music of all things,
I think it is the music of living.)
MY ANCESTORS WERE VICTIMS OF GENOCIDE. CONGRATS ON “THE LUCK OF THE IRISH”
MABRY GRIFFIN

You’re luckier to have
Met me
Than I am
To have met you
PULLING TEETH
KAI BARRY

Upon all the snakes in hell,
the despair in human hearts,
the vengeance in wolves’ teeth,
and the blood in bat fangs,
I swear to you that I’m your worst.

I swear to you that my teeth are lined
with every venomous insult hurled at me.
I swear to you my eyes hold the hatred
that light hell’s very flames.
Mostly though I swear to you that I
will take you into despair like a
John promised a good time
who’s been robbed,
I’ll take you for all you’re worth.

Under the cover of ecstasy
I’ll have you on your back
with your hands bent backwards
my fingers in your mouth
and you’ll be screaming
begging me...

Begging me to stop
ripping out all your teeth
one by one with my nails,
just like you took each
year of my innocence
out of my body through
bloody fingers and
promiscuous tongues.
SCOPULI, SIRENUM
TIANNA ROMERO MCLARDY

She smells of just the right amount of perfume,
so dogs and fools will follow.

She is the language of Leonard’s melodies.
She roots through garbage and seaweed.

She is a vision of Vienna,
with her love handles and succulent breasts.

She is pure scandal.
She finds ecstasy in stealing time: the greatest piracy.

I am terrified of drowning in her.
Still, I am swept.

O heartbeat of my wild imagination,
and vessel of my future,
I hear your call.

My dilemma:
I want to harmonize.
DAUGHTER
MAYA GRUBNER

10
pre family vacation
your mother warns you
not to stare at men holding
hands in provincetown
and you wonder why
she thinks you would

12
deval patrick’s daughter comes out
and holding the newspaper
you ask mom, what’s lesbian?
and she tells you it’s like gay,
but for women and you wonder
why there’s a word for something
that everybody is until you’re

17
and your father tells you the
hairstyle you want
will make you look like
a lesbian
and suddenly it’s a headline
in a newspaper article about you

21
your girlfriend’s hand
is a grenade
at night on city sidewalks
where strangers sharpen their stares
and searching headlights
almost make you
pull the pin
AN ODE TO MEN WHO DARE OPEN THEIR MOUTHS AGAINST ME
DALIA COUSINEAU

no sir, this two pound box is not too heavy for me
though i know i am a girl, that’s why you winked
a joke you thought we were sharing.
you don’t have to worry, you see,
this box is no heavier than the school books in my backpack
throughout the years,
or the weight of academic pressure from my parents,
it’s much less burdensome than the thoughts in my head at the train station,
reminding me that it would only take two steps to disappear.

my arms may look small and undefined but
they are scarred from hate and healed over with strength,
and this mind has fought battles you’ve never had to think about.

sir, i am not your pretty girl—i am your worst nightmare
i will wake you up with the sheets twisted around your legs like tourniquets,
like snakes wrapping themselves around their prey
i will swallow you whole
and not have to think twice.
i will be the tremor in your hands and the wetness of your thighs as you piss yourself in fear
you will regret
whistling at me on the street.

sorry, dude,
but i am a bitch
a wild dog with jagged teeth
and i will bite you if you put your hands on me.
MASK THE PAIN
JENNA TESSLER
HEROIN
ERIN O’SHEA

Father never had time for us kids;
some say he’s a workaholic.

Mother can’t handle the house on her own anymore;
she’s become an alcoholic.

Our parents didn’t notice anything was wrong
until you already had the needle in your arm.

Sometimes I wonder if maybe they could have saved you
from this path of self-hatred and harm.

I can’t help but to remember laughing in the summer breeze,
while we licked our lollipops and sat in the shade under a big oak
tree.

I wish things could go back to the way they were when we were so
young and free.

Now my mind replays an awfully numbing sound;

I wake up in the still of night with images of you
passed out behind the wheel of your car; cliff-bound

Everything feels impossible now, but is impossible really a solution?

I refuse to let this suffering go on any longer without finding a
resolution.

Today I will put an end to this violence;

It’s time to speak up, to use my voice, and to stop this silence.
RUNNING BACK TO YOU
SABRINA GARVIN

Memory is like a busy restaurant pitch black.
The candles at each table all snuffed out,
no one can be seen,
and whispers are barely heard.

Once in awhile a spark alights
and a single table appears from the darkness.
Just as surprised to see as be seen,
the people at the table stare back
wide eyed and scornful.

Sometimes we are happy to see the people
chatting merrily at the table.
Like the day we spent at the park
carving more circles into the roller rink.
Sipping juice boxes and munching granola bars.

Other tables are filled with hatred and angst,
their denizens cast dark shadows and harsh glares.
Like the text, “I hate you” unwarranted
from a so-called best friend. The one that
broke a hard-fought friendship of eight years.

Many more tables are clouded by sadness,
like incense it hovers
obscuring the beauty of what once was.
Like the dog who waited by the door every day,
but only for twelve years.

Then as quickly as it appears,
the small light flickers
and time snuffs it out,
and darkness reigns again.
At times of unbearable sorrow, I run
back to you, curl up in the lap of oldest memories,
fall asleep and awaken, pulsing with
the fear of my wildest dreams,
to be alone again.
I WANT TO SEE IT REVERSED.
ABIGAIL MARTIN-RYAN

I watch blue turn violent on VHS
as the bearded man stirs up dust
settling in his stool. Rain dapples
his eyes like it rusts a tin
roof. A circle of flames twirl
around his purged radius. His scorch
is the intent of the documentary.

Cameras point to behind a ruined
wagon, where blonde-and-blue-eyed
funnels arrive in multiples. They turn over
itty bitty graves. “Electrical problems,”
is how the man marks the bones
of his twentieth son
born to his fourth teenage
wife. Ashes flutter,
bits of dandelions
bits of crowns.

Days later, I stare into a two-year-old’s eyes
as he looks out at silicon sprawl
from the dozenth floor
of his family’s building. From up this high
I can’t see his
righteousness.
When the wolf spoke
its voice shattered into
ugly clouds of crimson
and ground teeth.

Yet when it spoke, I heard only
I'm sorry.
James had killed a deer before, sure. On a hunting trip, with his father.

But this was different. This, tonight, wasn’t intentional. This was his drunk reflexes, eyes half closed, that last beer haunting him as Pearl Jam and static tumbled through the car’s derelict speakers, begging him to stop. It had taken him about five seconds to even open his eyes after the impact, ten to stop the car.

James took a deep breath, leaned his head against the steering wheel. At least I was wearing my seatbelt. He laughed to himself, shaking his head.

“Okay,” he said, reaching for the door, “okay.”

He hadn’t realized how cold it was, but April in New England could just as easily be December. Clouds of breath drifted past his eyes as he stumbled past his car, following the trail of blood.

His dad had taken him hunting during the winter of 1983, right after the divorce, his eleventh or twelfth birthday. It was a rite of passage, a sign of growing up, but his father had been wonderfully ill-equipped to handle a freezing, starving child. By the time they reached the cabin, all James wanted to do was go back home. The little cottage was old and drafty, and the bitter air crept its way through the cracks in the walls, ripping the breath from his lungs.

They’d barely made it through the door when James’ father decided it was time to head out, throwing a bright safety vest at his son and gruffly demanding that he put it on. So he did.

It felt like they’d been sitting at that lookout post for hours —not talking, barely even breathing —before a deer emerged from the bramble. James hadn’t had time to notice the animal before his father was shooting, the gun seeming to explode from inside James’ head. He cried out and slammed his hands over his ears. His dad was already climbing down the post, gesturing excitedly for James to follow. James waited until his dad’s feet were flat on the forest floor before wiping the tears from his eyes, and following. He had barely made it to the ground before he heard his dad muttering.
“Shit. Shit, shit, shit.”
“Dad?”
“Stay over there, Jimmy. Don’t come any closer.”
No one else ever called him Jimmy. He didn’t like to be called Jimmy. “What’s the matter?”
“Nothing, I just…Stay over there, would ya?”
“What happened,” he asked again, walking closer.
“Jimmy, God dammit. Stay away, I’m asking you nicely.”
“But, Dad-”
“It’s a doe, Jimmy. We shot a doe.”
“That’s, I mean, that’s like, a girl deer, right, Dad?”
“Yeah.”
“Isn’t that illegal?”
“No. It’s not good, though.”
“So, what are we gonna do?”
His dad sighed, shrugged his shoulders. “Same thing we’d do with a buck. We’re gonna bring it back.”

The bags and guns were slung over James’ back and shoulders; his dad was the one to actually take care of the deer. James’ looked away when his father began to tie the doe up, and pretended not to notice the trail of red sludge behind them as they dragged the body away.

James had a sinking feeling in his gut as he staggered down the road. He had never felt like this before. Bobby was right, that ass is always right, he should’ve got a ride. A regular at Taylor’s Bar, James was usually great at holding his liquor. But he had already thrown up twice tonight and threatened to fight the bartender when he got cut off. If he had to call his mom to come and pick him up at the police station (this would be his fourth—fifth?—DUI) he would never hear the end of it. You used to have such promise, now look at you. You’re just like your father.

Too many failed relationships to count, a kid who only really existed on birthdays and holidays (her birthday is coming up, isn’t it? March something… March 26, maybe? Or no, no, I think it’s the 28), and constantly looking for work: maybe she had a point. James could feel laughter bubbling up (or maybe he was going to be sick again). Of fucking course he was stuck on the side of the road, in the middle of God Knows Where New Hampshire, looking for fresh roadkill, courtesy of his station wagon and a barrel of Budweiser.
He’d be lucky if he survived the hangover.

When they reached the cabin, James was sent to chop firewood. He slammed the ax over and over, thinking of all that blood. His father was preparing the doe, and James could feel his stomach churning. There had been so much blood, and his dad dragged it back, surely there was dirt and oh, God, didn’t his mom say dead animals carried parasites? The ax swung harder, and harder. He didn’t even hear his dad call his name, the sharp thwack thwack thwack keeping him in a trance. Sweat curled the edges of his hair as it dripped down his body and burned his eyes. By the time he looked up and noticed his father, he felt as though he was going to drop dead.

James sat down at the table. His father placed a boiling bowl of stew in front of him, uttering a cheery “Eat up.” James felt the bile rising in his throat as his father ate. The blood, the dirt, the blood…he couldn’t help himself. He vomited.

“God, dammit, what’s the matter with you?”
“I- I don’t know, Dad, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to.”
“Are you crying?”
“No, I…I’m so sorry.”
“You’re spending too much time with your mother. Get up. Let’s go.”
“No, please.”
“James. Get up.”

His father didn’t even bother with high-vis clothing, even though it was dark. James stumbled after his father, following him to the lookout post with vomit still drying on his face and clothes. His dad all but shoved him into the tower, promising they wouldn’t be leaving until James had killed a deer of his own.

Hours passed; nighttime in the November woods created a darkness James had never thought possible. But his father wouldn’t even look at him, just peering out into the woods, hoping for any sign of life. James tucked his arms around himself, pulled his knees right under his chin.

“Hey. Hey,” his father whispered, shaking James’ leg. He blinked open his eyes, noticed the pastel sky above him. They’d slept outside. James was so cold his bones hurt. He could hardly move. His father was pointing toward a deer, a huge buck, directly across from them. “Hey. C’mon, it’s your turn.”
James was shivering, his teeth chattering so badly he was surprised the deer hadn’t run off yet. He felt like his breath couldn’t come fast enough.

“I can’t do it,” he whispered.

“Like hell you can’t.” His father pulled James into position, placed his hands on the gun. “Fucking do it, Jimmy. I’m not playing around.”

He stared at the deer. The gun was shaking, he was sure he wouldn’t even hit it. Slowly, he lowered it. “I can’t.”

His dad looked at him, equal parts disgusted and disbelieving. Without saying a word, he lifted the gun back up. He roughly grabbed one of James’ hands, placed it on the trigger. Together, they shot. The deer went down immediately. His father ripped the gun away from James and threw it on the ground.

“Let’s go.”

They left the deer where it was and began walking back toward the cabin. His father entered, slamming the door behind him. He began to throw all their stuff into tattered bags before shoving them into the trunk of his car. Twelve hours with his son: he’d reached his limit.

When they got back to James’ mother’s house, his dad didn’t walk him to the door. He didn’t even wait for him to get inside before he was speeding down the road.

James spent one week in the hospital with hypothermia, listening to his mother on the phone, screaming that James would never again, under any circumstances, be alone with his father.

James was staggering down the road, anxious about the inevitable carnage. Sure enough, he could see where the street glistened with blood. He closed his eyes and ran his hand over his face. There must’ve been a lot of damage to his car. He hadn’t even thought to check.

Before he could even register the sight in front of him, he knew something was off. Something in the air, maybe—a kind of heavy, deadened silence. It was a glint that first caught his eye, moonlight reflecting off of the blood, maybe. But, no, this was something small. Something man-made.

A diamond ring, shining clear, from a mangled hand in the middle of the road. Blood ran in streams through the cracks in the street. The woman was lying face down, dead.

James felt the bile rise in his throat.
Subconscous

Sam Manning

The only way to do it
To be like this now
To get the full flavor
To feel you have a full feeling
To be a part of an emotional town
To feel whole. Once you know how man in love
And what would happen you know I want up to you
When I was young, I had and then I lost you, you were taking to him for new
Again and again in phone calls for you or anything else
Should I have the chance you fall to the floor
So you like anymore if they help request
For like an idea to be and be there for you
For make sure that she's fine and be their next
And you have a lot of love and just call it and you have a good time of a
Time if the internet if it is not regular person who are all fed
And the only way I would be there for all time normalized if that you have a good idea
Maybe but you know, how man is all about that but we didn't order of personal music and I was like the one
That are really nice look and a lot of it has it in a lot more and many times and the feel of them to talk
This was just in love the normal and the idea of my breakfast for me and the guy there in the coffee shop I was there
When I take the bread for me and the rest are not the case about it or why can't move on
And then when the boys are really good idea for the
Dinner was good to order
But he didn't want you in a fashion where I am
And I think it was you in the same place
And not only was the other one work for the entire year
And meat that you could have been mess about when the was more toward that take

* Seen Oct 21*
CONFESSIONS
KERRIN MANGAN

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Me and him, we hate
the parts of each other that
are too much like us.

Fourth Sunday of Lent
My sun, I love her,
but each night I lie in fear,
I’ll be just like her.

Palm Sunday
The thought of losing
her, it fills me with peril.
The dawn breaks for me.

Pentecost Sunday
Just to see him once
get everything he deserves,
I would destroy you.

First Sunday of Advent
They will never know,
how lucky, gifted, I am,
to have them as mine.
LINGERING
DALIA COUSINEAU

your favorite song came on the radio today
i heard you sing along.
i wish all i could remember was your sweet tenor tone,
and not how loud you could get when you yelled

sometimes i can smell your cologne
on strangers as they walk by.
i react to it like i did when i was allergic to red dye #40
with hives
A MOTHER’S LESSONS
ERIN O’SHEA

Four;
slipping my tiny fingers
into dusty window sill blinds;
sneaking a peak at the outside world;
hoping you would come out
with me,
into the summer’s sun.

Six;
you weren’t there that afternoon,
at the street’s corner
as the bus came,
and went;
taking me back to school with it;
and that was only the first time,
you didn’t show up.

Nine;
I remember Jell-O shots at my birthday party.
One set labeled with black sharpie,
“A-D-U-L-T-S.”

Eleven;
replacing your cigarettes
with cherry flavored lollipops;
an attempt to suck the toxins
right out of you.

Twelve;
I talked and talked and talked.
You never listened.

Fourteen;
unaware of what size bra to wear;
ponytail-mess;
appearance unlike the other girls;
girls with moms by their sides.

Sixteen;
performing in a high-school play,
based off your favorite movie,
*The Wedding Singer.*
Begging and pleading you to come,
you said, “maybe”.
But you didn’t, and I
wasn’t surprised.

Eighteen;
pushing the green and white tassel
out of my eyes,
searching the rows
and rows and rows and rows and rows
of heads belonging to proud parents.
You were not one of them.

Twenty-one;
you push a drink towards me,
as I say “no thanks”,
offering you my rouge lipstick instead.
You politely decline;
cigarette stained lips
are your preferred color.

Twenty-two;
my phone rings
with your name
on the screen.
You talk and talk and talk, and I
don’t listen.
oozing honeylove
while wallowing in
Twilight dew, you
speak a silly language.
the letters in your hands
cut deep into your eyes
but the feeling is still the same.

your mouth and heart go on
and on and on but
in truth they have left you
blinded by sea salt words
and waves of woe.
SLEEPY
VATH DOANGPRATHEEP
GOODNIGHT
KAI BARRY

If tomorrow the sky was no longer blue
you'd know I stopped loving you.
For our love lit the stars and held the clouds.
If tomorrow the sky was no longer blue
you'd know it was all for you.

I took the color from our sky's cheeks
looked up to her and said if he leaves me
before I finished she rained down on me
and spoke sleep my child

I ripped the stars from her veins when you
wanted a sparkle in my eyes and she spoke
my child, how much need you take?
I thought I needed the whole damn world.

So, I took the blue from our sky's eyes
took the stars from her veins
and the clouds from her hair
just to hear her say it isn't fair.

So darling if tomorrow the sky is no longer blue
but a funeral black, you should know
I took it all away to give to you.
i want to run through long tall fields
and i want to see the sun—
golden, on your back

i want to lie in public gardens
i want to hold your heart in one hand
and your palm in the other other

i want the all-good feeling
of smelling smooth greens and deep soil

and crystalline water
we were in the car,
with our seats pushed all the way back,
staring up through the sunroof.
your music was playing
i remember being in love.

we were in the car.
you were yelling at me again.
i embarrassed you.
it was my fault.
i cried with my head turned away from you.

we were in the car
you were driving and laughing and
i was hoping that a car would hit us
I AM  
ERIN O’SHEA  

I Am the flower you stop to pick on your way home;  
soaking in the sun.  

I Am a maple tree holding my ground in the most whipping of  
winds;  
dancing back and forth in the pelting rain on my bare skin.  

I Am the volcano of passion that erupts inside of me;  
hiding the once colorful Earth with thick clouds of smoke.  

I Am a tornado destroying places and homes in my path;  
thunder and lightning bolts screaming through the sky.  

I Am my own mother nature  
full of twists and turns.  

I carry my crown with me to every new place I go;  
carefully planting on stone after stone of memories  
from the soft Earth’s ground;  
marveling at the marble that I Am.
TWILIGHT
KAI BARRY

Night weaves his fingers through
Moon’s iridescent hair
while Moon kisses each star
on Night’s cheeks.

The sun watches them from afar
thinking how foolish they must be
to fall in love with the twilight hours,
how foolish they must be to fall in love
when they’re meant to part.

Moon holds his lover close
he wishes on every tide he’s moved
that they may have more than this
that they may be more than this.

Night takes Moon into his arms
I know where we can hide
Moon mumbles into Night’s shoulder
Where, my love? I’d travel the earth

Night takes Moon’s hands
he brings him to his chest
follow me he whispers

And the sun watches on as young lovers
travel to the outskirts of her reach
to have an endless night of affection.
To be Night and Moon on both hemispheres.
SLEEPING IN MOTHER’S PLACE
SABRINA GARVIN

Night swaths the cluttered edges of the room,
reassuring like an old friend.
The darkness hides enemies,
unfounded fears and unremembered nightmares,
dripping cold saliva down the back of sore necks.

Each time a car slinks by
its beams, circling the room, intrude
upon a child’s sleeping face.
Light from the street lamp outside
alights the stubborn dust,
that cakes such places of food and family.

Branches from the tree of spring memories
shatter the yellow light. Like the cracks
of the ruined glass in the kitchen,
that drew blood from a disappointed child’s skin.
The garden lamp stands just out of sight
like a dependable butler,
waiting to open the door of longing.

The dark eyes of scrutinizing dolls, remnants
of a mother’s expired childhood. The room, a museum
of a not so distant past with a resident who does not belong.
Warm dry sheets, pulled up around ears,
shield against the unknown.
If I push and try
to make some noise, heads may turn,
but eyes look through me.

GHOST
KERRIN MANGAN
FROM THE SIMON & GARFUNKEL SONG “THE SOUND OF SILENCE”
ABIGAIL MARTIN-RYAN

Four posts soaring into lofts and mists—
as I progress, they rise.
The arena has been vacant for centuries
but when a dark winged beast in the alcove
rings the call, I must obey.

Airplanes crash on top of me. Atomic bombs
always go off. Evacuation
is for the extras. I, my friends, am my only
friend. I’ve seen my siblings
get eaten by wolves and endless galaxy
on a spherical fulcrum. The battle is between
symbols—twisting my cats’ mangled bodies
till the ribs crunch, glass elevators
falling through fire, the children I work with
abducted as I stand agape. Porcelain dolls
sprint across my bedroom floor through the
dark, and the lights won’t turn on.

After that day on the train, shadows of
large men’s rough hands are cupping
and zippers brushing what I must teach myself
against silence is
a belief that puts me to sleep at night if only
with the lights on. The sound of a TV
from far away, you hear the channel change.

Drenched in sweat, I wake to static
where I supposed angels stood,
four posts wordless in their
mercy.
The halfway point is where she found her brother in the ditch all those years ago, his body twisted, his chest caved in where the truck had hit him. Only half of him was mangled, but it was the wrong half, so their mother kept the casket closed anyway.

When she turns here for the jog home, she doesn’t stop moving, but she can’t resist a moment to stare. Some mornings she shifts her weight back and forth from one leg to the other. Other days she stretches, standing on one foot then the other, bending the free leg at the knee and holding it behind her by the ankle. She might even run in place a few seconds, but she never lets herself go still.

When she looks at the leaves gathered there this morning, at the frost weighing them down, she imagines his cheek pressed against them: his warm flesh driving out the cold, bequeathing what life he had left to something that was already dead. Her mother called her morbid for thinking such things, but her mother had never had to see them. It had been Lauren who found Sammy there by the side of the road; Mom hadn’t looked upon the corpse until the moment at the funeral home when there were decisions to be made. And at that point, after not much more than a fleeting glance, she had left the room and left the rest to her daughter.

Lauren turns and starts back toward home.

All her life she has lived this town, minus the few years she spent tending to a marriage that never took root, and so the glistening pond nestled amongst the trees to her left is no balm for frayed nerves. The pasture to her right and the cattle grazing there, they are no reminder of a simpler age. And the horse paddocks, where she once watched her friends drive those animals over hurdle after hurdle, they offer no inspiration. She can’t remember what they looked like when they leapt, can’t imagine the wind in their manes and the look in their eyes as they dared to fly; all she can see now are the fences that keep them where they are, forever keep them where they are.

“If you hate it so much,” Mom keeps telling her, “then why don’t you leave?”
Lauren raises her wrist toward her face and the screen on her watch lights up to tell her how hard her heart is beating. She knows, of course—she can feel it—but she doesn’t trust herself. She knows she’s not as impartial as the sensor pressed against her skin.

As she crests the last of the modest hills on her route, the house looms large before her. Mom is on the porch in her rocking chair, an afghan laid across her lap, looking ten years older than she is. Ten years at least.

When she reaches the front steps, she holds onto the handrail and doubles over. Checking her watch, she realizes she’s attacked the second half of her run with a bit too much vigor and perhaps too much vim; she made great time, but she wasn’t ready. Tomorrow, she realizes, sucking air through her nose and nearly choking on it, she may need to take the day off.

On the porch, Mom scoffs, mumbling something about the path out back, the bike trail the town has paved atop its old train tracks.

“Too flat,” she tells her mother, still panting, though strong enough to stand upright now. “Not enough of a challenge.”

Mom shakes her head as Lauren mounts the steps. “Breathing is a challenge,” she says. “That’s not enough for you?”

Mom sits outside while Lauren is making breakfast, and though Lauren can see her shuddering harder every time she takes a peek through the kitchen window, though she wanted to tell her mother “You’ll catch your death of cold” when the old woman insisted staying out for a few minutes more, she doesn’t say anything. Lauren knows well enough to pick her battles.

At the kitchen table, over eggs and Canadian bacon, Mom wonders about pancakes. “Did I never teach you how to make them?” she asks.

“Reunion’s on Saturday night,” Lauren tells her. “I need to fit into my dress.”

“Fit schmit,” says Mom. “You could wear a potato sack and you’d still be the one to go home with.”

“Mom,” says Lauren, rolling her eyes. “It’s been twenty years. Most of the people there went home with someone ages ago. And certainly those worth—”

“Picky,” says Mom, cutting her off. “Always picky.”
“Not always,” says Lauren, rubbing her thumb along the underside of her ring finger, an old habit that’s dying hard.

The truck hit Sammy the day before Lauren’s prom. There’d been a small fire at the school, the pungent stink of rubber filling the halls, and everyone was dismissed. Sammy caught a ride to a buddy’s house for a few hands of Magic cards, but a few hands turned into staying for dinner and an angry phone call from Mom and the decision that Sammy, the “most inconsiderate son in the world,” would walk home when he was done.

Lauren was sitting in her room that night when her mother knocked on her door. She was in her underwear, at the foot of her bed, staring at the dress hanging in her closet, at the zipper in particular. When her mother knocked a second time, Lauren had to brush a tear away before she could manage the words “Come in.”

Mom opened the door and had begun to speak before she noticed the state of Lauren. She averted her eyes and said, “You could’ve taken a moment to get dressed.”

“It sounded urgent,” said Lauren, looking down now at her stomach, at her thighs, searching for something to blame.

“Your brother’s not home yet,” said Mom.

“You did yell wicked loud,” said Lauren, standing up and crossing to her dresser, knowing already what was going to be asked of her.

“Could you go out and see if you can track him down?”

Lauren pulled open her drawer of t-shirts. “Where was he at?”

“Kevin’s,” said Mom. “Just down 27.”

“Okay,” said Lauren, pulling on the baggy Incesticide shirt her boyfriend had left the last time he’d snuck in.

“It’s just that I don’t think he’d take a ride from me right now.”

“I’ll find him,” said Lauren, stepping into a pair of sweats.

And find him she did. She found him then like she finds the dress now: in the dark, forgotten and cast aside.

She pulls the dress from the back of the closet and into the light, surprised she remembered to put it back in its bag way back when. The funeral was one day, graduation the next, and her break-up the day after that. The guy said he understood why she’d bailed on prom, and maybe he did, but he said it with a hunger in his eyes. A hunger to heal her maybe, but a hunger nevertheless, and she couldn’t stand to be looked
at like that. She couldn’t stand to think of her pain as something to be devoured, to imagine him chewing away at her anguish until he found something worth saving at the center.

Mom is knocking again. Lauren invites her in. 
Mom asks: “You’re going to wear that?”
“I thought it would be funny,” says Lauren.
“You’re trying to be funny?” says Mom, shaking her head. “I thought you were trying to get laid.”
“Mom!”
Mom shudders for a moment, and Lauren extends a hand to steady her, but she just shoos Lauren off. She grabs hold of the door knob and closes her eyes until she is still.

“Mom?”
The old woman opens her eyes and forces a smile. “I can be at Elaine’s,” she says, “if you’d like the house to yourself.”
“Mom,” says Lauren, “that’s not why I’m—”
“It should be,” says Mom as she turns on the spot and starts back down the hall, her hand on the chair rail the whole way.

When she pulls into the restaurant’s parking lot, the party is already in full swing. The smokers have congregated around the side of the building, in front of the plate glass window for some shop that has its lights off—a dry cleaner maybe, but she doesn’t get close enough to check—and a few of them offer waves and smiles; one shouts “Hey!” but stops short when he can’t remember her name.

Inside, the bar is surrounded by kids she’s known since she was five, but who she hasn’t seen, for the most part, since they were throwing their tasseled caps into the air. They’re exchanging tiny paper tickets with the harried bartenders, the kind they used to sell at football games to raffle off VCRs and CD boxed sets. It occurs to Lauren that she’s paid in advance for a couple of these herself, and that she should probably drink before she goes any further.

The man with the wheel of tickets was their class president, and time has treated him well. The gray that flecks his hair now serves only to bolster the air of confidence he scarfed about him in those days gone by. He greets her with a warm smile and a hug, her name ready on his lips from the moment he saw her across the room. Every name seems to be ready on his lips, she realizes as she takes her tickets and makes way

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for the next in line, but that doesn’t diminish her affection for him in this moment; it simply confirms that they all made at least one sane decision in high school. This guy was the only one for this job; she can’t even remember his name, for Christ’s sake, and she was just staring at the name tag stuck to his still impressive pecs.

A whiskey sour in each hand, Lauren makes her way into the back room where most of the commotion seems to be centered. There are hors d’oeuvres on tables pushed against the walls, a small cart of booze manned by a perky blonde who’s being ogled by grown men in backwards ball caps, and cluster upon cluster of classmates. Some have sequestered themselves amongst the same cliques they called home in the days of yore, but others have broken ranks. There’s a cheerleader chatting up a kid who never left the art room, there’s a dude who spent half of senior year doing time in detention spinning a yarn for the kid he pantsed relentlessly in the sixth grade.

“Ren’s not time’s fool,” says a guy she once had English with, “though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle’s compass come.”

Lauren hugs him, kisses him on the cheek, asks, “Does Shakespeare get you much play, Ian?”

He laughs. “Not with the women who can spot it.”

They chat for a while, as Lauren finishes her first drink and then her second, about everything from that one time Lauren did theater with Ian (“The children’s play!” she says, wondering what it was that year; “Hansel & Gretel,” he tells her), everything from that to who’s died from their class and when.

_Morbid_, she thinks, her mother’s words in her ears.

“Was Robin Gates our year?” she asks Ian, pretty sure Robin wasn’t, but not ready to let the conversation go. She’s looked around the room a half-dozen times by now, and she’s spotted no one else worth talking to. She’s also pretty sure she’s getting drunk. Lauren eyeballs the tables of food, the supply of hors d’oeuvres nearly depleted, and she thinks to grab something before her chance is gone, but decides against it. If drunk is what she’s going to be, then drunk she will be.

“Robin? Nope,” says Ian. “Year after. Same as your—”

She watches him stop himself, watches him realize what he was about to say. Then he ducks his head and shakes it.

“It’s okay,” she tells him, squeezing his arm.

“No,” he says, stuttering. “I’m… I—”

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“It’s okay, Ian. We’ve all lost people.”
He finally looks at her again, managing a weak smile. “It’s just,” he says, “it’s just that I just did the same thing with Michael over there.”
He nods his head toward the other side of the room. “I mentioned his sister without thinking about it, that is. Only that was probably worse, since she died 2 years ago and not 20.”

“What one is Michael?” asks Lauren.
Ian points him out, and the bearded fellow in the tweed coat is so far removed from the mopey kid who meandered past her house on his paper route that she’d thought him someone’s husband on first glance. He’s holding court with a couple of guys, telling a story with his hands as much as his mouth, and people on his periphery are starting to get sucked in. The cheerleader and the artist, who’d been getting rather cozy with each other over in the corner, they turn to Michael now too.

“I don’t remember him being that charismatic,” she says to Ian.

“Well,” says Ian. “He’s a professor now.”

“Of?”

Ian is saying something else now, but Lauren is focused on the two drink tickets he’s been fiddling with since they started talking. Her gaze passes between the tickets and Michael, Michael and the tickets, the tickets and—

I’ll be at Elaine’s, her mother is repeating in her head now. If you’d like the house to yourself:

“Ian,” she says, squeezing his arm again. “You going to use those?”
Ian raises an eyebrow, confused.

“Your tickets,” says Lauren, taking hold of his wrist, shaking the hand and the tickets playfully in front of his face.

“Oh,” says Ian. “No. But haven’t you, like, haven’t you had enough?”
“Not for what I have in mind,” she says, plucking the tickets from his hand and heading for the perky blonde at the drink cart.

“What do you have in mind?” says Ian.

“Drink, sir,” she says, patting his cheek, “is a great provoker.”

“And what are you hoping it will provoke?”

“Lechery, sir. Lechery.”

“But lechery,” says Ian, as she collects her drinks, “it provokes and it unprovokes. Remember?”
“For men maybe,” she says, downing the first drink in one hard swallow.

“And, besides,” says Ian, “lechery with who?”

“Who do you think?” she says, downing the second drink and handing both empty glasses to Ian.

“But I’ve told you,” he seems to be saying, but what he’s told her is something she didn’t hear before, something she doesn’t hear this time either.

The crowd has thinned out around him by the time she gets there, so Lauren is free to make whatever move she wants. But she can’t decide if he’s a hugger, and he has his hands in his pockets besides, so she simply gets close enough that he might hear her through the din, and she leans in to check his name tag (something she’s seen countless people do tonight as a way of getting things going).


“Hey, Lauren,” he says with a smile.

She’s pretty sure he didn’t look to her chest for her name, and she’s suddenly sad that, even if he did remember her name, he didn’t use the logistics of the event as an excuse to take a free peek. She’s also not sure why she said his name four times, and she’s about to walk away when he speaks again.

“How you been?” he says.

She puts a hand on his arm as she says, “You’re so sweet to ask,” and then, feeling just the slightest hint of muscle on an arm where she expected to find none, she adds, “My god, you’re hot.”

Lauren cannot understand why she’s said it, but he laughs, and that seems a good enough reason to say it again. “No, seriously,” she says, waving a finger around and nodding in the direction of everyone else. “You’re the hottest guy in this room.”

Michael looks down, still grinning, but blushing now too.

She draws closer, lowering her voice as she leans in. “No,” she says, cupping her hand over his ear. “Seriously. Don’t be embarrassed.”

“I’m not, Lauren,” is what he says, looking at her again, a kind look in his eyes, the kind of look she hopes he will give her when they’re back at her place and she’s on top of him.

She hopes she has not just said that out loud.

“It’s just,” he says, but she doesn’t let him finish.
“What?” she says. “Are you—are you gay? I thought that was your cousin.”

“That was my cousin,” he says. “Two of them, actually. Me, I’m—”

She puts a finger to his lips and then holds her free hand to his chest. “The hottest guy in the room,” she says. “That’s what you are.”

“Lauren,” he says, “how much have you—?”

“No one’s asked me,” she says, drawing closer to him, a hand on both arms now and both hands squeezing. “No one’s asked me why I’m wearing this dress. No one remembers. No one remembers, Michael. But you—”

“Your brother,” he says.

“See!” she says, walking a pair of fingers up his tie, from his chest to his chin, the fingers like the legs of the itsy bitsy spider they imagined when they were kids. “See,” she says, “I knew you knew.”

Behind her, she suddenly feels a hand on her shoulder, a thick, meaty hand.

“Lauren,” says Ian. “Come on.”

“What?” says Lauren, shrugging Ian’s hand off her shoulder. “I haven’t even asked him yet.”

“Lauren,” says Ian.

“Asked me what?” says Michael.

“If you’ll come home with me,” says Lauren. “My mother’s gone. I have the house to—”

“Lauren,” says Ian. “He’s married!”

Lauren stares into Michael’s eyes, hoping they’ll tell her the truth she’d rather hear. But eyes can’t speak, she knows. She knows that, even through the fog that’s lifting now, lifting faster than it ever has before. She lets go of the arm she still has hold of, pulls her other hand from his face, and stands there before him, waiting to be judged. She looks around her, searching for other judges, other verdicts about her being cast down from on high, but no one else is paying her any attention at all.

“I’m sorry,” says Michael.

“Sorry for being married?” says Lauren, hating the still-playful tone in her voice, hating the corner of her lip that twitches ever so slightly upward as she speaks this terrible line, hating too the eyebrow that arches in invitation.

“No,” he starts to say, but she cuts him off.
“Because if you’re sorry about that,” she begins, wishing she would shut up but unable to stop the words from spilling out of her, “if you’re sorry about that, the offer still stands.”

“Lauren,” says Ian, his hand on her shoulder again, now with a firmer grip. “Let me take you home.”

“You’re married too,” she says as she turns on him. She gives him a raspberry, her spit showering his un-expectant face. And then, finally, she storms out.

Her shoes in hand, she walks in stocking feet through the center of town toward home. It is cold, sobering. She smiles at that thought, at her second great pun of the night, but then she is crying. It isn’t until the river of tears and mascara and snot finally trickles into her mouth that she stops. She gags, coughing for a moment, and she stumbles into the shrubbery at the back of the old Quick Mart’s parking lot. It’s closed now, so there’s no one to laugh at her, and that makes the decision to sit so much easier. Sure, she’s almost home, but she’s not sure that’s where she belongs. At least not yet.

Lauren stares for a long time at the back door of the place, trying to remember a story from her high school days. There was a robbery here, she remembers, and the kids jockeying the register claimed someone had attacked them from the bushes during a smoke break. But then it turned out they did the deed themselves, one of them shooting the other so they could make off with the pittance that was in the safe.

At least she thinks that’s how it went. She’s not sure she trusts her memory right now. Or any other part of herself, for that matter.

A few cars pass, one or two even making the turn on 27 that she was about to make, the turn that would take her home. And suddenly it occurs to her that if Michael wandered by her house delivering papers back in the day, that maybe that meant Michael lived nearby. And that maybe meant that he was staying with his parents while he was home for the reunion. Lauren stands up. She can’t sit here. What if he passes by? She tugs at the hemline of her dress, slaps at her ass to brush the dust away, and is just about to get going when she hears footsteps coming up the hill out of the center. Footsteps and a voice.

“I guess we had the same idea,” says Michael before she can get away.
Lauren wipes at her face, trying to clean it up before he can see her properly, but she can feel the make-up smearing as she does, and she realizes it’s useless.

He stops a few feet from her and offers a kind smile. “Can I walk you home?” he asks.

All she can manage is a nod.

They walk for a minute without saying anything else at all. Then Michael says, “When my sister died a couple of years ago, I thought of you.”

Lauren thinks it an awkward comment, but appreciates his attempt to find common ground. Dead siblings are as good a topic as any for small talk, right?

“I was a mess,” he says. “And I thought about how you got through all of senior week—graduation, and the banquet, and prom—”

“I didn’t go to prom,” says Lauren.

“I know,” says Michael. “Or, well, I know now. Ian told me. But I thought you had. That’s how strong I thought you were.”

“You give me too much credit,” says Lauren.

“I looked you up on Facebook once,” says Michael, “saw that you looked happy, that you were married—”

“Divorced now,” she tells him, correcting him.

He turns and gives her another smile. “And you survived that, too,” he says.

A car passes, headed toward the center, its high beams blinding them as it comes round the bend. And so they stop for a moment, shielding their eyes with an arm a piece. When the light is gone, Lauren lowers her arm and sees her house ahead on the corner.

“You inspired me,” says Michael. “I guess that’s what I’m trying to say.”

“Because I’m a survivor?” asks Lauren, stepping ahead, eager to get home so she can get back to crying, now that he’s given her tear ducts fresh ammunition.

“Yeah,” says Michael. “I figured: if you could get through all of that as a teenager, then through the rest of it as an adult, then maybe I could suck it up and deal too.”

They’re at the fence that circles her house now, her fingers playing with the latch on the gate.

“I’m sorry,” says Michael.
“For being married?” says Lauren.

He chuckles. “No, I’m sorry for rambling. I thought I could make you feel better. With my story, I mean.”

“I’m happy to have survived,” she says, unlatching the gate and stepping into her yard. “But that’s all I’ve ever done, Michael. That’s all I’ve ever done.”

There is snow on the ground when she wakes for her morning run after a few uneasy hours of sleep, but she gets dressed anyway, finds her pedometer on the nightstand amongst empty water bottles and a near-empty bottle of ibuprofen, and then heads downstairs.

Her mother protests, rattles off the list of excuses Lauren has to stay inside this morning, but she plugs her earbuds into her ears, waves goodbye, and gets on her way.

At the spot where her brother died, she does as she usually does and jogs in place long enough to imagine him there in the ditch. But then something changes. She catches a glimpse of what she’s left behind her—a trail of sneaker prints in the snow—and she can’t bear to look at them. So, this morning she doesn’t turn around; she keeps running. Maybe, she thinks, if she’s careful, she’ll never have to stop.
DOROTHY
BRIT SHIPMAN

her voice
is a haunting voice.
“i’ll see you in a while,”
she says, her gentle fingers
tracing circles onto the curves
of my misshapen spine.
we talk of unwritten songs,
ambiguous thoughts,
and rich gelato melting on our tongues.
she asks to borrow my sweater,
and before she closes the door,
i tell her, “you will always wear it better.”
her voice
is a haunting voice,
and i could listen for hours.
EXCERPTS FROM A BOOK I’LL NEVER WRITE
ANNALISE ERRICO

Pg. 152
You didn’t kiss me.

Pg. 99
Lone wolf.
That’s what you called yourself;
I called bullshit.

Pg. 220
There is no better sound
than my name
with your lips wrapped around it.

Pg. 300
You left me.
You left me.

Pg. 123
My hand was so clammy,
you pulled your sweatshirt over your palm.
I gave you a shy smile,
you could barely quirk your lips in response.

Pg. 257
“I didn’t give up on you.”
“Yes, you did.”
I screamed it,
so loud the sky shivered,
and you just walked away.

Pg. 134
“Were you ever aware of me?”
“No.”

“I want you back.”
“Tę want me back too.”

You wouldn’t kiss me in front of your friends.

I love you,
and I think you love me.

“Are you embarrassed of me?”

I was under the covers, you were over them.
Our elbows kept knocking.

I saw you sitting there;
I worked up the courage to introduce myself.

This doesn’t count as a relationship.

You never did say that you loved me.