THE PROMETHEAN

THE LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL
OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY-PORTLAND

Rust and Stardust

2012/2013 ISSUE
My car is limping, Dolores Haze,
And the last long lap is the hardest,
And I shall be dumped where the weed decays,
And the rest is rust and stardust.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
"And the Rest is Rust and Stardust"

Calvin: If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night, I'll bet they'd live a lot differently.
Hobbes: How so?
Calvin: Well, when you look into infinity, you realize that there are more important things than what people do all day.

--Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes

This year The Promethean staff wanted a theme that would inspire people to look up at the stars and feel the power of the universe. After four weeks of discussion we decided that Rust and Stardust would bring a variety of submissions inspired by the infinite creativity the universe lends us. To our delight, this proved true, and we are very pleased with the journal this year.

The Promethean seeks to encourage a variety of entries from all sorts of people, and that is exactly what we got. We received many delightful pieces from a variety of writers, ranging from English majors, to Biology and Psychology majors, to incredibly talented community members. Here you will find the ones that made the cut. These are the poems, stories, and photos that inspired discussion, and at times, left us speechless.

The creation of this journal takes a dedicated group of people. This could not have been done without all of our student editors, faculty, staff support, and of course, all of our magnificent contributors.

This issue is near and dear to my heart as this is my final year at Concordia. My three years on the staff, one as Managing Editor, have deeply inspired me, increased my love of literature, and given me a sense of belonging. I will greatly miss being a part of the staff that composes the annual medley of Concordia's creative community. Therefore, it is with deep satisfaction that I, and The Promethean staff, present this year's Rust and Stardust issue to you.

Ciara Laing, Managing Editor
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Technicolor

McKenna Rinta

In the dim room we watched the slides
Colored rose and golden from the eternal sunshine trapped inside
Over the clicking and humming of the machine
The cousins argued over Dewey-Who?
And Who-belongs-to-that-pink-sock?
Questions never answered over the white noise of long-lost memories

These candid snapshots show the times
When small parts of you were alive
Somewhere in the bones
Of distant relatives
Somewhere in the minds
Of confused in-laws

Mischievous young men
Now your rowdy great-uncles
Lounged lazily on the grass
In Fourth of July parks
Sipping lemonade
Watching their lives run past them, over the dusty gravel

Women fussed over the children, Tupperware
And rose bushes, as they still do
Haunted by their own restlessness
Their youth held on tightly to the roots of their perms
Afraid to let go and be left behind
In this frozen world of dust motes and sunlight

Poppy

Jamie Dugas

Jennifer pushed her neon yellow hair behind her ears and sobbed behind the stacks in the library. Miraculously, Mrs. French or Mrs. Hobbs had not heard Jennifer as she went about her sobbing deep in the Russian novel section of the library. Jennifer stroked her hand over her greasy hair, noticing that her fingernails were dry, caked, and crusty from pottery class. She could hear the soft thrum of students and the incessant beep beep as they checked out library books.

One of these students was Edgar Brandywine. His long, pencil thin fingers brushed over the spines of Maxim Gorky, Yury Olesha, Leo Tolstoy, and, Edgar's favorite, Nikolai Gogol. After a few minutes of contemplation, Edgar selected the following: The Government Inspector, War and Peace, and lastly, The Life of a Useless Man. Edgar grazed the top of Jennifer's head as he reached for The Life of a Useless Man. The loud crash of the book falling into Edgar's waiting hands momentarily distracted Jennifer from her grief. Edgar held each book close to his chest, as if he were holding bars of gold. He nodded to the girl with the obnoxious yellow hair and mascara-smeared face and walked to the front desk. Edgar struck up a conversation with Mrs. French as she checked out his books. Mrs. French, who knew Edgar well, scanned his tarnished library card against the scanner. Her normally smooth glassy expression turned cloudy as she glanced at the screen. Edgar grew distracted by Mrs. French's extra-long red nails clicking the keys and by the soft sobs of the girl with the yellow hair. Mrs. French saw that Edgar had a fine, a large one. For any other student, Mrs. French would prohibit the checking out of new books; she would write a library fine slip, and send the student on his or her way. But Edgar was special. She quickly wrote up an extension and smiled warmly at this fresh young face with coke bottle glasses.

Just as Edgar was leaving, both the librarian and the boy heard a terrible strangling sound. Mrs. French whipped her head
around to see young Judy Ellis at the copying machine. Today was Judy's first day working at the library. Judy was a mess. The beautiful braid in which she had tied up her hair was growing sloppy; tears were stinging her eyes. All the lights and buttons on the copying machine were blinking, and a massive pile of papers, like snowfall, was gathering at Judy's sandaled feet. "Oh Judy, what in Heaven's name?" Mrs. French said with an obvious tremor of annoyance in her voice.

"Goodbye Mrs. French!" Edgar said quickly; he wanted to start reading. Mrs. French hardly noticed Edgar leave as she bent over the frazzled contraption. Judy ran her fingers through her hair and pranced around with terror etched on her face.

The continuing purr of the copying machine further lulled Poppy Jones into a deep sleep. Her head rested on The Fundamentals of Animal Science, her glasses slowly slipping off the bridge of her nose. Poppy's table was scattered with paper, textbooks, and a selection of empty food containers. Every once in a while, Poppy's lip quivered or her eye twitched violently. Her glasses had now fallen over the side of the table.

The yellow and purple horse was frothing at the mouth. Dr. Hotchkiss glared and screamed in Poppy's face. "How much Adequan did you give him?" Poppy fell into the mud pit, her arms and legs entangled in mud and quicksand. Next to the mud pit, Michael Jackson was belting out "Billie Jean." Jennifer came over on a pure white unicorn and taunted Poppy. "Yes, how much Adequan did you give him?" Jennifer's neon yellow hair was stringy with grape shampoo. Buzz Buzz Buzz Poppy was surrounded by killer bees. The buzzing was louder and louder, "How much Adequan did you give him? Your horse is dying!"

"Poppy! Wake up! Poppy!" Poppy stumbled around for a moment; the buzzing was not the sound of killer bees; it came from a defunct copying machine. Somehow Poppy had sleepwalked all the way behind the library desk, bumping against the copying machine. Poppy looked into the face of her friend Judy. "Where is my horse?" Poppy asked, searching her face for her glasses. Judy could not help but laugh at Poppy's absurdity. Her small birdlike hands quickly covered her mouth to suppress any obnoxious laughter. "Oh Poppy, I think you were dreaming." The two girls stood in a landscape of white, as the copying machine's papers blanketed the floor. Poppy looked around, dazed and confused. She could not find her glasses or any of her personal belongings. Gently, Judy led Poppy back to her table and helped her back into her chair. "Is my horse OK, Judy?"

Poppy asked frantically scanning her eyes across her disorganized space. "I think you were having a nightmare, I'm sure your horse is fine." As Poppy resettled herself, Judy shuffled back towards her workstation. She had begun to think that Mrs. French thought hiring her was a mistake. As Judy carefully gathered her hair to re-braid it, she heard the distinct sound of ripping paper.

"Judy! Please come back to the front desk." Mrs. French's voice snapped like a rubberband on a wrist. Judy quickly forgot the sound and rushed behind the desk. She was determined to prove Mrs. French wrong. Other people had heard the strange sound too. Jennifer was still in the Russian novel section; she was strangely quiet and calm. The ripping sound came from the Agriculture section. Out of curiosity, Jennifer ventured from her spot to investigate. On her way, Jennifer froze as she noticed her ex-friend Poppy perched on the edge of her seat. Jennifer grew boiling hot then ice cold. She had hoped she wouldn't have to see Poppy ever again.

Oblivious to the soft chattering and movement in the library, Dan continued to rip his history paper. He was sitting comfortably on the floor of the Agriculture section surrounded by jagged strips of white soaked in red. Dan wanted to rip up the giant red F at the top of his paper first. Dan's precise sweeping movements effectively ripped up each comment scrawled in red. The back of Dan's head was resting on Crisis and Opportunity: Sustainability In American Agriculture.

A shrill cry forced Dan out of his reverie; a half ripped strip of his paper fell from Dan's shaky hand. "You killed my horse! You made me give the wrong amount of medicine! I think you and Dr. Hotchkiss were conspiring and Michael Jackson too!" Poppy had stood up from her seat, the textbook she had been reading crashing to the floor. Poppy looked exhausted and truly mad. Poppy's eyes bore into Jennifer, who stood like a statue near Poppy's table. "I have no idea what you are talking about." Jennifer said flatly.
“And you got the unicorn, you had the unicorn,” Poppy spluttered as she sunk to the ground, tears building and rolling down her cheeks. Everyone behind the desk, including Judy, stood transfixed watching the scene.

“Everyone! The library will be closing in fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes!” Mrs. French declared through the library’s intercom. “Well, it's been a crazy first day.” Judy quipped under her breath. “It's also your last day,” Mrs. French retorted, her mouth frothing with spittle. “Pick up the mess you made and get out of here.”

As Judy ashamedly gathered up the numerous sheets of paper, a soft grin lingered on Dan's face. After the brief distraction, Dan had successfully torn his history midterm into a neat pile. His hands cupped the strips—each white and red strip looked like abstract art.

While Poppy recovered from her meltdown, she watched her friend Judy exit the library. Judy’s braid had fallen apart again and her face was beet red. Poppy stuffed her things in her backpack and hurried to catch up with her friend.

On the way out, Poppy pushed Jennifer to the floor. Jennifer’s small figure hit the rough carpet. As she prepared for the fall her eyes locked with a guy’s eyes across the library. Jennifer noticed the heavyset guy had a pyramid of red and white papers next to him. He must be an artist too, Jennifer thought to herself as her clay covered hands brushed the fibers of the carpet.

Mrs. Hobbs waddled over to the metal gate and proceeded to lock up. Her black beady eyes sunk into her doughy face as she grabbed the metal handle. “Wait for us!” a voice cried out; Mrs. Hobbs snapped around to see where the cry had come from. Two teenagers, a girl clutching Introduction to Veterinary Science and a young man carrying a plastic baggy filled with white and red paper refuse walked out, arm in arm.
Remember

Louisa Borecki

The routine was comfortable. It was killing me, but oh so comfortably. I wouldn't weigh myself. Ever. I knew I had surpassed the 250-pound mark months ago, but wouldn't stand on that scale to prove it. Some things you just don't need proof of. I had just got my driver's license so I drove everywhere. I drove to Fred Meyer for an apple pie- a whole one. Then I stopped at Silver Dragon to order spicy orange chicken for six. I ate it at the park- the left corner behind the skate park so nobody would see me. I ate it all there. Then I'd drive to Ross to buy new shirts, new pants, and more sweatpants that I felt made me look thinner and sporty.

I never remembered. Each morning I woke up to sticky notes plastered along my wall, my mirror, and my bed stand. REMEMBER each of them reminded me.
REMEmber that nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.
REMEmber that if you find yourself disgusting, so will everyone else.
REMEmber to exercise an hour a day.
REMEmber that you promised yourself to lose fifty pounds.
REMEmber REMEmber REMEmber

But I never remembered. I never remembered any of it because none of it was worth remembering. Nobody wants to remember to hate herself a little longer, just a little bit more. Forgetting is the best gift our memories give us. We forget the hatred, the arguments and that time you heard your teacher call you fat.

So I made a new list of remembers. A list of REMEMBERS to paint, to sing, and to find new friends. Was I happier? No. But I was just a little bit less unhappy.

Here's a list of things to remember:
Remember that the world is yours for the taking, but there are a million others who are told the same thing.
Don't be cruel. It'll break your heart more than it breaks theirs.

Remember that skinny jeans don't make you skinny- but don't give a fuck either way.
Don't forget to love food and the ones that you're with, because at the end of the day- they were the ones that showed up.
Remember that nothing is sweeter than honey; and nothing more worthless than money.
Remember to cry once in a while, it's the only way to let the demons out.
And at the end of the day remember to pray to god or the universe, or whatever you may- because there's something out there something bigger and wiser who keeps you afloat, tucks you into your bed, kisses your head, and says,

"Tomorrow. Tomorrow, you'll remember."
Green-Front Spirits

Regina Maug

He labored by day
And returned home at night,
With a detour along the way.

He enters the store,
One amongst many.
His step is purposeful, his voice strong.

He spares no glance
For the myriad of products,
But asks for the usual.

I reach for the bottles
That contain his poison of choice.
This happens each day.

The months fly by, transient.
His hands begin to tremble.
His eyes have a glaze.

He points to his usual,
And when I speak,
He mutters in response.

Still more time passes,
The deterioration continues.
His eyes look, but do not see.

He shuffles my way.
His lips part to convey words,
But he can no longer speak.

The seasons roll by.
The bottles remain on the shelf.
I see him no more.

Hopeless © Monica Logan
Ribbons

Ciara Laing

Ribbon, piles of ribbon
Fill my stomach
If I take the toothbrush
Or my finger
Or any skinny,
Long object
And stick
It down my throat
Hit my uvula
I'll trigger
That gag reflex
Retching reaction

And the ribbon will flow
Freely from my stomach
Up my esophagus
Caressing my tongue
And out the gaping
Hole

Like magic
You'll gaze
As my belly
Deflates

Only a pile
Of pink
And white
Ribbons on the floor

Take Flight © Katie Wartell
Free

Kayla Suvak

Let me jump out of planes
And off of mountains
Let me fall into the abyss
Of the unknown

Let me dance with the stars
Of countless constellations
Let me twirl in the circles
Of the wind

Let me laugh with the thunder
As it echoes the lightning
Let me cry with the snow
As it builds you up

Let me be the one
You're desperately reaching
Let me be the dream
That flirts with your mind

Let me be all
That you need
Let me be all
That you love

It's a Kid's World

Gabriela Fora

Little kids are so weird. They make weird noises, play in dirt, don't like to take naps or go to bed, and make messes out of everything. When I was younger this would be what perfectly described me, well, I guess to a certain degree it still does. I get to relive these eccentricities every once and a while when I go babysitting. Usually I arrive to an understandably cluttered house sprinkled with cookie crumbs and random stuffed animals sprawled on the carpet. Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, Cars, Lion King, Aladdin, or any one of the other genius Disney creations is always playing on the big-screen TV. It's always mid-movie, the epic climax when the plot is finally heating up, but the viewer is nowhere to be seen, most likely already bored and off playing somewhere new and exciting.

When imagination is endless and time is without limit, having imaginary friends in alternate universes is the norm. Games are created on a whim and new identities are assumed and believed as absolute truth. Children become spies, chefs, mailmen, firefighters, doctors, demons, and professional athletes to every sport known to man, as well as those that only exist within the mind's eye. These alter egos are very much a part of who they are, yet they are quick to forgo one when a better one is discovered. There are no limits to whom or what one can transform into either: even dogs and cats are perfectly acceptable alternatives to humanity.

As kids mature and get older they relinquish their titles of kings and queens and instead take to the streets, wanting to be a part of the real action. They play games such as dodge ball, four square, hopscotch, hula hoops, tag, Frisbee, hide-and-seek, and capture the flag; using scooters, skateboards, jump ropes, trampolines and any other contraption that spins, rolls, bounces or has springs. These days we still play these games, versions of, those games, but have distorted the innocence into something that better suits our current interests. Instead of a simple game of hide-and-seek, there is the game of fugitive, where the only rule is there are no rules, while regular tag is
replaced with zombie tag or sardines, where a group of people hides in discreet places in huge stores like Target or Ikea.

Variances in games and toys are typical from kid to kid, but regardless of age and gender food remains a common denominator, though the kinds and combinations are subject to change. While Green Eggs and Ham may sound exclusively like the title of a Dr. Seuss book, I'd be willing to bet that it has made the dinner table for a young child more than once. While I was never compelled to try that colorful eggy creation, I have made my own masterpieces over the years myself (though some of these I still find amazingly delicious): toast dipped in hot cocoa, pizza in Pepsi, dill pickles inside grilled cheese, Ketchup-only sandwiches, corn and mashed potatoes, peanut butter and banana sandwiches, French fries and soft-serve ice cream, jelly topped on cereal, and chicken in maple syrup. Foods that, according to common sense, should in no way be eaten together, but strangely lend the palette to unthinkable strokes of genius.

Maybe it's because kids are more open to trying new things, to be daring and different. But if these games and combinations of foods actually mean something, like Freud would probably suggest, then I'm not exactly sure I'd want to know what they say about me.

Testify

Katie Wartell

Under the dingy fluorescent lights, a hole in the cement wall.
Tape recorder on, you may proceed.

Look at me.
Look me in the face and tell me you didn't do it.
That you didn't slam her head against the floor and then into the oven.
You lied to her face that you'd do anything for her, then screwed that whore right around the corner.

You beat the shit out of her.
Told her that she was nothing without you.
Venom ran through her veins.
As you dragged her body down the stairs, spit in her face.

Did you feed her violent words and cold-blooded threats when you slapped her across the face and called her "bitch"?
Or threw her out of the car while it was still running
And sped off into the rain?

She doesn't love the way you lie.
You made her cry and now she is six feet under.
You put me in the worst place.
In-between and then you threw me off her.

Smashed me into the wall.
Struggled to the phone.
Punched the numbers in.
Watched her lifeless body fall flat.
"9-1-1, report your emergency."
This is your guy.
A guilty fabricator.
You can't bring her back!
She ain't the cat in the hat.
You killed her soul.

Stop the tape.

---

**November**

**McKenna Rinta**

"I was young once like you," said one puddle to another. "I used to be but a dribble."

The smaller puddle felt dismayed. He had survived a
rainstorm and was growing slowly as the rainy season went on. The
rolling thunder had shaken him down to his depths, causing his
surface to shiver. Dark nights had left him cold and frightened. But
still it rained, and the puddle grew.

"I will be like you one day," said the smaller puddle. A ray of
sun fell on the larger puddle and it smiled.

It began to rain once more. The heavy drops spread rings
like little grimaces across the faces of the two puddles. And they
grew steadily, side by side. They swelled and overflowed, joining
together. When the rain stopped they shared the icy blue of the cold
November sky.

"We are one in the same," said the old puddle.

They slowly receded back into their own lazy shapes. Big
leaves began to fall onto them, sailing for a while on the mirrored
sky before sinking. Flocks of geese sent sharp shadows across the
puddles. Robins swooped down to wet their feet.

As the winter drew near and the ice began to creep, first onto
the damp, cold leaves and then ever so slowly into the water, the little
puddles lay dreaming of the life they had seen and the big things they
had done.
Lyrics.
They are everywhere.
They fill your head when you remain silent.
They give you strength when you are weak.
They calm you when you are frustrated.
They blind you from what is the truth,
swallowing you into their own world.

Lyrics consume me.
Lyrics consume us.
Lyrics will promise to give us something to say.
They create a voice in our head.
This voice feeds the subconscious as we remain unaware.
It may not be what you think but it will sure be damn close.

Lyrics hook you. Lyrics hook me.
Stuck on repeat over and over the words sink in.
I become lyrics.
I am lyrics of a song.
I am what I was told to become.
We all transform to what we are to become.

“Help I have done it again. I have been here many times before. Hurt myself again today. And the worst part is that there is no one else to blame. Be my friend, hold me. Wrap me up, unfold me. I am small, I’m needy. Warm me up and breathe me.” ~Sia

As the music creates, we are beings that are overwhelmed with the message left for us. We become haunted as we allow our minds to drift into the world of what we think is known. We try to escape what holds us to this life but we get sucked in. By the second verse we are bound to the imagination of what we believe reality to be.
No escape for me.
None for you.
We have become consumed as we consume.
Stuck in the repeating chorus of society.

A Honeymaker's Heart

Allison Woodruff

I itch with words.
They are unsettled within me,
A restless swarm of bumble bees
That need a place to call home;
A piece of paper is the closest to a tree
That I can provide.
I want to open my mouth and let them fly
Yellow, black, fuzzy, sting
The beautiful glisten of a kaleidoscope wing,
The metronome tick of a honeymaker's heart.
They are all buzzing, pushing, soaring
In circles and cartwheels
They will drive me crazy with stars in my eyes
If I do not let them eat my pencil, smudge
Themselves in graphite
And go free; sticky-sweet tumbles of leaves.
Platform 4

Louisa Borecki

I spit on the ground and switch my cigarette to my left hand so I can rewarm the right. I’m waiting for Deanna to return from the bathroom. There are a hundred people on this platform but you could spot her from Australia. A sea of lanky Italians in skinny jeans and knee boots part for her. Her tie-dye jammers taper at the ankle to reveal wool socks bunched up under Birkenstocks. She’s wearing three sweaters, each baggier and chunkier than the last. Even if you couldn’t see her head you would know it’s adorned with dreadlocks and a hemp headband. Some things you know without having to see them.

“Do not go into that bathroom. Someone has recently had explosive diarrhea in that bathroom.” Deanna and I should be used to the public bathroom situation by now, but they become ever more horrifying with each train station.

“Platform 5.”

“What?” I realize my cigarette has burnt down to my fingers. I stamp it out and turn to Deanna.

“We’re on the wrong platform.” Deanna looks at the train tickets. I turn to her in horror, knowing the consequences of missing this train.

“GO GO GO,” I shriek. “THIS IS NOT A DRILL. I REPEAT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”

We plow through those skinny Italian bitches and thunder down the stairs and then up again to Platform 5. By the time we find an empty chunk of cement to sit down on my sides hurt. I can still see platform 4 across the tracks. We watch as a train labeled CINQUE TERRE pulls up to it.

Before I can pick up my bag, the train sighs and soldiers on. It is our train leaving from platform 4. We had been on the right platform to begin with. I glare at Deanna with such disdain you would have thought she just ate my first-born.

“Huh . . . I guess it was platform 4 after all.” Deanna seems unperturbed.

My life flashes before my eyes. We’d have to sleep on the tracks. Deanna would be kidnapped and raped by Mafia and I would never forgive myself. I’d be tormented by her memory and lose myself in heroin. Police would find my over-dosed carcass in an alley being picked over by rabid cats.

“Next train comes in an hour.” Deanna cracks her back mid-sentence.

I shake the images of my impending demise from my mind and slump down to wait. When the train finally arrives Deanna and I push onto it with such fervor you would have thought it was the last train out of Nazi Germany.

We spend most of the ride in silence. Anticipation and silence. The last five minutes of the ride plunge into an endless darkness as the train tunnels through the mountain. This hole doesn’t seem to have an end. Finally, one glimpse of light – then a second. The train comes to a slow stop at a station on the brink of the sea, out of the rabbit hole.

We arrive to catch the last streaks of a pink sun on a green sea. My breath is taken away. Not in a fainting-southern-bell sort of a way, but the kind to remind you that there’s more beauty in the world than hate. The only way out of the rabbit hole is through it.
Fading Dreams

Anna Voronko

You lie
Your “I love yous” are not real because I can see it in your eyes.
You don’t want me just as I once wanted you.
And maybe we’re staying together just to stay together,
Because we’re afraid of finding someone else

Or because
We are afraid to fall asleep to nightmares while lying on these cold sheets alone.
As the ghosts of past emotions haunt us,
We wonder what went wrong and when did we decide that it was okay to cheat.

I wonder when “talking” became the silence,
When did we mute these feelings and how did we place our hearts in cages,
Locked these frail memories and threw away the keys so that the only other person that knows these things is...

Me...
When did these cracks begin to show?
When did this heart begin to break?
When did you poison my soul and stain it with dark melancholy and this pain?
When did this metamorphosis take place and you become my biggest fear?

My biggest fear is the sense of losing you, losing me, and losing “us”
When did “us” become a “you” and when did “us” become a “me” –

Two separate hearts, denying the fact that we’re only falling further apart,

And I am drifting North

You’re drifting North

You became so selfish, narcissistic,
Waves

Michael Black

Waves crashed on the shore. Looking back, it was easy to see why I had been moved along the line of states and highways, the veins and tendons of these United States. I was sitting under the moonlight on a beach. The weather was warm and the night was cold. I was sitting next to some suburban yuppies from Southern California; we talked a lot about love, life, losing to the system. Now we sat silent in anticipation of some other great escape.

I was 17, living life as a hollow dream. I had moved to Maui at the end of my freshman year from a place I couldn't even begin to call home. I'll tell you: It's hard growing up without a home. If they say “Home is where your heart is,” then my heart was nowhere to be found. When you never stay in a spot for long that's what happens. I spent three years here, four years there, every summer on the road. This was my surreal dream.


“We're going up the mountain” a happy-go-lucky girl answered ecstatically. It's pretty easy to lose interest when you always have something new to see. I was born in Portland, but I didn't live there much at all. I was a son of the South, of the Midwest, the Expanse; I felt like I was a soldier forced into a delicate dance. I would ride across superhighways and be quiet for a moment, only to bellow at my family with anger the next. This wasn't the easiest childhood. Thinking of what the girl responded, I pondered that the thought of going up a mountain is almost proverbial; meeting a challenge. They were overcoming a great obstacle, and for me it was just another peak that I'd seen off in the distance a hundred times over.

Suddenly my friend Luke came from the hillside. He was strumming his acoustic and singing along. Music and melody caught my ear. There is something of a prose to the melody of song, to the imperfections of someone casting out some cornerstone of their spirit for you to hear and see. Maybe it was music that saved me from discontent more than anything else. For you see, you can be a hundred places and know a thousand different people from a million backgrounds, and they could all look that one direction and appreciate song. They could appreciate the light in the dark, the candle with a subtle but tender scent. I sang along.

It was some folk song, oh so common for us to sing to. The six people from California looked at us and smiled, happy that they were in this idyllic hipster haven on Maui. It was half an hour; maybe an hour, possibly two. It felt like a day, singing our hearts out under the moon light, people lighting a bonfire next to us as we used the crashing of thunderous waves as a metronome to our tune of suburban cacophony. I felt like music was the savior and we were the apostles. That the greatest glory of all things on earth was this sound we had the audacity of being able to make, and the hope of improving. And it stopped when the sun rose.

And maybe a year passed. I moved to Seattle. I had felt some call there, some distant reverie that asked me the eternal question, “When will you be content?” I was involved in Political Organizing, in a relationship that seemed so grand and permanent; I was happy. But happiness, as so many learn in life, is not contentment. It is the blink before the tear; it is the ache before the cavity. And thus sadness overwhelmed me.

“What madness! It's such a short life; it's a pity that we all just want to move on! Never happy, always paranoid, until it's far too late!” I exclaimed this over in a variety of different sentences that all meant the same thing. But life is irony, and I found out Luke had moved to Ballard that same year. All it took was ten seconds of music and conversation to see that we were all looking outside when we needed to call out and believe in life from the inside. It was the singing that showed a truth: be truthful of your dreams. The dreams were the guide: go find your home.
The diapers. I change.

Garret Potter

I change diapers.
I change the children's diapers.

I lift them onto a cushioned table designed for said purpose,
adorned with blue disposable gloves,
and remove any clothing in the way,
until behold!
Alas,
the velcro-sealed padded body trash bag known as a diaper.

I peel it back—
each one a surprise
depending on limitless combined factors of diet, digestion, biology,
and chemistry,
like the magenta remains after beet day,
or the aqua-marine following eating artificially colored birthday cake
frosting—
each unique in consistency, color, and stench.

My job, as a preschool teacher,
is to wipe the
soil, we shall say,
off and out of the still forming unmentionable places
of these two and three year old humans
while holding my breath for as long as I can
to hurriedly deposit the wraiths,
like a ghost buster,
deep into the odor sealed storage containment diaper pail.
Then breathe a
half-fresh, half-lingering breath of
what I hope is mostly air,
distracting my gag reflexes

from launching the contents standing by in my stomach.
How both the child and I come out of this clean is no mere success,
but a small miracle.

But even there, on the changing table,
every moment is a teaching opportunity.
So, I inform the child of how poop is made,
saying: "The good food goes in up top
and the bad stuff comes out the bottom—
your bottom that is, my friend."

And they respond with infectious giggles
and clever inquiries like,
"Can I touch it?"
To which I reply,
"I, the Diaper Swiper, find germs might hurt you who peruse your
gooey poo,
so no, you cannot touch it!"
To which they respond,
"You silly Midder Garret."

And I know,
odd enough,
multiple times per day I perpetuate this.
I feed them.
I supply these fecal factories the stuff they need
to keep producing more.

And yet how could I not?
How could I help myself
with each curly or straight lock of their crowns,
each small-toothed round dimple-cheeked smile,
each mirror-image daybreak flashlight eye gleam;
how could I resist perpetuating their changes
from bottles to blocks to balls to ballet
to bikes and beyond?
Could I forget that not long ago,
I was helplessly vulnerable,
dependent on some older, wiser, more able being
I, with the spark of life
without the knowledge of how to keep fire going.

Could I forget each maternal sacrifice
or the faces of each of the people I peed on?
My fire so carefully tended,
how could I not lend mine to fuel theirs?

When I signed up for this job,
I knew that my hands would serve their turn at the changing table,
but how was I to know what would happen there?

For it was there where countless children forgot I was an employee,
forgot my name and called me "Dad,"

It was there where Weston told me that
he loved me more than a monster truck shark,
giving me the highest compliment in the known toddler universe,
ushering me to tears,
not only in an instinctive (olfactory) response to the death in his
diaper,
but also from cardiac growing-pains
(—my heart enlarging).

When I accepted this position,
I agreed to feed and nurture,
to teach and train them,
and yes, to change their diapers,
but there were no notices,
nor releases to sign,
warning how much these new to life half-lings,
these miniature humans, these my new friends,
would so greatly be changing me.

Every moment—a teaching opportunity;
they waste none,
as they lift me,
transport me into play,
replacing my distance and reservation,
with creative engagement of the now,
replacing my intimacy issues
(from false cultural faux pas)
with unconditional vulnerability (and trust),
replacing my filters and false ideas
(like dirty diapers or disposable gloves),
with pure, receiving, open palms,
like the ones
in which I supply these young scholars tools
by which they
will make
their next
changes.
Suddenly it was blowing a gale. The wind whipped through the streets as dust swirled into the air, making the branches toss and roar. I was awakened by some far away instinct, a signal that I needed to wake up. Something was wrong. I opened my eyes, shivering with fright in the freezing air. 4:30 AM. Urgh, I can never sleep at Grandpa's house! My eyes rolled as I looked around the room while a little beam flickered through the windows. Seriously? The rattle was the loose window sash, and it let the cold breeze into the room. I quickly jumped out of bed and tightened the double hung windows by adding a strip of foam tape to the top and bottom of the sashes.

After taking a sip of water to clear my mind, I settled back to my sleeping mood. My baby niece was still deeply asleep next to me. As she tossed and turned, her blanket fell on the side and her Tinker Bell shirt slid toward her angel-like face, revealing her little cupcake belly button. I called her Nu, a nickname for her chubby pinky cheeks. I wrapped the blanket back on her while still watching her sleep. Her eyelids closed against the dim light of dawn, while her peaceful and serene dreams blocked out the dangers of the outside world. Following her soft-breathing rhythm, the obnoxiousness of the wind sank into oblivion.

Visiting Grandpa's house was always my priority. I’d call him Poppa because he made popcorn from scratch. Poppa was 75 with wrinkles etching his face. His pensive eyes seemed to be lost deep in his thoughts, and his forehead’s deep creases pulled his eyebrows down as if he was focusing. Poppa always let me sleep on his bed so he could spend the night at his favorite place on earth: a working tower in the middle of his giant fishpond. Poppa's room is quiet and painted with blue, gray and white clouds. I like his room even though it is not as spacious as other rooms in the house, for a small detail on the wall in purple marker says, “Hibery love Poppa because you are beautiful with gray hair and give me more gummy bears than sister.” I burst out laughing every time I read my own loving quote for Poppa.
Ha-ha, kiddo.

Same room, same furniture, same calming incense, but this room just felt different today. Cold. Inside out. I snuggled up to Nu and slowly closed my eyes, hoping childhood memories with Poppa would comfort me into falling asleep again. I remembered the time when Poppa walked me up the muddy ladder to his working tower. I remembered the time he grilled fresh trout from his pond. I remembered the garden, cornfield, and campfire.

Tangled with thoughts, I heard somebody walking toward the room. The rough wooden door slowly creaked open. A familiar smell of minty medicated oil sneaked into the room. I was too scared to open my eyes, but at that moment my eyelids felt so heavy that I could not muster the strength to lift them up. My mouth was glued and my tongue was frozen in a silent scream. In my consciousness a single light spun faster and faster, making me shudder through my veins and out my pores. The hair on the back of my neck straightened up and my hands closed into two sturdy fists. Suddenly, I could not tell whether the gentle touch on my face was a hand or an air bubble, making my bangs move from side to side. I blindly tucked them behind my ear. Closer and closer, the coldness spread the stuffy breeze throughout the room, making my lungs crave oxygen. The freezing gush swept down my body and through my trembling feet. The creaking noises from the door slowly settled into the soft ground and a shaking low-pitched voice whispered into my left ear, “It's Poppa.”

A warm air suddenly blew in the room as I heard his familiar voice. It quickly drove away the coldness of the room and released the cranky tensions from my body. I sat straight up and saw that Nu was still asleep. I curled up instinctively in a blanket holding my little angel. My heart squeezed while tears and sweat were rolling down my face. What had just happened?

It had been six months since Poppa passed away…

Continue Checking

Anna Breithaupt

Food crosses the space
Between us.
A box of Cheerios
Is too much.
I leave it on the counter
Behind me.
Continue checking.

He talks, snickering
At his phone.
I ignore,
Looking past
Into the invisible space beyond.
Continue checking.

He asks if we sell
Beer or wine.
We do not.
I tell him “no.”
Continue checking.

The transaction concludes.
He walks, groceries in hand,
Leaving the cart behind.
Continue checking.
It All Fades

Keegan Baurer

The smoke from the burning heroin fills my car, the fumes so thick my lungs scream for fresh air. The smoke isn't nearly as bad as the odor: a burnt vinegar sort of smell that infiltrates my nostrils to the point that I can taste it. I quickly fumble for the button to roll down my window, gasping for fresh air as yellowish smoke billows out into the countryside.

It's a particularly humid summer afternoon, with unbearably bright sunlight assaulting my eyes. As if the smoke wasn't a great enough offense to my senses, my body is drenched with sweat and my damp shirt clings to me. I shift in my seat, and then wipe away the beads of sweat on my forehead with the sleeves of my shirt. My car is stationed in front of a dilapidated house in the countryside. Faded and chipped paint, boarded up windows, and a trash-littered lawn all serve as tell-tale signs of a drug den.

I choke on the toxic fumes as I scan my surroundings. This was supposed to be a routine deal, with me purchasing thirty tablets of OxyContin for three hundred dollars. In the backseat sits George, the source of the heroin haze that now tears at my throat and lungs. George is a gaunt man, and while the drugs aged him considerably, he is likely no older than twenty-five. Pock marks cover his cheeks, and a greasy mop of hair serves to conceal his sunken eyes. In his hand is a glass pipe that he continuously raises to his mouth, torching it in hopes of gleaning every last bit of tar from the utensil.

"You wanna hit, kid?" he inquires as he glances at me with glazed-over eyes. His words reveal the extent of his high, each word slurred. As I control my urge to choke from the foul odor, I violently shake my head in the negative. "Suit yourself," he proclaims before once again raising his lighter to the pipe. A few moments of awkward silence pass, so I nervously reach for my pack of Camel 99's and light one up. I take in a deep drag, slumping back in my seat as the nicotine eases my stress.

"Where the hell is Mingo?" I mutter to myself as I inhale another drag from my cigarette. As I exhale I watch the smoke bounce off of the black dashboard and then disperse into the haze that permeates the car.

George must have dozed off, for upon hearing my words he speaks abruptly, as if I had jolted him from an opium-induced dream. "What was that, kid?" Each word appears to be a struggle as George attempts to resist the urge to fade off into unconsciousness.

I glance at George in my rear-view mirror, only to notice my appearance in the process. Heavy bags rest under my eyes; I haven't slept in days and it looks like Oscar de la Hoya took a couple swings at my face. Swirling waves of anxiety crash within my oceanic irises. My face is smoothly shaven, my hair neatly cut into a sandy Blonde fade. Order even in chaos: this is typical Keegan. My Class of 2011 T-shirt, a tight fit only a few months ago, now loosely hangs over my emaciated body. My fingertips are raw and bloody from nervous biting. The tattoo on my right forearm, a microphone wearing a fitted hat, serves as a constant reminder of nights spent performing at shows and writing raps.

Another drag, then I reply, "Nothing man. Just talking to myself." My voice is shaky, a result of my dual fears of the isolated location and the still-linger ing clouds of tar that inhabit my surroundings. Even as a full-blown pill junkie, I still possess a warped sense of morality. I feel morally at ease sniffing lines of Xanax or Percocet, but the "hard drugs" scare me and I refuse to touch them. I begin to think that the actual smell of heroin isn't what is torturing me, but what the smell means. The idea that I'm dangerously close to violating my already twisted sense of right and wrong is sickening. Irony sets in as I realize that at the age of seventeen, I'm deciding which highly-addictive narcotics are okay and which are not. I manage a nervous laugh to myself and then light up another cigarette.

No sooner do I take my first drag than the passenger door swings wide open. Torn from my thoughts, I glance to my right and watch as Mingo takes a seat and closes the door. Mingo is short, five-six at most, and has compensated for this through excessive weight-lifting during his stint in prison. Tattoos from former cell-mates mark
nearly every inch of his body. Under his right eye are two teardrops and his neck features a condor with its wings outstretched. Tattooed letters adorn his knuckles, reading “Vato Loco,” the name of a gang that has taken residence in my hometown. His daughter’s portrait is illustrated in ink on his bice; her hazel eyes are sad.

Mingo is the drug connect. George was merely the middleman; he knew Mingo and arranged the meeting in exchange for a cut of the pills. On the way to the deal, George had informed me that Mingo was recently released on parole after doing a prison bid for assault with a deadly weapon.

“Yo, what the hell took so long man? I’ve been out here for an hour and this heat is killing me!” I normally keep my cool during these deals, but the weather and reeling effect of the heroin smoke has me extremely agitated. I try to lock eyes with Mingo, but the tinted shades of his sunglasses make it hard to read his face.

“Chill fool! I had to take care of some business.” The slur to his speech gives away what that business was: getting high. “You wanted three hundred’s worth, right?” He reaches into his pocket and retrieves a plastic bag containing white, round tablets; white powder coats the interior of the bag. I haven’t ingested any opiates in a few hours, and the sight of the bag intensifies my cravings to the millionth degree. My stomach feels as if I had just endured one of the vomit-inducing roller-coasters I rode during a family vacation at Disneyland. Pure agony erupts within my skull, as if all the chemicals I’ve ingested are attempting a forceful escape via my forehead.

“Yeah, three hundred for the bag.” I hand him five twenty-dollar bills and four fifties, held together by a steel paperclip. Mingo tosses me the bag and I immediately unseal it, eager to get my high going again. But as I examine my score, I immediately become suspicious. The baggie is too light and there are clearly fewer than thirty pills in front of me.

“The fuck, Mingo?” I say, my stomach in knots. “George said you were the homie, that you hook it up fat. I agreed on thirty for three hundred and there can’t be more than fifteen pills here!” I try to keep my voice level; past experiences have taught me that disrespect is the quickest way to get jumped, or worse.

“You better watch your tone, white boy. I don’t do refunds, so you can take what I gave you and fuck off. George doesn’t get a say in this, so I don’t care what he said I would give you.” He finally takes off his shades and places them in his shirt pocket. I lock eyes with Mingo, hoping to see if he was just trying to punk me, trying to see if I’d give up a hundred and fifty dollars so easy.

I spark up yet another smoke, and then respond: “Dude, you’re shorting me half of the product I am paying for. That shit’s not cool. You’re really gonna do me like that? I drove out here to the goddamn middle of nowhere to do business, and you’re gonna treat me like a bitch? What is that man?” My fear of the violent Mingo is overridden by the urge to bury my nose in white powder.

George once again snaps out of his coma-like state, wide-eyed and fearful of what’s going on. I can tell he is as surprised by this turn of events as I am; he attempts to speak, only to be scared into silence by an imposing glare from Mingo.

Mingo reaches into the pocket of his baggy cargo shorts, feeling around for something. Before I have a chance to process this, Mingo seizes the gun in his pocket and shakes its barrel into my forehead. My headache centralizes here, at the business end of the pistol; in a way, it feels like he has already pulled the trigger. My whole body tenses up, the cigarette rigidly locked between my fingers. He brandishes the gun as he states: “Listen here, punk. You’re gonna take what I offered and consider it a blessing that I don’t rob you or, better yet, blow your fucking head off.” The gun is small, probably a 38 snub nose, but it would still prove lethal enough. I can’t tear my eyes away from it: its charcoal-colored frame with a six-chamber cylinder.

I have no air in my lungs. This is my first encounter with a gun pointed at me. The feeling of helplessness is suffocating, even more so than the sweltering heat or stale smell of heroin. As I speak, I still have my eyes locked on the barrel of the gun as if I were not speaking to Mingo but to the weapon itself. “Hey man. I don’t want any trouble. S-Seriously. I’m not trying to die over some pills, just let me go. Please.”

Mingo flashes a twisted smile, revealing several mangled
teeth. “That's what I thought, bitch. Yo George, you better not let me see this clown again, or I'm gonna fuck both of you up.” George nods nervously, as if the danger of the situation had brought him back to some degree of coherency. With that, Mingo swings open the passenger door and steps out into the harsh summer sun. Strutting to the front of the car, he growls at us as he points the gun at me through the windshield: “Now get the fuck off my property!”

I turn the key, throw the car in drive, and speed down the dusty gravel road we had arrived by. My knuckles turn white from my death grip on the shifter. Even as I race down these old country roads, my mind is nearly blank. Except for the gun. All I can see in my head is the image of the gun pressed against my head.

I drop off George at his apartment and then return to my parent’s house. I spend several hours scrubbing down the inside of my car, just trying to get rid of the smell of heroin, of fear. I scrub and I scrub but I still can't escape the odor. The aroma is once again choking me, my throat closing up and making it hard to breathe. The smell is trapped in my clothes, my hair, the carpet, and the seats. I spray Windex on the windshield; the droplets of blue liquid become yellowish as they mix with the heroin residue caked on the glass. Yet, I keep cleaning the car, attending to the floor. I douse the carpet in shampoo and scrub off the muddy footprints in the passenger and back seats. While faded, the faint imprint of Mingo’s boots remains. The carpet-cleaner also helps mask the smell, creating a hybrid odor of vinegar and soap.

I see the bag of pills that started this mess, almost hidden beneath my seat. My first instinct is to throw them away, but I don’t. I hold the baggie in my hand as I roll each pill between my fingers. Instinctively, I reach for the razor blade and straw that I keep in my glove box. I reduce three of the pills into a fine white powder, then organize it into a neat line on the calculus book I had lying in the backseat. Placing my nose to the straw and the straw to the line in front of me, I inhale. Euphoria overtakes me, and the putrid smell begins to fade away.

Everything’s fine. Yeah, I had a gun in my face. But it’s not like I actually got shot or anything. Plus, at least I have some Oxy for tonight. Maybe I can sell some at a high price, and buy more tomorrow... I sniff another line, this one bigger than the last. The smell of heroin, of fear, of death. It all fades away just as quickly as it came.
Sockslam

McKenna Rinta

Boy, I remember the day you picked me up. You saw that I was being sold in bulk and you just had to have me. From the moment we met, I was just another sock to you, bought at a discount rate of ninety-five a dozen. I have wasted time, I have sat around for days and nights just waiting for you to open that drawer and pick me up. I thought it would be the best day of my life when you finally put me on. But then that day came and I started to feel like every other sock you wore to keep yourself warm.

Through wind and rain I was there for you. With every stormy night I’d lay in your bed with you, try to comfort you. You’d rip me off and throw me in the hamper and I’d wait for you. And I started to see I was nothing to you. Nothing but a piece of fabric to protect you from your cold, hard blisters. No different from all the others you picked up at the CostCo.

You think you can just wear me ‘til I’m brown, wear me when you’re bleeding, wear me out on the dusty cement when you get your papers in the morning? Papers that tell you there’s a sale on socks at the Fred Meyer down the street.

How many times are you going to put your foot inside of me without my permission? I’m tired of being used and abused until I’m worn out, ripping at the seams, unraveling, ‘til there are more holes in me than I can count. And you take that mess you made, roll me up and toss me in the trash like yesterday’s old tomatoes.

Jet stream

Angela Davis

My eyes fixate on the line forming
The line connecting
Me to you.

I’m aware of its frailty.
Slowly the soft white vapor fades
Into the blue canvas
Of you.

Where you have been
is overshadowed with
Where you are going
What was once visible in the air
Now circles at my core.

A soft white stream of promises
Spreads rumors of hope
And the sky shows no evidence
You

Were

Here.
Intelligence; or Lack Thereof

Alex Anderson

Has anyone who has lost their mind, ever found it? Is there a box hidden under the counter, away from peering eyes, marked lost and found, at the place where it seems to have gone mislaid?

I have lost my mind. If I had asked, would you have sent a search party to come collect it? All alone, in the big world without someone to look after it; it worries me, the fact that you did not.

When I recall the time it started wondering, could I be able to depend on help to retrace my steps? Seems like a reasonable thing to ask.

Since I had not noticed when my mind took day trips and left me behind (not caring for my well being) I should have cried when it went away.

I did not notice, or cry.

Apparently, it seems to have vanished and I have no logical explanation to give for its absence. It figures, that if I had taken better care of it and not wasted so much time loafing about, it might have been content to stay, indefinitely perhaps. Although perhaps not, because I was negligent- always leaving it alone.

When you call, it returns, like a wayward dog to its faithful owner. Seems like when I whistle it runs farther away intentionally.

I cannot say that I blame my mind for wanting to go, though I wish there had been a note. This idea comforts me. What insanity! A brain cannot leave a note without a hand and a pen. Taking notice of my brain with some scrap and a writing utensil, leaving words for me to discover, that is madness.

Who wants to be labeled crazy? Others then want to take notes and write up their prescription for my woes, though there are not any now that it is gone. If I am regarded as such, then everyone will make me take a look at the issues, which cause me to be given such a name.

The only pliable option: open up my heart and take a good long look inside.

When it made up its, um, mind...does it have one? Well, when it made the decision to forsake me it must have packed all my troubles nice and tight in a little black bag, the type with wheels. Not too small to be considered weak, but not too bulgy either; straight and to the point. I never was so meticulous and perhaps that is why it packed the bag.

Was my head sick and tired of always having to pick up after me? Were you?

I thought that I took care of my mind. I always provided for it; meals, warmth, and protection. There were the times that I considered it precious. I just could not bring myself to live true to the words. Anyone can tell themselves “I love you...,” but doing and saying are different matters entirely. I had never waited for a response; that is ludicrous. Now, I cannot begin to say it enough. I hoped that it felt the same way but no one is home up there to retort, telling me that that is not good enough. I am the type to wait around and expect that it will come home the next year to rest. I promise to do a better job with it. That is, until I get bored, sending it away in disappointment for my lack of affections.

If I thought it was worth the effort and the risk of being left with a definite rejection, I could go searching myself. I think that I am petrified on my own. I know that no longer do I have a true to life companion, always there when needed. What I do not know is how to bring it back.
How do I become elated from this numb state of seclusion?

Since my consciousness took leave, I find that I miss it. It makes me wonder if that is the way it felt when I abandoned it; night after night, to my own vices. The same could be said about us. Maybe I have begun to realize and have further comprehension of this ill at ease notion; our relationship was the same. Now that I recall, with my limited ability to think without a head, the occurrences were essentially the same.

When I got the call saying it was over, I did not understand that what we represented is where my mind was secured. I was steadfast in love with and dependent upon, but lacked a grateful heart to holdfast onto that which I most treasured.

While out there finding yourself a suitable companion and enthusiastic lover, take a ride on my train of thought. Once onboard, it would carry with it precious cargo that I want to have back. If not forever, then for the now, otherwise I am over and done. I'll never get over the fact that...

you walked away

I woke up to blood-covered sheets. A mild state of panic filled my body as a nonchalant “Oh my” escaped my lips. I peer down at my leg, looking more like fresh beef rather than a human leg; the crimson liquid covering me like my disdain for myself. I was caught off-guard. I knew that something could have happened but I was hoping that I would have the wherewithal to finish the job. I had class to get to and didn’t have time to deal with anything unexpected. I grabbed a small hand towel and cleaned my leg as much as I could before I put on pants, a shirt, did my hair and headed to school. Today would be normal, just like every other day.

I felt as though I could grab my chest and tear my ribcage apart exposing myself to the world. Be seen as fragile as I felt. It seemed so easy; it was anything but. I caught myself mid-thought, jaw-clenched. I needed to get ahold of myself. I had an image to keep up. People around me were oblivious to my feelings. One classmate had described me as a “nice robot” because of my lack of outward emotions. Everything about it was true except when I clenched my jaw. It was the way people could tell I was stressed. All of this ran through my mind in a fraction of a second as I walked to my first class. In that moment I was sure of one thing, that day had the potential for normality but I was going to have to work hard to achieve it.

The thought of having to live like this for the remainder of my life, however long that might be, lingered in my mind. The depression had morphed into what was now my life so slowly at such a young age that by the time I noticed it, it had already been living with me for years. My life was depression, there was no hope for the future; it just was.

I thought back to when it all started, third grade. That was a defining year in my life. I had been forced to skip second grade and enter a new class with new classmates. I was the odd man out. I
didn't know anyone and no one seemed to want to know me. I woke up every morning at what I jokingly referred to as the butt-crack of dawn only to don my school uniform and mentally prepare for another day of torment. White polo shirt, burgundy vest and dark blue pants; I did not look like the other kids in my neighborhood. I went with my brother to some lady's house. She was a friend of my mom and since my mom had to be at work at seven, we always went there for an hour before school started. It was a rundown house and even at that age I could tell it was not sanitary to touch the walls. I hated it. The toys were old and I imagined they were slathered in germs like the margarine on the toasted white bread I was offered. I always refused to eat or touch anything. No one else seemed to care about the squalor that was called a home. I would gladly go to school just to leave that place. School was better but not by much. The school itself was clean and orderly but the hatred was outlandish. I could easily divide the class into two distinct groups, those who hated me because they didn't know me and those who hated me because I was different; sometimes the groups would even intertwine. I was seen as the kid who was too smart to stay with "his own class." I tried to make friends but to no avail. I never did have friends but I did have an unending supply of bullies. I was small, smaller than any other guy in class so I guess I was seen as an easy target. As the months passed by I drifted into a state of depression; a decline so gradual that I myself didn't see it at the time.

Everyday after school I would have to wait for an hour before my mom could come pick up my brother and me and take us home. That hour was longer than all of my classes combined. I was alone with nothing to do and surrounded by hoards of peers talking about me, pointing and laughing. Crying every night when I got home, I wondered why I could not make friends. I cried about my life quite a bit. I held myself together in public for fear of what others would think of me, but once I was home the tears would flow, a waterfall cascading down my face soaking my white shirt. The kids in the neighborhood had their own group. I was an outcast to them; if life was Halloween then I was the person passing out vegetables and toothbrushes. I quickly found out that they couldn't make fun of me if I wasn't around so I disappeared. I lived in a world that wasn't controlled by me, a world of unpleasantness and torment at school and physical abuse from my big brother at home. He was much larger than I and had a terrible temper even then. I knew I wasn't happy at all with my life but if I had known how my life would go, I don't know what I would have done.

As seventh grade started, I was still alone; not just at school but outside of school as well. There was only one person I called my friend; although I hadn't seen him in a number of years, he was the closest person I had to a friend. My life moved like clockwork. First school then guitar practice and finally home. I would play Legos alone for hours on end. In my fantasy world I was surrounded by friends. People wanted to be around me, they wanted to talk to me and I was happy, at least until my eyes drifted up and I realized that I was in fact alone. I continued my weekday ritual until eighth grade when I transferred to a new school. A new start for me, a time to make friends because even the loneliest of people had friends in high school and although I was a year short of high school, my school housed middle school and high school in the same building. I found that my assumptions were wrong, not everyone would have friends in high school and somehow I was the one holding the short straw.

College was a new beginning for me that I so desperately needed, or so I thought. I was so turned off to interactions with others that I actively avoided them as to refrain from gaining more people who didn't like me. My days groaned on through college, no one knowing the real me. They knew the fronts that I put up. Characters I had created. They believed my lies. I quickly learned my ability to lie my way out of anything.

I could see myself meeting with my first psychiatrist. He was an older man who came highly recommended. He had told me that not only did I have depression but seasonal affective disorder and a self-hatred to the likes of which he had never seen. All in all, it could be described as a good day. I wasn't going to him so that he could help me, I was there because the doctor prescribing the antidepressants required me to see a psychiatrist. I knew
the antidepressants would help. They were the newest and most expensive. They had very high ratings; people everywhere were getting better. It was not a question of whether they would help me or not, it was a question of when.

Leaving one psychiatrist and moving on to the next, it was almost ritualistic in nature. Out with the old, in with the new. I went from an old man with unusually bushy eyebrows, talking to me about why he was qualified to be talking to me, to a sophisticated highly revered female psychiatrist. It took a month before I could get an appointment but it would be worth it. I knew, at the time, that a month of no support would be difficult but I never could have guessed how difficult it would be.

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"Kill myself?" I laughed maniacally. That does seem like a good idea, especially considering the circumstances. I laughed as I walked around my room. Everything had been dark in my house for several hours so it had to be at least two in the morning. My bed was so relaxing; the memory foam surrounding me, covering me in luxurious comfort. I felt as though I was lying on a cloud; the world below me could not possibly affect me. Just as quickly as I had felt the safety and squishy coziness, it all faded. I was now in a dense fog, my soft cloud forcibly removed from around me. The kind of fog you see in every horror movie you watch; so dense you can't even see your hand in front of your face. I was on a road, the fog blocking me from seeing any oncoming car. Terrified and alone I lay there in the disillusioning warmth of my own bed. Even my bed was betraying me, after years of protecting me from ghosts and shadows alike; it was allowing this to happen. A fear gripped me as a thought invaded my mind. "I should cut my wrists and bleed out while I lay here in this vexing comfort." I knew the comfort of my cloud was gone but at the same time, it beckoned me. Luring me with the promise of returning. I needed a blade to cut myself with. I kept an Exact-o knife in my desk. It was sharp enough; therefore, it made the cut. I chuckled a little as the terrible pun swept through my mind. I formulated my plan. It was as elegant as it was deranged. I would cut my wrists and ever so carefully drape my arm over the edge of the bed, bleeding into a bowl. The blood would drip slowly out of me as I calmly faded away. I brought the knife to my wrist and pressed down as I flinched a little. As I continued laughing in an uncontrollable way, I realized I was right. My bed was more comfortable, my cloud had returned.

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"He cut his wrists," I heard my pastor say. Why had I texted him? I knew he wouldn't approve of this.

"It'll be just a few minutes," the nurse replied.

I blamed myself. I hadn't calculated any of this; if I had, the job would have been accomplished. I was taken to a small room with nothing but a bed in it. I had done a terrible job cutting my wrists and if I had looked at a clock I would have realized that it was 9pm not 2am. That mistake was unforgivable. A man entered the room telling me that they needed me to change into the clothes they provided. I quickly came to the realization that he was not escorting me anywhere with any privacy to change. I laughed as I pulled off my clothes trying to make the entire situation more awkward for him. If I was going to have to change in front of someone, they were going to be uncomfortable. He left with my possessions, leaving me alone in a locked room with no way to escape. I laughed as terror filled me. I hadn't snapped back to my normal self yet; I had just seen the sheets on the bed. They were a low thread count, resembling cheesecloth rather than bedding.

"I don't care what happened, I am not sleeping on that. I have standards," I said out loud to myself.

I focused on my many flaws. All the reasons I hated myself. I had once tried making a list and the task was overwhelming. When it came right down to it, there wasn't anything about myself that I liked. I always seemed to do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing. Tonight, that wrong thing was winding up in this hospital. I desperately needed to get out. This bed was horrifying, more so than the thought of dying. I was willing to lie to get out of that place and boy did I lie.

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I left work early; I had an appointment to get to. I did not
tell anyone that it was with a psychiatrist. She had been highly recommended and I looked forward to getting help. Frustrated, I pulled through traffic and made it to my destination; a small building with no parking. Needless to say, I wasn't thrilled. I walked into the office; it smelled fresh and clean. A middle-aged woman walked toward me; she introduced herself and told me that she would not be meeting with me because I was suicidally depressed. After that, she demanded that I leave the building. The incident was so jarring, all I could do was laugh at how implausible it seemed. She was there to help people like me. Was I too much for even the best? The question hung around in my mind like an unwanted guest who didn't know when to leave.

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"She did what?" asked my doctor. He was obviously upset but seemed to have something off-topic to say. He explained that some people have depression that never goes away and I was likely in that category. There was no surprise there but he wasn't finished. He explained that there is a small group of people whom antidepressants won't help and their depression will never go away. He said that I was most likely in that category. I went home in silence that day. My heart was so low in my chest I thought it might just give up. I couldn't bear to tell anyone; I just collapsed onto the bed and for the first time in a long time cried. I had nowhere to turn. I had no one who could possibly understand my pain. I was alone in the piercing silence.

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Everything I had gone through had led me to this place. Going from a scared boy alone in my pathetic school uniform to a young man alone in the world. I had learned a lot, my leg a quiet reminder. I had come a long way but it was becoming increasingly more obvious that I had quite a bit to deal with. The cloud was the only comfort in my life and even it was unreliable. All this paraded through my mind like a funeral while I was glaring at myself in a mirror; the emotions mixing a vile new concoction in my mind.

Then it happened, something that would soon become an unwanted common event. I was blind, falling and trying to catch myself, my legs not fast enough to keep up. I awoke several minutes later on the floor across the room with a pounding headache.

Under my breath I desperately whispered, "What was that?"

Whatever this new problem was couldn't have come at a worse time.
Department: The Promethean, Rust and Stardust (2012-2013)

Palace of Fine Arts © Alex Anderson

Golden © Katie Wartell
Paradise

Karissa Cooke

Sand brushes over
The newly found pink sea shell
Hiding its beauty

Wind sprays the ocean
Making the sanded shell gleam
Cradle it with care

Skip in the tide pools
Flat gray stones travel across
Five, six, seven- gone

Sun slipping away
The world a tinted orange
Far as eyes behold

The air becomes still
Like my heart as skies transform
Blues and greens appear

Here everything is
Is what it should be, always:
Perfectly peaceful

Denoument

Benjamin Crane

Dear Hopefully Caring Person,

Thank you for picking up my bundle of letters. Did the knotted shoelaces keep the letters together or were they scattered on the ground? I thought about hiding them around town but they should be together, at least until after you're done with them. You're more than welcome to read the letters underneath this one but if you do, I have a favor to ask of you. Could you read my letters? I am asking you because you also like to travel down here by the river or else you wouldn't have found my letters. Oh and feel free to keep the shoelaces!

Well, I've been reading a lot of poetry and lyrics for my AP Lit class. The football players call poetry gay but I really enjoy it, even if poetry's only for girls and queers. Here's my favorite: "The calm, / Cool face of the river / Asked me for a kiss." It's called "Suicide's Note" and is by Langston Hughes.

I don't mean to scare you but I've felt really down recently. Really, really down. I've been sad many times but this time feels different. I feel like there will be closure soon. Closure, it's a funny sounding word but it seems so perfect. Anyways, here's when I ask for that favor.

Enclosed are both letters and journal entries. Please read them. No one's listened to me in a while so it'd be really nice if you could read them. I'll let you decide what you want to do with the letters and journals.

Dear Brittany,

I trusted you. I fucking trusted you.

Look where we've gone. We used to be the best of chums, do you remember that? We used to draw pictures with Sharpies on one another's Chucks. We'd prance into your parents' gigantic wardrobe as if it opened into Narnia. What about our sporadic six in the
morning trips to get coffee with the band? Do you remember any of that?

But after nine years everything had to crumble.

Hell will take me. Shit, you say it's inevitable. "You need to change and come back Ben. I can love you but I can't love your sin."

What the hell does that even mean? Brittan y, I never left. I told you that I was depressed, I told you that I had been questioning my sexuality, and I told you that I was afraid.

Our families and church tell us that homosexuality is wrong. But I'm not gay—I'm just bi. Either way, I'm still afraid. How can I feel safe when everyone tells me I'm going to hell? You plead with me and ask me to return to religion but I just scoff at you. I'm sorry, but what will your god do for me? You claim that he can save me, but he gave me this life.

I am ready to say goodbye.

With a rope knotted just right about my neck, my body can fall and my epitaph will finally be written. You tell me guilt cannot free me from my plaguing phantasms. Only through salvation can I escape, you say. You beg me to change my ways to avoid damnation, but you are wrong. Hell is not the promise of my death—it's the promise of my life.

"We're all going to Hell, we may as well go out in style! / Death is a promise, and your life is a fucking lie. I refuse! I refuse! I refuse to close my eyes."

(Bring Me the Horizon)

Dear Jeff,

Reprobate and hopeless, this is what you call me.

My body writhe s, my voice howls, and my soul weeps, but to no avail. You once told me that I could be saved, but it seems you've discarded such hopes. Out of all the miserable people, how could you have lost hope for me? You work for the church so aren't you supposed to be the perfect father? Aren't you supposed to be the perfect person? Donning cowboy boots, Wrangler jeans, and a plaid shirt, you're the epitome of a Texas Christian. Doesn't your book have something to say about giving up hope for your son?

Every Sunday night is the same crap—family time of prayer and scripture reading. We meet in the living room which is adorned by Bible verses and too many crosses. Family devotionals in your Jesus room won't save me, Dad. I live to die; life bequeaths me undying judgment, persecution, and hatred. Spitefully you call me a charlatan; "You've changed and I don't like it." Please Dad, just listen to me and open your eyes! Look at yourself in the mirror. You are the bête noir e, always there, always stalking me with cold-blooded intent. I beg for your understanding, your compassion that you must still possess.

"This isn't going anywhere," I say as I mosey toward my room. You respond, but only after you corner me at the basement door. "I didn't dismiss you, son." With a patriarchal "nudge," you toss me down into the darkness. Later you will claim that my descent was my own doing, that I stumbled over my feet. Bullshit. I felt your hands as they jettisoned me down the stairs. You begin to follow me, taking the shape of the bête noire, the black beast. Denim jeans and a plaid shirt transmogrify into a hellish creature. As a shadow form, you whisper "fucking son of a bitch." Quickly and mercilessly, your arms surround me in a tackle as we both plummet to the floor. I hear you gasping for air as you hoist yourself up.

Slowly and fearfully, I schlep myself up only to once again feel your arms around me. This time, it is an embrace. Apologetically, you ask for my forgiveness and fearfully I concede. Perhaps I am a charlatan; I cannot forgive you nor will I ever be able to. With a smile you metamorphose from your shadowy form into your human form. You act as if your actions aren't marring. Softly you say, "I love you, but now you need to ask for forgiveness." Soon, however, you'll be the black beast once again.

"And I find it kinda funny / I find it kinda sad. / The dreams in which I'm dying / Are the best I've ever had." (Tears for Fears)
Requies aeterna—will it ever come? Contemplatively gazing at the river below, I rest cross-armed on the bridge's rail. This night was like any other night. I walk out of the school's doors only to be smacked on the ass and called a fag by my old teammates. I fear the day when they see me with my beau.

Like a sloth I drag myself home. Mom is home so I can't cry unless it's in the shower. Stripping down past my skivvies I turn the shower handle counter-clockwise. Before passing through the shower curtain, I search for my beloved jagged blade in its hiding place underneath the sink. My brother found the knife at an old pawn shop. It's sharp enough to scrape up and down my arm, creating a raw throbbing feeling. Fuck, it's not there. Shit.

I scurry out of the bathroom and eventually find it in an old box buried in the crawlspace.

Back in the shower, the raindrops quickly fall and pile up creating a lake of tears. The waters consume me, dragging me down to their depths but I can do nothing. In a perfect world, a world that will never come, the waters will drown me. But I've been here before. I can't drown myself in the shower. Instead, the flooding waters drag me further and further down. These are the graceless waters of Styx. Eventually I surface the water only for the ebb and flow to carry me to terra incognita. I gasp for air, attempt to clear my eyes, and then see the stygian gates. Those gates. The gates of Hell. Etched upon their battered walls, a message presents itself to me: fucking worthless. Pronounced through trochaic foot, my message is sung in Gregorian chant. A dull piece of steel rests at my side. It's my old friend, the one I almost forgot about. It can take away my pain away. Vale, mundi crudelis.

Long Distance

Monica Logan

Hey, what's up? What are you doing today? Mark had sent the text to his girlfriend, Anne, two hours ago. The agitation of knowing his girlfriend would not text him back immediately was evident on his face. He sighed loudly while trying to distract his mind with his med school neuroscience textbook, reading *The amygdala is the center for aggression.* Mark could picture his amygdala burning red hot with his growing hostility and jealousy. "What in the world is she doing?" Mark asked the walls of his Chicago apartment. "Why isn't she texting me back?" He sighed again, even louder. "Maybe I'll call her. Maybe she's just sleeping. I am two hours ahead of her. Maybe she's not even awake for class yet?" His frustrated and concerned voice grew even louder in his two-person dorm. "Yes, I'll call her," he decided. The phone rang. And rang. And rang. "What the HELL?" he screamed, throwing his cell phone at the couch.

"Dude, is everything ok?" Mark's roommate, John, popped his head out of his room. "I'm fine. Anne just isn't texting me back." Mark's anger broke through his calm words. He decided to text her two more times.

"Oh." John almost started to blush as he snuck behind his door. He sweat profusely as he went back to his computer. Mark is really mad. He paused. *Y aren't u texting him back?* His memory of Anne's lips against his filled his mind. The one time she came to visit Mark in Illinois, Mark had a three hour class he had to attend. John didn't. The difference of schedules allowed John to grab a cup of coffee and get to really know his roommate's girlfriend. And those three hours spent with Anne were the best three hours of his life. As he opened the door toward the street for her, she obviously felt the same way because she leaned towards him. One kiss from her changed everything.

* I am trying 2 figure out how to break up w/ him w/o telling him about us, she said. I don't want to break his heart.
John's heart skipped a beat. He could hear her soft sweet voice being genuinely distraught over the well-being of Mark. *I want to move to Portland to be with you.* The words flew from his fingers before his prefrontal cortex could stop them.

*I luv u so much!* John smiled at her sudden confession, but then he stopped immediately as he tried to imagine how his friend would feel about the situation.

Anne could remember running her fingers through John's thick jet black hair. "I do love you so much," Anne said out loud to the Oregon rain outside her window. The moment they met, Anne finally felt alive, creating a connection stronger than like or lust. Shaking hands with Mark's roommate stirred her soul. John was perfect for her, everything she needed in a soul mate. Mark had an odd laugh. He was too tall for her. His smile was too quirky and crooked for her to love. But John was another story. Just imagining John's hands running up and down her body sent shivers down her spine. And his eyes. They were full of dark, intense passion for life.

Anne's phone chirped with the Darth Vader theme song twice more. Her phone was going crazy since she hadn't religiously texted Mark. He was so possessive of her; she couldn't stand it anymore. "Fine!" She said to her phone. She didn't even read the new texts. She wrote, *Mark, I'm sorry but we have to break up. I can't do this long-distance thing anymore.*
Chilbalba
Regina Maag

"This is it, the entrance to the Mayan underworld. Chibalba..." our guide whispered, attempting to scare us. After hiking several miles through the rainforest to reach this destination, we now had to climb through a little hole in the ground. The humid air is a great equalizer; we were all drenched in sweat as we ducked through the entrance. "There are nine layers of the underworld, we are going to the very bottom," he said warningly as we stepped into the darkness. Nine layers? Just like Dante's Inferno. Now it was my turn to descend into the underworld.

The air inside was devoid of sunlight, giving the world an unnatural chill. Even the humidity could not reach us in this dank enclosure. Perhaps this cave was more than a hideout for lurking spiders and bats. We dropped our possessions at the entrance since there would be climbing involved. I hoped no modern Mayan would snatch my broken camera and passport.

The first sight to reveal itself to us was a massive cave spider clinging to the ceiling; it sat beside a myriad of interlocking termite tunnels constructed on the wall. I hate spiders, especially ones the size of your hand. The cave's walls felt rough beneath my fingers, and the mud gurgled beneath my boots. Stepping around stagnant puddles filled with the unknown, we came to a giant stalactite. These were the roots of the Ceiba tree, burrowing deep into the underworld, according to the Mayans. It looked like wax that had spilled from above but hardened on the way down. I wanted to touch it, but it was forbidden. We traveled steadily down, our guide informing us every time we reached a new level of the underworld.

The stale air surrounded us, silent and brooding. What it was waiting for, I did not know. I've never considered myself a claustrophobic person, but the cathedral-like walls seemed to huddle together, murmuring a conversation that was as archaic as the Redwood Forest. It felt as if I was interrupting their discourse, and was welcomed with a loathsome hush. My breath caught in my throat; it seemed as if the supply of oxygen had been cut short.

There were rickety ladders placed throughout the caves, each erected fifteen feet in the air. Two people had to hold the ladder while someone else ascended to catch a glimpse of the ancient Mayan pottery. To me they were not ladders, but harbingers of death, coercing me to join the menacing crouch of the walls. I didn't want to climb up those ladders, but I hadn't come to Belize to chicken out as some of the other students were. I gripped the ladder fiercely, the rusty surface flaking off under my clenched fingers.

To get further down in the caves, we had to scale down a few crevices with only a frayed rope as our guide. I could feel the tension in the rope as multiple hands clutched it firmly. Finally, we had reached the ninth level. We had squeezed through some tight spaces, but the caves now opened up into vast ceilings; bats were suspended from them and blinked furiously as our lights interrupted their repose. Petite holes had been burrowed into the ground, tombs to store human sacrifices. We attempted to delve further into these crypts of stone, but whoever had been sacrificed here was tiny, and we couldn't fit. There was a roped off ceremonial circle around which we all gathered.

"Now we are in....Chibalba...." trailed off our guide for what seemed the fiftieth time, though we never grew weary of the way in which he whispered it. "Turn off all of your lights."

We did as we were told, and suddenly, I was swallowed by darkness. Terror gripped me, followed by a rush of adrenaline. Bats fluttered in my stomach. "Now, watch the light," whispered our guide from somewhere in the abyss. He sparked a lighter, and then held it up to the wall. The lighting was interrupted by shadow, the shadow of something carved into the stone. I had no idea what I was looking at until he said grandly, "This is Xtabay. Look!"

As he pointed upwards, I saw it, a massive feminine figure that stretched all the way from the floor to the vast ceiling, at least thirty feet tall. Gasps filled the cave. "Seductive spirit of the forest." Her accentuated curves were doused in shadow, but the outline was unmistakable. She almost resembled an immense Oscar award, hands clutched together in a regal fashion, towering over us in a stately
stance. Although the menacing walls had rejected me, Xtabay seemed to greet me, an unexpected friend in the darkness devoid of hope.

He let us look for a while, but soon it was time to leave. The way back up seemed a lot shorter as I tried to recall every detail. The image of Xtabay was now seared into the forefront of my mind, and the ominous walls no longer huddled in abhorrent discourse. As sunshine loomed ahead like a beacon, the air became fresher, and I could breathe. I was no longer afraid; I had been to the underworld and returned, just like Dante.

Scars

Sara Mofyneux

Chains around my ankles. Just let me run Purple lines imprinted on my layers of skin. Blood runs from my swollen lip My wrists ache the cold metal ties my hands

They are slowly winning, Winning the fight that they can never be champions of

Taking control of me My life Each breath My thoughts The visions in my head can’t stop But not my heart

Put me in the ring, let me throw the punches.

Kick me down, and just watch You can’t prepare enough for what is to come

On my hands and knees, I am weak My prayer is to be set free Release me of these chains

Afraid to move, give me one more chance This isn’t my reality, it can’t be

Defeated, I will not be
I can change, just one more chance,
I feel you.
Your scarred hands touch my face
And bring me to my victory
You raise my hands in the ring
You give me your crown of thorns
And we defeat them together

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Peeved

Andrew Landstrom

crawling slower than a snail
it’s absolute torture,
cap’n crunch against the roof of my mouth
has more enjoyment than this
the bloody color has appeared
I’ve missed my window;
is this guy floundering in his thoughts
is he lost in deep space
the money light now reveals itself
gas all the way
he goes for a left turn
stupid texter

Timothy Lake © Alex Anderson
Wrong Diagnosis

Ciara Laing

Alice drags herself into the morgue. She has to see the body and say goodbye for the final time. James will be cremated the next day. She can hardly believe it. She is late as usual.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she tells the coroner.

"It's ok. I understand. He's right through there, lying on the table," he says pointing at the door.

Alice nods as she walks toward the metal door. She pushes the door open and sees him there on the table. Dead. The sound of her high heels clicking on the floor is comforting. It's so quiet, so dead in here, she thinks. Of course it's quiet, it's a room filled with dead people. She imagines each slot holding a different person, some old, some young, tragically young.

He looks more peaceful lying on the table than he did sprawled out on the couch with his mouth hanging open and his eyes rolled back in his head. She still feels guilty that her last words to him were so harsh.

"I going to kill myself if you leave," he had said to her.

"You know what, I don't care anymore! What will it be, the seventh or eighth try? I love you with all my heart," she said with tears swelling in her eyes, "but I can't do this anyone. I can't go through this day after day. You can't take me with you!"

"So where are you going?"

"I'm going to go stay with Sharon."

"Don't go. I can't live without you. I won't!"

"You know what?!" she shrieked. "You want to die so bad?! I'll pour Drano down your throat and then we'll be done with it!"

Those were the last words she said to him. He died that night and was found the next day by the neighbor that had heard their argument. The police called Alice and told her that he had died and asked her to come to the house. When she arrived they let her see him, then they arrested her.

"Ma'am, we are going to have to take you in," the sheriff said.

"Why?"

"The neighbor reported that she overheard you yelling something about pouring Drano down your husband's throat."

"I didn't kill him."

"We'll release you when the coroner confirms that."

"Asshole! He's going to make my life hell in his death too."

When she reaches James' body, she finds that she doesn't have any tears left to cry. She wants to kick him; he made her so miserable those last few months. She's pissed that the doctors missed it too, but what could she do?

"I love you. I'm sorry... Asshole." She looks away, what is she supposed to do? Talking to a lifeless body isn't going to help.

The coroner peeks in like he usually does, as people do sometimes get over-emotional and even faint. "Is everything alright in here?"

"Yeah, I guess." The coroner starts to turn to leave, but Alice stops him. "Why does it look like he's sweating?"

"It is because he has been out of the freezer for so long. I took him out an hour ago when I expected you to arrive. Essentially, he has started to thaw."

"Oh...Well, I'm done, I guess."

"Ok."

Alice takes one last look at his face. He just looks like he's shepping. Fucking doctors.
When considering ways to curl up for warmth in winter

Garret Potter

When considering ways to curl up for warmth in winter think of cashmere—rabbit fur.
Imagine all of the rabbits escaping the cashmere factory before they are shaven, finding their way to where you are, nuzzling you close.

Think of thick wool socks; think of skiing on a sea of sheep.
No, think of crowd surfing on a slow stampede of alpacas, landing in a soft armchair next to a fire in a log cabin built by lumberjacks.

It is evening.
You meet an old friend there in the neon candlelight. The collision of your hugging torsos is perfect thawing every cold shoulder and icy word from the day. You melt.
They pick the puddle of you up in their palms of love.

Think of a mug of hot cocoa.
Think of immersing yourself in the largest hot cocoa spa-pool, swimming past marshmallow floaty-toys wading through the whipped cream foam.

Think of going camping
with the one who kissed your soul before you served them your lips.
It is so cold that you must curl up, huddled together—spoons.
This is not enough.
So, you put your sleeping bag inside of their sleeping bag,
and wedge yourselves into both.
Together you are an armpit.
Realize this is more sanitary than most other pits.
Find solace in their neck,
slither there all serpentine,
and bask in another’s life-flood beneath the humus of their skin.

Think of a warm burrito,
a wet burrito, doused in mole sauce.
Think of being doused in mole sauce.

I have a friend who says that burritos are just tacos in sleeping bags.
This friend says that her winter coat might as well be a sleeping bag with sleeves.
When she wears her winter coat
it is as though she had once been a taco and has now transformed
or that she merely puts on a four foot diameter tortilla before heading out to brave Minneapolis.
This bears no consequence; think no more of my friend.

When considering ways to curl up for warmth in winter,
think of a puppy.
Think of yourself being all Polly-pocket-sized, tiny,
journeying across the Fantasia of your childhood home
on its soft, giant head,
holding the cuddly tuft of its neck like reins,
falling asleep to the lullaby cradle of its deepest breaths.

Think of a movie,
maybe Bastian and Falcor, or Dorothy and Toto, or Milo and Otis,
Or, maybe something with Fred Astaire—

Think of tap dancing exuberance.

Think of a tea kettle
whistling its hot single,
like Otis Redding sittin’ on “The Dock Of The Bay,”
or Bobby McFerrin whistlin’ “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,”
or Axle Rose whistlin’ “Patience,”
or Edward Sharpe whistlin’ “Home.”

Think of the stovetop at home.
You are making breakfast in bed for the one
who has knit the very fiber of their being into a patchwork quilt
to offer you their every semblance of warm.
In return, you are making them eggs,
not over easy,
but seasoned and scrambled well.
Focus on the griddle, up front.
Be warm. Be up front.
Warm somebody’s cold front.
Be somebody’s warm front.
But do not think of back-burners.

No, when considering ways to curl up for warmth in winter,
do not think of back burners
nor the people you have left there to burn,
nor the person you may be holding there now, confused.
(Do not let them burn [out].)
(They are someone’s delicacy.)
(Someone[else]’s enduring winter warmth.)
Let them off of your selfish simmer.
Tell them the truth, and set yourself free.
For when it comes to curling up with the one who loves you.
Keeping your options open
will only let all of the heat out.

(Were you born in a barn?)
(Neither was I.)

(Take a break with me.)
(This is intense; I know.)

Think of a library,
a University library,
at Berkeley or Princeton or Reed—
old wood, old windows, old books.
filled with story and tale and myth.
Come in.
Find the toasty nook next to the stacks of romantics.
Peruse their ancient spines:
Verne, Hugo, Austen, Dumas,
until one of them stands out—calls to you,
professing is propensity to soothe and heat!

Peel back its cover(s).
Crawl in.
And tuck yourself in to another's story
until once again,
you are warm enough
to go out
and brave
your own

2013 Writing Contest

Letter from Ciara Laing, Managing Editor

It was several years ago that *The Promethean* decided to stage
a writing contest for all students, faculty, and staff. The success and
popularity of the contest encouraged our current staff to continue
the tradition, but with a slight adjustment.

This year, we decided to use a concept similar to last year's. In
the past we have done the Short-Short story, challenging our wri
ters
to tell a story in 500 words or less. This year, we decided to give pa
cipants 250 words more. The challenge issued: create a story in 750
words or less. Our theme: Down the Rabbit Hole. This theme could
mean whatever the authors wanted it to mean.

Our Short Story Contest received many submissions, as Con
cordia writers were up to the challenge.

Jeriann Watkins, alumna of Concordia, was our judge this
year. She graduated from Concordia University in 2012. She is cur
rently working in the SEO industry, writing articles for blogs. She has
a blog of her own, dairyairhead.com, where she shares her poems,
short stories, and musings on life. We are grateful she found time to
select our winners. We thank her for sharing her precious time and
energy with us!

With that we present to you the winners of the 2013 Down
the Rabbit Hole Writing Contest. Enjoy!
Not Perfect (A Fictional Story)

Peggy Wood
First Place

Notes from our judge:
A Fictional Story- The title of this story makes the reader wonder if it truly is fictional or if parts of it are true, but the ending is just what the main character wishes they could do. The author manages to describe the application of makeup in great detail without making it dull. We walk through the story with the main character, sympathizing with her, and yet wishing she would stop lying. She is not a perfect person, but she is not a villain either. She is human, which makes this story extremely relatable.

Blood Red lipstick. A bottle of nail polish. A tube of mascara. A black eyeliner pen with soft pink eyeshadow. Some foundation, and blush. I start by doing my weekly filing of nails, then pluck some of the unruly hairs in my eyebrows; smear on the foundation before blending it in so that it looks natural. Add some eyeshadow, then eyeliner and lastly mascara. Next is my lips, and blush. My hair I let fall in false wavy curls that I completed before getting my makeup and polish. Lastly my nails. The pink nail polish goes on smooth, the excess easily whipped off with the longer unpainted nails. My girlfriend comes up behind me; her long slender arms wrap around my slender waist. She is prettier than I will ever be. She doesn't wear makeup, she doesn't do her nails or pluck her brows. She's a natural beauty. I envy her sometimes, but not because of her looks. It's because she is brave. She came out of the metaphorical closet years ago, and I have not. Right now, as she holds me from behind, she thinks I am getting ready for class. She sways a little on her feet, leaning against me, hugging me as I smile and brush my hair. She thinks I am faithful, honest, and kind... but I'm not.

I turn around, pressing my nose against her cheek and hugging her with a smile. "Go back to sleep silly," I say. She smiles softly, sleep still in her eyes.

"I want to see you off," she whines in a low, exhausted, but happy tone. I give her a knowing look and shoo her off to bed. She is willfully scooted to bed and tucked in. She offers a short peck of a kiss to my neck before dropping back onto the pillows with a thud and sleep consumes her. I smile at her, waiting till I think she is at the point of not getting up again. I go to her closet and grab my change of clothes that I leave for nights like these. A pair of tight jeans and a tight sequined shirt. I grab some jewelry from the counter and head out of her room, closing the door behind me so that she is left in complete darkness.

I change in the bathroom before dropping my clothes in the hamper and grabbing my purse from its calculated resting spot next to the front door. Once I am outside I take a breath. I feel guilt, but not enough to stop. I take out my keys, walk to the car, get in, and leave. I go to a coffee shop not two blocks from where I took her out to dinner last night. I do a final check in the mirror. I look like a doll. A porcelain doll. Though not nearly as perfect. I am cracked, and painted over. I am masked by this image. I sigh, smile, and get out of the car. I head to the door and open it where I go in and greet my long term boyfriend. Everyone that knows us expects us to get together. He is nice, good looking, and has a career going for him. More importantly though, he is a man. I smile, swallowing the lump in my throat. A group of our friends are there with us; we sit together and talk while he and I cuddle. "A perfect couple," one of our friends says when she complains about her love life. "That's what you are," she claims. I smile and giggle. "Yeah," we say. No one sees that I stop paying attention. I glance at the clock. Right now, she is probably waking up. Right now she is probably thinking about me, in class, being bored out of my mind. After all, she thinks that is what I do these mornings when I go to meet with friends. "Sammy?" I can almost hear her calling my name. "Sammy, earth to Samantha." I am pulled from my thoughts as a friend pushes coffee in my face. "Order up, looks like you need it," my supposed best friend says. I smile shyly. "Sorry."

A perfect couple. A perfect couple. I look at the swirling coffee. I can't do this anymore. I can't do it anymore.

"I'm a lesbian." I say softly. No one hears.

"I am a lesbian." I say again, it feels good to say it. Everyone hears. Good.
Next Time

McKenna Rinta
Second Place

Notes from our judge:
This story will strike a chord with anyone who ever wished that they could just leave where they are and explore the world. The setting is ambiguous and therefore can be imagined to be anywhere or anytime. With phrases like “heart and breath and hair on her lips,” and “Those stars turned into bright shining windows that got so big she felt she could climb straight out of them,” the author has crafted a piece that draws the reader in and helps them experience an escape of their own.

Dirt speckled the back of Aurora’s legs, bare heels slamming down on the muddy grass, faster and faster. She hoped she would never be able to stop. It was the end of summer and the sharp tops of the yellowed grass seemed to press little holes into the soles of her feet. This patchy mix of mud and dead grass sloped down to the creek, and she was determined to run straight through it. The sharp sunlight shot spears through her eyes until all she could see around her was gold and white. She kept running. Don’t stop when you get there, she whispered to herself between quick breaths. The wind caught her hair, caressing her shoulders and swirling it in front of her eyes. This cool mountain air felt strange mixing with the wet warmth rising from the muddy ground. Goosebumps tickled her neck and arms. There was the creek, right in front of her. A flash of betrayal rushed through her limbs. Eyes wide, she dug her heels into the rocky bank, sending dry stones into the water as her feet skidded out from under her. Her legs slid into the shallow brown-green water as she landed with a thud on the bank. She sat there, heart and breath and hair on her lips, staring past her submerged legs at the path that started on the other side of the water. It led right out of the creek and into the forest, changing from mud to dry dust as it wound its way up into the trees. Next time, she said, pulling herself up out of the creek and turning away from that enticing wooded trail.

She was too exhausted to run back up the hollow. Instead she took the long walk, toes digging into the grime, legs aching and spirit sinking. When she reached the grove at the top of the hill, she wandered in. Leaning on a dead, gray tree for support, she brushed and rubbed the dried grass and red hay fever dots from her legs and feet, wishing that she could go up that trail, wishing that the trail turned orange in the fall, wishing that the field would for once dry out by the end of September, wishing that the orchard would give a full harvest all summer long. A hawk flew overhead and she couldn’t help wondering if he had ever seen what was on the other side of the hills, if he had seen where the trail led. By the time she reached home the sky was turning dark, bleeding out purples and reds behind dirty brown and black clouds. She hid herself indoors, trying to forget about the world outside and all of its temptations and sorrows, trying to forget about that path she would never walk on. As she lay in bed that night watching the first stars appear out her window, Aurora asked her mother if the stars knew where to go.

“They don’t have to worry about where to go. They just are,” her mother replied. “Shut out the sky, Aurora. Pull those covers over your little head.” Aurora did as she was told. She closed her eyes tight until all of the stars from the night sky shone in the darkness behind her eyes. Those stars turned into bright shining windows that got so big she felt she could climb straight out of them. And she did.
Sarah is enjoying a glorious childhood; she is funny, smart, and so athletic that she beats all the boys in basketball. But in second grade, Sarah suddenly found herself overcome with strange inclinations, resulting in bouts of throat clearing and body tensing. She is unable to fully understand the doctor, but is unconcerned when he diagnoses her with a mild case of Tourette's Syndrome.

Even though Sarah doesn't know what's going on, at least she now has an excuse for the people who mock her. But sometimes, the term “Tourette’s” is not enough to stop the teasing. There are times where she can’t quiet her vocal tics during a spelling test. Whenever the noise escapes her, Sarah’s cheeks burn and she nervously apologizes to her neighbors. No one else can see Tourette’s for what it is: an itch—a mental itch that distracts and annoys you, fueling emotional tension until it is scratched.

Though her tics do not subside over the years, her awareness of them does, though others never grow used to it. Sarah’s itch is beginning to spread. Body tensing and throat scratching are no longer enough; everything has to be even. Sarah has holes on the insides of her shoes from consciously kicking herself as she walks until it feels just right. Irritation sprouts from things as trivial as crooked lines. And when expectations go unfulfilled, Sarah retreats into an unassailable fortress of sorrow.

As the years go by, the effects of Tourette’s not only refuse to regress, but proceed to worsen with the onset of Sarah’s OCD and depression. The itch has never felt so powerful. Sarah fights the battle every day, eventually building up the strength to resist the itch for brief moments. Sarah can give a smooth presentation in Geology only to excuse herself from the room to succumb to the demonic itch that has consumed her.

By the age of 18, Sarah can restrain herself for most of the day, successfully masking the disorder from her classmates. But at night, she spends sleepless nights lying in bed, shearing her itch with maniacal desperation before she is finally hospitalized for her perpetual convulsions. The cataclysmic bouts of spasms amplify her anxiety, which reignites the spasms. It is a vicious, interminable cycle. No matter how she fights the impulse, she is always dragged back into a waking nightmare.

The struggle overwhelms her—exhausts her mentally, emotionally, and physically. One night, she loses control and begins slapping her head, crying and screaming at herself between blows: “Just. Be. Normal.” Then her OCD takes hold, and she finds herself unable to stop. Sarah lies on the floor for hours, beating herself around the head, unable to satisfy the hellacious itch.

Then it’s gone.

There Sarah lies, broken, on the floor of her bedroom, consumed by sobs, desperately trying to imagine what her life may have been like if she could “Just. Be. Normal.” Sarah doesn’t find out and Sarah never will find out.
It’s “War’s”

Masha Polozova
Honorable Mention

Notes from our judge:
This story is a great look at an interaction full of conflict. It doesn’t have pretensions, is just outlining an encounter, and has a nice splash of geek humor to boot.

I’m seated on a bench with a group of my friends mingling around. Many of them sip beers, but we’re outside tonight because some of us are still too young to enter the nearby bar. The fire we’re gathered around attracts other patrons, mostly our age. Amongst those we don’t know is an attractive young woman, teetering on the lap of a military-clad man. She’s visibly wasted, lighting cigarette after cigarette while publicly allowing her boyfriend’s hands to wander over her, making no effort to conceal their prolonged kisses and loudly commenting on the people around her.

Eventually, inevitably, she joins our conversations. They are a valuable source of attention. Someone in our group mistakenly offers her a drag of their cigar.

“No I don’t smoke black-guy ciggs,” she giggles. My group of friends falls silent, and the girl friend I came with and I exchange a look.

“That’s... cute.” One of the guys looks at her with disgust. The sarcasm in his voice isn’t lost on her, and she sneers back at him. “WOW way to go all Darth Vader on me,” she quips, bringing up a topic she must have overheard us discussing earlier. “When did it get all Star Trek out here?”

None of us think that’s an insult, but her bratty tone isn’t misunderstood. I can’t help it: I laugh and call her out.

“Darth Vader. Star Trek.” I throw a pointed smirk and alternate raising and lowering my hands like weighing fruit on a scale, “Uhh.....”

The laughter I prompt from my group causes her to snark at me to put my hair up in those side buns (Princess Leia) and immediately ignore me.

A few minutes later, she makes another joke in poor taste and is rewarded with snorts from the couple sitting near where I stand, warming my back on the fire. Mistaking their reactions for friendliness, she bounds over to giggle at them.

She is not acquainted with the couple, but they humor her. A thin scent of putridly sweet perfume mixes with the distinctive smell of tobacco and hits my sense as she steps near me to speak with them further. My annoyance grows exponentially in proportion to how close to me she sways. Sensing this, I think, or oblivious to it, she brushes shoulders with me in her haste to appear likable. I bristle, stick my hands in my pockets, ignore the invasion on my personal space, and continue conversation with my friend.

It is after the fourth time she jabs an elbow into my side in her enthusiasm that I impulsively yell a “hey!” and then let my voice calm to speak the rest.

“Can you stop touching me?” “What’s your problem?” She turns her entire body towards me, proximity to mine unchanged, less than a foot between us. I take a step back. I’m not confrontational, but I don’t phrase myself with respect, either. “Just get out of my space.”

I watch my opponent’s eyes narrow in calculation, drunken thoughts shuffling through appropriate emotional responses before settling on being offended. She tries to initiate an argument but I close my ears to it and before I know it she’s trying to give me a hug, assuming we’ve made up. I don’t hesitate to shove her hand out of my face, causing a flare up.

When I walk away from the spectacle, she’s absolutely infuriated, forcing me to let my friends know I am leaving and head quickly to my car. I can scarcely decipher individual insults in the flurry of her obscene shrieking as she follows me, the auditory equivalent of someone taking sandpaper to the soft part on the inside of your elbow.

“Hold. My. Shoes. HOLDMYSHOES!” Her tenor is slurred, directed at her blissfully buzzed boyfriend who, half-laughing, half-
trying to coax her attention away.

I force myself to maintain my pace and not turn my head, the internalized anger manifesting itself as tunnel vision. Pressure begins to accumulate in my skull; I feel the blood flood all the way up to the tips of my ears and can only think, you’re metabolizing adrenaline, this is an automated response system. My valiant girlfriend, her own boyfriend in tow, assumes the role of mother hen and clucks so violently at the girl she is entirely deterred from ever even reaching me. I lock my car door behind me, breathe deeply until my hands stop shaking, and start my engine to head home.

Deep Sea Fishing

Regina Maag
Honorable Mention

Notes from our judge:
This story offers the reader a glimpse into an aspect of life they may not be familiar with. It is “every day” in its plot, but the ending is fun and whimsical.

It was my first time going deep-sea fishing with just my dad. At four in the morning, he bangs on my bedroom door of the beach rental house, and I drag myself out of bed, donning multiple layers to act as a barrier against the cold. After driving down to the docks and paying our fees to the ever-friendly Joe, we huddle around the cleaning station until everyone has assembled. The attractive deckhand, Tom, leads us along the corroded docks to the Siggi-G, and we scramble aboard. Sunlight had just begun to illuminate the brisk, morning sky as we leave the harbor behind and sail toward the bar. The bar is the treacherous crossing where waves from the bay and open ocean collide, sending many to their deaths in foul weather. An eerie lighthouse blinks relentlessly and the fog bells toll for us as we cross. Once we escape the confines of the bay, the big motors burst to life, and we race towards the dusky horizon. The Siggi-G plows into each wave, forcing her inhabitants to cling to the railing as the spray of the sea erases any remaining fatigue. Fortunately, I had taken the seasickness pills offered by my mom before our departure.

The sun has finally risen, exposing the rest of our companions on this expedition. Two old men begin swapping fishing lies with my father, and a young couple has occupied the prow of the boat. A family of five fills the stern, but my trained eye catches sight of a guy about my age. The back of his sweatshirt reads “Cusick, WA Football,” and despite the layers of coats, his physical fitness is apparent. Perfect.

We stop a few miles off the shoreline, and Joe calls for the angling to begin. I flip the reel and count to twenty as the line and weight drop into the water. A thud reverberates up the line, telling me
I have reached the bottom. There is no time to wait, I immediately begin reeling, but at a moderate pace. You want to keep the fish interested, but if you go too fast, they can't catch it. My hook leaps out of the water, empty. I drop it again and count. This process is repeated until Tom tells us to reel in, and Joe drives the boat to a new location.

As I faithfully reel in my bait at a temperate pace, I am met with resistance. Perhaps the best part about fishing is the excitement of getting a bite. It is akin to the same sensation that engulfs you when that romantic interest sends you a text, only better. You feel the battle raging in your hands as you set the hook and reel furiously, all the muscles in your arms screaming for mercy. My first bite of the day yields a sea cucumber, not quite what I had expected. It was still pretty as I picked it off and threw it back into the briny water. However, within a few hours, I have maxed out at seven fish; our box is stuffed with rockfish, halibut, and salmon.

I sit on the only bench as Tom hollers and Joe begins to change locations once again. The guy with the football sweatshirt comes and sits next to me. The roar of the engines is all that can be heard until he turns and extends his hand, flashing a smile worth more than all the halibut we've caught. I allow myself to be hooked and reeled in.

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"There are always Barbies."
Say it one more time
Push me to the edge
Throw the ball; shove it to the back of my palms
Make me cry

Knees pressed hard against floor,
That day replays in my head over and over again
Like the sound of tires shrieking on the pavement
Like the sound of nails being filed
Like a whistling teapot

"Train insane or stay the same."
"But do what you want, what makes you happy, what feeds your soul."
How can I when you say "there's always Barbies."

I fucking hate Barbie
I hate her perfect body, her perfect Ken, her perfect life
Nothing is ever fucking perfect like she makes it out to be
Fuck you Barbie

Say it one more time,
Push me to the edge
Hands pushed on the floor, leaving sweat imprints on the painted lines
Tears drop, leaving a small puddle on the half court line

That day haunts me
Haunts me like a ghost that never did live or die
Haunts me like night sweats
You know I can't quit
Your blood is pushed through my veins,
At a faster and faster pace every time you say the word Barbie

I see your lips push out each letter,
You say it so slowly, knowing you are sticking a needle in my arm
Only to watch the blood run onto the waxed floor

Say it one more fucking time,
Shove those words off those lips
Push me off the edge, throw me
You know I can't fall
You built me, you created me
You have made me strong

Say it again.

My dreams replay the life I used to enjoy, as if reality was the false one.

It's Saturday. I know it's Saturday because my mom hasn't lightly knocked on my door to softly call my name for school. Instead, the rising sun sneaks through my vertical blinds to heat the blue and pink quilt on my bed. Wet sandpaper tickles my chin and cheek. His mostly orange face greets me. Bright mossy-green eyes look excited and curious, asking me, "What fun shall we have today?!"

My hand sneaks out from under my heated burrito of blankets, scratching his furry forehead. Still tired, I shut my eyes and put my hand on the cool underside of my pillow. Peaches decides it's time to go back to sleep for a few more minutes, so he plops right next to my pillow and gradually falls asleep. The cream walls of my room seem to breathe lavender, soothing both of us in our attempts to snooze.

I rub my feet together, trying to get warm again. Peaches sees it and can't resist being playful. He attacks the moving quilt. I move again, not wanting to be trapped by chubby cat. He then decides the best way to keep it from happening again is to just lay on top of it. I lose the game.

After a few moments of still peace and quiet, my tummy will be silent no more. The sugary-maple scents are too enticing to resist. I withdraw my feet from under my fat feline. I pet him one more time before I stroll to the door and open it. He follows me down the hall, constantly looking up to make sure I remember he's still beside me. I walk with him to the kitchen. Dad made waffles, so I sit at the table eating mine with yogurt and fruit on top, just like him. Peaches disappears to enjoy his own food. After breakfast, we go to the living room to watch all our favorite shows. Once I'm comfortably seated, Peaches springs up to unwind in my lap, both of us full and satisfied. My hand instinctually glides on the top of his soft head, past his fluffy ears, and down his slightly boney back. He paws and purrs in
my lap, a good sign he is as happy as I am. 
The next moment, the world has changed. I have changed.

Scratch Scratch. LET ME IN! Pleaaaaaaasssssssseeeeee! My carrot-colored triangular ears extend fully up when I hear, Click! Staring with grassy eyes at the slowly ajar door, I hold my breath to break into a dramatic run. My whiskers can fit! I race inside, finally. I look up at her face, walking next to her. I want her to run her hand over my fur and tell me I'm a good kitty. I want to sit and flex and relax my claws. "Come on, Peaches," she says sweetly. Her face looks really scrunchy all of a sudden. We sit in a large chair. Me purring almost as loud as she is talking. "I'm so sorry to leave you for a while, I'm going off to college! Are you going to be okay without me?" I don't really hear what she is saying, but I understand how tenderly she scratches my chin, my favorite thing. I stretch out my rough tongue to lick up the sweet orbs falling from her cheeks.

My life has changed again, only this time. The room is dark. Quiet. The memory floods back to me.

My mom's voice over the phone was comforting as usual when I called her late that night. All of a sudden, she paused, taking a deep breath. "Now, Moni," she started, as I heard tears start to well into her cool emerald eyes. "I have to tell you..." I felt my own eyes commencing the typical drowning. "I'm so sorry, Moni." Another pause. "It's Peaches," she continued, barely audible through the weeping, "He died on Tuesday." I couldn't breathe. My cat. My amazing, cute, loving, funny cat. My already wet eyes flowed uncontrollably. "He was hit by a car." I wept, openly. "Moni, are you ok?" It was impossible to respond. "Monica, please answer me, are you going to be alright?"

The hurricane in my heart is too loud for words. My shattered core completely still.
Why I am Smoking a Newport

Dylan Evanston

I look down at the Newport between my fingers. I wish it would last forever. I hate Newports. I think I understand her better for it. I don't want to smoke another cigarette as long as I live. I don't want to have time to smoke another. I don't want to live another minute. I don't want to die. I don't want to want anything, but I don't want to have anything.

Stay the course. Take it easy. Take it as it comes. Nothing is coming. Sleep.

It's self indulgent. The future is bright. The future is. I don't want it. I don't want to want it. I want it.

The cigarette in my hand is segmented from being in Mark's pocket. I watch each bubble of tobacco turn to smoke, brushing the hair out of my eyes to see better. Brushing the hair out of my eyes to be seen better. To be seen. If they see me, they would turn away. I look out over the rim of my glasses, the snow fall catches the sun. Blurred sheet of white between me and the sidewalk, I exhale in peace. I exhale a piece of the cigarette. It holds me together.

I asked if I got a kiss goodbye. Not today. She only wants me when I'm drunk. She only wants me when she's drunk. I drink when she does. Touching hands when we're sober, she feels too much. When I'm drinking, time isn't so bad. With a drink in one hand and a smoke in the other. With my hands full. Without a free hand to hold hers. Without want, I can relax. My intention is clear and unseen. See through and unseen.

I trip over my own words. Leaving my mouth they form a wall of white noise. Through the wall, my shape is somewhere out there. Hiding behind my honesty.

If I put it behind me then I have to admit that time is winning. Looking at her over the table, eyes hidden beneath the brim of her faded cap. She looks like a movie star in hiding. I touch her hand and she freezes. I pull back. She has found us a dark room, mostly empty, on a Sunday morning. She is a tiny miracle. A bundle of nerves and fear. Human.

I don't want her to look up. In the car, she keeps her eyes on the road. In the car, I don't have to see her pain or the anger that grows up around it. She keeps it all buried. Thinly. If we park too far from the bar the rain might disinter it before we make it inside. My hand on her shoulder might brush away the last bit of dirt. In a clean, well-lighted place, the soil and what lays underneath would stand out in high relief.

The coffee tastes like piss and the fries are too long. The wall paper has velvet filigree. She tells me it is unsanitary. She tells me the staff here are creepy. She loves the fries. She only eats the ones that are sized to her liking. We dip them in sour cream and hot sauce. I take the bill, she scoffs at me and objects, but lets me pay all the same. She humors me, but the gesture is lost.

On the sidewalk, heading into the bar, we walk past a porch with a few people staying dry. I can't make out their words. She looks up at them and smiles. She loves porches. She doesn't know why she doesn't have one. I point out that mine is a shitty porch. It is still a porch.

Alone on my porch, I look down at my Newport with remorse. Only one or two bubbles of smoke left. She only smokes when she is drunk or nervous. She smokes a lot around me. In our own way, we're killing each other. I smile, chuckle to myself. The laughter turns into a cough. The coughs nearly take me off the railing. It subsides. I keep laughing. This is gross. I want to be buried. To sink with her and slip away for a while. Slip out of time. Slip out. But I'm out of time. I'm out of smokes.
Notes from the photographer:
We nicknamed this little guy White Anglo Saxon, and though we never figured out whether or not he was a Protestant, the fact that he selected the cap of this Warsteiner dunkel as his perch suggests that it is possible.

Winter 2011
The Cully, Portland, Oregon.
Nikon D5000, Nikkor 55mm f/3.5 Micro P
Lynne

Ciara Laing

He sits in the great room reading his favorite Stephen King book. The heat from the lively flame tickles his dress-socked toes. Dan closes his book and sits up rigidly in the purple velvet wingback chair. It was that smell, the stench of musty roses—the one he had had professionally cleaned out of everything made with a stitch of fabric.

Shit! Where is that smell coming from?
That musty rose hadn't stuck its thorns in his nostrils for seven months and sixteen days. That could only mean one thing.

"Oh, Daaaaannnn, I'm home!"

No. How?

"Dan, sweetie, I can't find my clothes. Why is my closet empty?"

He wasn't sure what he was going to do. Should he run? Call the cops? Hide? He sits there stiff as a dead old man. If he thought Lynne was crazy before he had her institutionalized, he was in for a real treat now.

Lynne had broken out of the institution only an hour ago, and they wouldn't realize that she was gone for at least another four hours when they did the midnight check. The pills they had been giving her were supposed to make her drowsy so she'd fall asleep fast, but she had been hiding them in the spots behind her back molars where her wisdom teeth used to be.

"Oh, I see, you thought you had gotten rid of me for good? Right sweetie?"

Dan doesn't answer. He hears the plunk of her heels descending the stairs. Where did she get heels? he thinks. He imagines some innocent lady walking home from work getting dragged to the ground and beaten nearly to death. He wouldn't put it past Lynne to beat a lady senseless and strip her of her clothes and belongings to blend in on the streets. Plunk, plunk, plunk! He knows he needs to move and quick.

He hurries quickly through the great room, then the dining room to get to the kitchen. He heads straight for the knife block. He grabs the biggest chopping knife in the block. As he sprints into the office, he catches his chunky reflection in the window.

Shit! I can't stab her. What the hell am I going to do?
Dan tries to breathe as shallowly as possible and listens carefully for Lynne's footsteps. Bullets of sweat drip off his balding head as he crouches behind his mahogany desk. He hears the heels on the wood floor, she's in the great room, and then the sound shifts to a harsher clicking, the tile...she's walking across the kitchen floor. Dan slides across his desk and runs for the stairs. I can get to the phone upstairs, call the cops — they'll come get her.

The stairs creak beneath his feet as he takes them two and three at a time. He trips three from the top and is greeted by the sound of a gun being cocked. He turns his head to see Lynne at the bottom of the stairs with his shotgun.

"Now Danny-Poo, why was this big gun in the coat closet? You weren't planning on shooting me were you?"

"No, no, it is just for protection... in case of robberies, break-ins, you know."

"No, I don't know! I think you were going to shoot me, you piece of shit!"

She quickly climbs the stairs and holds the gun inches from his face. "You were going to shoot me weren't you?" He looks away grasping the knife tightly; she still hasn't seen it. "Answer me! WEREN'T YOU?"

CRACK! She smacks the barrel across his head, knocking him onto his side.

Looking up with blurry vision, he can see the rage in her ice gray eyes. The sound of her teeth grinding together makes his neck feel tight and pinched. He winces as she pushes the barrel closer to his face. I have to cry. She always feels bad when I cry. One shot and my brains will be the new wall decor. The tears start to flow freely.

"Please. I wasn't going to shoot you. I promise sweetie, I love you."

"You don't lock up people you love!" she screams as she...
bounds up two stairs and kicks him in the center of his back.

“T’m sssorr...ry, pppp...lease, give meee... a chacha...chance,
I love yyy..yoooou,” he coughs and sobs uncontrollably.

Lynne loosens her stance and lowers the gun, letting it hang loosely in her right hand. “I’m sorry sweetie, come here,” she says, left arm open wide.

Now! Dan lifts himself and puts all his force behind his right arm and drives the knife deep into her stomach. Lynne grasps the banister and eases herself into a sitting position. Her hand shakes as she slowly pulls the knife from her stomach. Blood spills down the front of her. “You son-of-a-bitch!” she shrieks.

Dan takes the gun and runs down the stairs into the dinning room. My cell phone is in my coat! He dials 911 and walks back to the staircase; Lynne is gone.

“I am going to kill you,” Lynne’s voice echoes through the house.

“Screw you, you crazy bitch!” He walks past the stairs into the great room; the fire is blazing.

“AHHHHHHHHH! FUCK!” Dan screams as Lynne stabs the knife into the back of his shoulder three times. The muscles in his shoulder throb; nerves burn, fueling his anger. He turns and throws her to the floor in front of him, near the fire.

“Don’t move! Keep your crazy ass right where it is!” he says as he cocks the shotgun.

“Screw you!” she spits at him and starts to get up, shaking and growing paler. The middle of the blue cashmere sweater she stole drips thick, dark drops of blood onto the tops of her bare feet.

“I’m serious, I will blow your nuts-o head off!”

“Yeah, sure thing, dick face!” she says with the knife clenched in her hand.

She begins to lunge and Dan fires the gun just to the right of her shoulder; she ducks to the ground. “Missed me!” she taunts. Pissed, Dan fires a shot into the ceiling. Lynne screams out in fear this time. She jumps up and runs straight at him, knife raised above her head. He cocks the gun, Click! “Damn it!” He jumps back, but it’s too late; Lynne thrusts the knife into the center of his thigh.

“Crazy bitch!” he screams, grabbing her by the neck. He pushes her back and slams her head into the brick mantle of the fireplace. He pushes her into the fire, pulls the grate in front of it, and sits and holds it in place with his feet. He shoves his fingers in his ears and hums Hush Little Baby to himself.

Lynne wails and claws at the grate as the room fills with a shadowy smoke and a burning stench. It doesn’t take long before her body falls limp. Dan scoots back, gets up, and walks out the front door.
Mac

*Sara Molynex*

Entering on the one lane narrow road
I have never stopped to come back
To collect this group of memories once again

The field just outside the rain dropped window
Where she watched me kick the ball
Every other street provides either a memory or a blank

The street signs have stayed the same
But more foundations have been built
The paint color has chipped away

Library’s walls have grown ivy
City park has aged with the children’s continues laughter
Structure still stands strong
I search and search to find our names
A 2 by 4 all to ourselves
Easily found for the next return by the swings

Swings that set your soul free
Close my eyes tight, I see you
Your sandal-strapped feet ignite your engine
Navy shorts, red striped shirt, tan bright smile
The wind fills your strands of hair
Higher and higher above the structure you fly

My feet lead me back to the path that I once walked
Only in a much smaller size back to the parking lot

The next stop awaits the home where we once laid our heads
From the back seat, that drive seemed like forever
This time I could hold my breath from the park to home

The flag lot buried deep between the duplex and Joshua’s
Stands our blue painted four walls and gravel driveway
Close my eyes ohh so tight
I see..
Dad’s fishing boat parked on the side of the house
My basketball hoop next to Mom’s sunflowers blooming
And your swing set
The foundation of those swings never stayed on the ground for too long
It’s where you learned how to push the boundaries, putting yourself on the edge with every pump of those tan little legs
It became your safe haven,
A half moon of fresh air that filled only your lungs
The lungs that you have fought so hard to own

I drive away, leaving those twenty-two months behind
Only the taillights leave a red reflection off of the sign reading “Welcome”
But quickly vanish as the miles separate,
The distance doesn’t take away anything,
I leave with more then I came with
Soars

*Katie Wartell*

The crisp air of the moonlight nights. Its shadows start to dwell. When he woke from his long slumber; He swore she'd been to hell.

She had taken his love to war, Fought against her demon. And in the moment he knew that With her wings, finds freedom.

Rain City © Alexa Lepisto

Oh Simple Thing © Alexa Lepisto
No Illusions

Sunshine Dixon

I know I’m not promised tomorrow
I brush with eternity every day
Face to face with my creator
I may be one step away
But each second, minute, and hour reveals
The seed of potential in me
If I stay planted in the Lord
I’ll fulfill my destiny
There’s an ocean in each drop of water
There’s a forest in every tree
There’s a nation in every baby born
There’s potential inside of me
Every person I meet is important
Everyone has a treasured seed
That firmly planted and watered
Can grow into a tree
I contribute my time to new ventures
To supply an idea or two,
Three times a year I volunteer
And stay all the way through
I work with women and families,
Spend time on cancer issues,
Mentor and teach small children
Whose lives often teach me, too
I share my food with the hungry
Who hasn’t been hungry before?
Or needed desperately to get a new job
And couldn’t get through the door?
Sharing won’t give me status
In this ever changing land
Or make me something special
Because money came through my hands

To live with no illusions
One must challenge mistaken perceptions and misconceptions,
To live with no illusions
One must undertake personal inspection

To live with no illusions
One must be willing to change
To live with no illusions
One must forgive and release pain
To create a new reality
And use individuality
To affect the common man
With the skills and talents in your hands
To pour out the possibilities bottled up inside
To pour out potential poetry and books you want to write
To go fishing in Alaska, or climb the mountains high
To learn new romance languages, or even how to fly
To share food with a stranger
Even if it’s just some rice
To read books to little children
Or do something very nice
To pour out your money, time, talent
And all I’ve listed up above
If those things are not enough
Then try pouring out your love
Take part in your community
Who knows what your quest will be?
Maybe when you die, under rest in peace
Your tombstone will say
Died Empty
There’s an ocean in each drop of water
There’s a forest in every tree
There’s a nation in every baby born
There’s potential inside of me
"Honey, Honey?" Fred exclaims as he bursts through the front door. "Shit, shit! Donna get under the bed," Honey whispers as she un-cuffs the stripper. Fred prances into the bedroom. "How was your day sweetie?" he asks, smiling so big she thinks his jaw will snap. "Lovely." "Great! Guess who I ran into at the store?" "Who?" she asks, trying to muster his same level of excitement. "I ran into Milly." "You mean the girl with the snake farm?" "Yeah. And she said that we could get one for free for that time I fixed her truck." "Seriously Fred? What the hell would we do with a snake?" "Treat it like any other pet. Feed it. Love it. Ya know?" "No." "What do you mean no? I told you when we met that I wanted a pet snake." "We've been married six years, I don't ever remember you saying that." Honey throws the sheet aside and hops out of bed and heads for the bathroom to grab her robe. "Since when do you lay in bed naked?" "Since it's 90 degrees out Fred. Fucking duh!" she hollers from the bathroom. "So what'd you do today?" "What do you mean 'what'd I do today'?" "Well, Jane called and said you didn't come into work." "Yeah, I didn't feel well. Summer cold I guess." After a few minutes, Fred puts the medium boa constrictor he was hiding in his jacket under the end of the bed. "Well, I really think we should talk about this snake thing." Honey comes to the bathroom door, toothbrush in mouth. "No." "I want a snake!" She spits into the sink, "Yeah, and I want a snake in this house about as much as I want to sleep with a stripper." "What?" "Meaning... I don't want a snake in the house." "Well, fine then! Fucking fine!" he spits as he storms out of the house.

Honey quickly runs to Fred's side of the bed where Donna had slid under. She bends down to tell Donna to get out while Fred is gone. She doesn't find all of Donna though; what she does find is a yellow boa constrictor with a very full mouth and Donna's stiletto-shoed feet sticking out.
Fly Like an Eagle

Hibery Ho

I...I...bated...this...feeling. My teeth chattered as I groaned in fatigue. My body began to violently shake and felt cold to the touch, my skin splotchy, and my muscles achy. It was like my neck, back, and knees had toothaches. Right to the bone. I dragged the electric blanket out from its hiding spot and curled up into a ball underneath it. Wretched hot and cold flashes, goose bumps and shaking from hell. Any movements, even reaching for my water bottle on my desk, became impossible. I hallucinated beyond control. The whole room was flipping upside down and I felt like I was standing on my head. Within seconds, my breaths became weaker and shorter, phlegm blocking the air going into my lungs.

Knock...knock...knock. “Hibery?” Grandma came in. “I was out with Sonia for lunch so I got you a cheeseburger and a coke. I am off to her house to see the kids now; do you need anything, sweetheart?”

“Hmm I’m good, thanks Grandma.”

“Okay dokie. Make sure to drink a lot of water and try to sleep. I hope you feel better.” Grandma slowly walked away in her belly-apple-shape posture and left behind a 15 year-old girl fighting her spiking fever. The loneliness like a shadow of darkness trapped me entirely in the cold room.

Actually we were not related. Calling Barbara “Grandma” was just an appropriate way to address her since I was not much older than her grandkids. Grandma was my host mom. She had signed up at Portland Lutheran School to provide a homestay for international students like me. Wrinkles and lines made her face look like a roadmap of time. However, you would never know she was seventy-four because she dressed in nice, cute clothes; actually some of the same outfits I wore, but they didn’t look too weird on her. She was a typical grandma with her voice always set to an adoring tone, gentle as a butterfly. She also had a wide bosom for hugging but frozen dead blue eyes that only appeared if you touched her sparkling wonderland: her kitchen.

Purr. I hated when her gigantic, dusty mobile green monster grumbled to life. I only rode with her seven times and all seven times I was scared to death. She could barely see over the dashboard, and when going down the street, the car looked like it was driving itself. But... she’s already gone. She’s gone and left me behind like I was the carrier of the Black Plague. Never before had I wanted her to stay by my bed, checking my temperature with her hand on my forehead, saying, “Honey, I promise you will get better soon,” like my mom always did. My heart squeezed at the same time my chest fought for oxygen. I thought I was going to cry, but I couldn’t. Maybe my tear glands were dehydrated since the stinky fever had already burned all of the fluids from my body into the air.

I felt freezing cold but I was sweating and shivering like a nervous freak. The swollen tissues in my throat grew spiky and sucked up all of the saliva left in my tongue and gum tissues. My mouth dried up so quickly. I was damn tired. It was getting worse since my stuffy nose and dry mouth impeded my breathing rhythm. I literally crawled out of bed and dragged myself to the kitchen where Grandma had left some food on the counter.

Why hamburger again? Didn’t I have that yesterday and the day before? The cheeseburger smelt awful, like burnt grease and charcoal; it made me want to puke. My nose felt like it was on fire from blowing it so much, and the meaty beefy smell made it worse. No. No. No. I’m not going to eat that again. I slapped my face a few times to wake up my brain because I needed my central nervous system to send the signals through my body so I could move. Here we go. I boiled some hot water in a pot, threw in some rice, and waited until it softened, like a thick porridge. I also added an egg, shredded peppers, and salt. The soup was looking good and my stomach began rumbling. Ha-ha Mom, you should be proud of me. I am not a kitchen expert but I can make rice soup today. There is no way on earth that this can compare with how you make it, but I’m satisfied. Mumbling to myself in great pride, I started to come alive, although my arms were still weak.

It was such a pleasant feeling when I could make a bowl of Viet-style, digestible food for my cold treatment. The September
sun shined brightly on my face and washed away all of the anxiety and distress. Even the fever became drunk from the sunlight and fell asleep. Looking out the window, the sky was blue and high with white clouds, translating it into a vision of peace and happiness. Suddenly, purr, the familiar disturbing noise from the green monster cracked the moment.

Splat. The bowl of soup flew straight down onto the floor in slow motion as I saw the apple figure with a high bun on the head coming toward the front door. NO! Please tell me that Grandma is not coming home. I froze like a giant ice cube, and did not dare look around. Crap. Grandma's crystal bowl exploded; sticky rice and broken glass flew everywhere. My heart contracted its last pump and pulled all the blood back into its four chambers, making my face pale white. The soup probably gave me a swollen red blister on my feet but it was nothing compared to the fear that came out with my breath.

"What is happening?" Grandma looked at me with her eyes flashing, closing into slits while her nostrils flared.

"I'm... mmm... sorry."

"I'm asking what are you doing in my kitchen?" Her mouth quivered and slurring words spewed into space like a volcano releasing its pent up emotions.

"My... my mom... this chao soup... when I sick." My eyebrows drew together and I no longer knew what language I was speaking.

"So you didn't want the cheeseburger that I got?"

"My... my sore... throat... can't... swaaaa... lloooow burger."

"Ok Hiber, listen! I want you to clean my kitchen right now and go back to your room. Also from now on, I don't want you to use my kitchen. No more! Did you get that?" Her face was contorted in fury like a bull. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled with ferocity.

"Yes, I understand. Sorry Grandma."

I carefully cleaned her "untouchable" kitchen then ran back into my room immediately and burst into a river of tears. She's just a stranger. I was wrong in the beginning when expecting her to be like my mom. I leaned my back against the wall and slowly collapsed to my knees.
Freedom

*Sara Molynex*

I stand here tall and proud
My roots are firmly weaved through the soil
I know who I am, where I have come from and where I want to go
Those choices are firm, like the ground I stand on
My layers are built thick and filled with memories and emotions

I may sway side to side, back and forth in a fall storm
But nothing has created a shift like this before,
This winter storm brings something new

Darkness instantly covered the once blue skies
Rain covered the dry cement
Lightning crashed, electrocuting my thoughts
To think of my existence without her could not be a reality

My trunk moved side to side
Disrupting the soil with every sway
Each time pulling harder and harder
Changing my identity with each tug and pull

The places I once desired to go and the roots I wanted to grow
Vanished
Just as her life almost did before our eyes

The evergreen that I have become from seed to sprout
Perfectly placed on every course, can be seen from any view
Without one doubt I have become another
Unlike any other I have seen before
Jazz Bass

Sunshine Dixon

My grin wide
I feel butterflies
As my eyes follow
The line of your neck
With your strings you swallow
The undivided attention
In every inch in the room
And at every table
How are you able
to put us all in the same trance
With musical chants
Making us swing our skirts
Prance like we have ants in our pants
We dance 'til we're near death
Out of breath
And glad
We exhaust every ounce of energy
Moving back to our seats
Heads in sync to the melody
That bellows sweetly
'Till we're completely
Out of breath
And glad
Eyes set
Covered in sweat
I grin
I'm starting to feel
Those butterflies again

Maritime Losses

Dylan Evanston

She was the albatross that,
Alighting on the boom,
broke the mast and tangled the rigging.
Her head a mass of black sails
And grapeshot lips
Bomb and grapnel, three sheets to the wind
Gave no resistance
But fell to the deck in shambles.

Relationships are but ships
And with holes below the waterline
So must sink.

The smoldering wicks
Of matchlock love
And saltpeter enmity
Have felled larger and stronger
Than these planks we walk

On shore
Survivors hold candlelight vigils
For those tonight with Jones
Sailors bones never found
Pillars of fat lit
That souls may come home

Standing amid the mass
When first set ablaze
The wax pools lazy harmless
But unmoving the shaft shrinks

The tiny ocean of melted fuel
cupped upon palms
turns tan to brown to black
as hands char and flesh shrinks
pulling from the bone.

Would it not be kinder
to pinch the wick between
thumb and fore and be done?

But knowing how long to hold on
comes with years not possessed
of young lovers.

That the other held the
ege of the flotsam for dear life
letting go only when strength gave out
cast release before death a betrayal
in flickering golden shadows.

Dredging seawater through sockets
head bowed praying to God
that when the skin falls away
the skeletal fingers of the lich
may prevail upon the demons
to drag the lost from the depths.

Instead the gulls
and the sharks feast
far from the yellow glow
of candles in windows
or blistered palms
under the remorseless moon

for what does an albatross
care for death
but what it can taste.
Spring Shopping

Ciara Laing

Light, springy floral
Sweaters, frilly
Short dresses hug
The white faceless
Mannequins all the same:
Perfectly fragile
Elegantly dainty

They remind me of childhood Barbies
Those beauty queen, centerfold bunnies
Meager Blondies

“Mommy? Is there one that looks like me?
Black curly hair and green eyes?”
A graceful Gracie?
“Oh baby you’ll never be like that
They are all so tall, svelte and darling
You are my sweet, plump, fluffy Gracie."
“Ok, Mommy.”

I hate those mannequins
The dream girl Barbies
With their sparse waist
Slim, mile-long legs
High cheekbones
A sculpted, starved face
Thin-as-rail arms
Ghastly square shoulders
Twiggy collarbones
Their stance a wire coat hanger
An object for displaying clothes

It’s a lie,
I’m a liar
I’m in love
With those plastic
Cuties
Their cold
Soulless
White presence

I remember that day with a purple haze
When she described my lack of beauty
Standing there in the toy section of the store
Looking up at her shiny brown hair
And golden skin from elbow height
My eyes swimming with fat tears.

I can still feel the texture
Of the bloodshot anger
And crushing shame.

My truth is that I aspire,
Have a hunger to be
One of
Them.

God, please make me pretty
I want to be as pretty as Barbie
Give me flat sunshine hair
Eyes like the blue sky
Lips the color of the garden roses
An itty bitty... what does mommy call it?
A wwwwwwaahh... a way?
A waist! One of those
I don’t want to be as plump and peachy
As a plain apple pie
Please make me good enough for Mommy.
Notes from the photographer:
Fourth of July. I had just caught a ride up to Eugene from Oakland the night before with a friend who happened to be going my way. California not being big on fireworks, I was glad to see some Oregonians had visited Washington recently.

Summer 2012
College Hill, Eugene, Oregon
Nikon D5000, Nikkor 24mm f/2.8 AI-s

The Bottle and Rocket © Dylan Evanston

I Call Myself Alice

Allison Woodruff

I call myself Alice.
A misunderstood creature, sticky sweet
I rest, only appearing lost in deep sleep
Filling the velvety crannies of darkness
Hidden between a rock and a hard place.
In my water, I steep black tea
I have all the suction cups, saucers, and plates
That I could ever need
For my afternoon social affair.
Reaching with inky accuracy
My rippling muscles will shrink and squeeze
Searching for guests,
If you please.
A bulbous teapot, my head curious grapples with
The purple depth of my situation:
All I wish for is company
To release the tension of the tides
To look me in the eyes (not the tentacles)
And ask me politely about the weather.
God and Cigarettes

Dylan Evanston

Raindrops fell into indifferent rivulets across my arms and back, held at bay by my quickly saturating rain jacket. Both feet plying the pavement; I kept my helmet on under my hood. My bike in one hand, a cigarette in the other. I was still a bit jarred from the blow to the head. The side mirror of a van, knocked flat back against the side. My bike pinned between the van and a parked Subaru. The driver had decided to veer into the bike lane at the last second. I should have seen it coming, he had done it at every stop to prevent my overtaking him, but I had been too close the last time. Putting his mirror back in place, I apologized. I tried pointing out that I couldn’t stop on a dime and he had cut me off. He was too busy yelling to hear me.

When I told Sam the story later, he said I should have taken my Kryptonite to the guy’s window. I had tried to brake. My hands on drop handlebars had to move to keep from being pinned. One cannot brake with no hands, but one cannot brake without their hands on the brakes either. No room to swing a lock, no room to do anything but grip the handlebars and pray. I had done neither.

The cigarette burned a small hole in my jacket sleeve. I kept it tucked upward under my hand to stay dry. Another drag. I looked up to see a church stoop up ahead. I wonder, would someone have kicked me off if I’d stopped to smoke out of the rain for a moment? Perhaps. I could tell them that I was there to pray. That would be a lie.

Or would it.

I pictured a thin, aged form leaning on the wall in the shelter. Black robe and a white collar; a priest. Sitting at his feet, still smoking, my bike at the foot of the stairs in the rain, myself. I dismissed the thought out of hand.

Things evolve. Evolution leads to greater and greater complexity. The evolution of all things “just so” is highly improbable. The degree of power and complexity attributed to God is vast. A “supernatural”, sentient being is exponentially more complex than the life forms which have thus far evolved here. Therefore, as best we know based on the evidence at hand and the required degree of complexity, his/her existence is far less probable than the current theory. All these things I say to the priest in my head. To myself.

True. I hear my own words echo in my head from the mouth of a friend. I, now become as the priest, respond. That is true my son, but I see you on Sundays. You are there with many others, gathered round to take heart in the glory. To eat and drink and share fellowship, around a television set. Men on a green field, a thousand miles away, hit each other, fighting for yards. Their legs churn the grass and carry one another to the ground. Some of these men you have met or seen, most you never will. I smile, thinking of my roommate’s friends who congregate at our house every few weeks to watch the UofO Ducks take on some team or another. They stand on their feet and yell profanities and cheers at the screen, caught in the moment I stand with them.

You know for a fact that those men can’t hear your words. Not the players, nor the coaches, nor the referees. The boy on the steps at my feet looks up smiling and says, “Clearly”.

We agree that it is totally impossible that those individuals can hear you, yet you talk to them. God is simply very unlikely, yet you see talking to him as the mark of misguided foolishness. You are willing to allow such things time in your life, but you rule out God?

“But they are simple entertainment,” the boy argues. “I don’t take it seriously.”

Serious or not, you still do it. If you showed the same passion to God, lived in his light with the small energy you spend on the game, you would find that energy rewarded with far greater. The tradition, the camaraderie of shared experience and connection to the past. The parables of honor, trust, respect, friendship, free will and striving that coaches use on the field are all in the Bible, but in a much more powerful form. The belief that God is there is not an absolute one, it is a choice that I make every day.

“But my belief or disbelief cannot change whether or not God exists,” says the boy, taking another drag and looking out into the rain. “How am I supposed to follow something that I’m almost certain does not exist?”
I smile down at him and shake my head. *This is not an easy question my son, but some day perhaps you will find an answer.*

My vision of myself put out his cigarette and stepped back onto the sidewalk nearly two blocks behind where my legs continued to move. I could feel him, the boy from the steps hurrying to catch up. As he stepped into my frail shadow, I thought it strange that I had not stopped.

A more religious man than I may have felt as though he had spoken to God. For me, that thought is highly improbable. I lifted my bike by the top tube and crossed the parkway to the street, dropping my corporeal smoke into the flooded gutter. As it fell from my fingers, I cringed, hearing a chorus of my former girlfriends scold me for littering inside my head.

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Notes from the photographer:
About a week later, right after Katie and I ate the two eggs we found that day, but no more were laid, we realized that they had gone out in the recycling, and our chickens were not yet laying. We escaped without getting sick and with all the chickens now laying, we get six BROWN eggs a day.

Fall 2012
Peter Q-B and Rosemary Chicken
The Embassy House, Alberta Neighborhood, Portland, Oregon
Nikon D5000, Nikkor 55mm f/3.5 Micro P
Early

Allison Woodruff

Sunlight caught and spun
Into sugared blossoms, cherry syrup
Drenching five a.m. air

Stretching slowly, I hear the chirps of early-risers outside.
Rubbing last night's poems out of my eyes,
I shake words out from between my sheets.
Finches no bigger than a child's fist
Take hold of the sky,
Leaving their shadows to race along the grass.

Running after fleeting shapes, my mind trips
As I spill over into notebook scraps.
The bell tower chimes six in the distance.
I untangle my limbs and eyelashes,
Mumble sweet nothings to the nestbuilders,
Notice the light pools that move across my room.

Eyes of a Child

Patricia Purvance

"Honey, I found a lump on my breast today."
I halt where I am, crossing in front of my parents' closed double doors. The doors are old, the white patterning on them unique, but they don't quite fit the door frame, leaving large cracks at the bottom between the carpeting and the door edge—leading to the sound leak I currently exploit to catch my dad's response.

"You're alright. Calm down Mary, it'll be okay, just schedule a doctor's appointment to get it checked."

I'm torn between wanting to stay and listen, and the desire to not get caught eavesdropping. I'm curious as to why it's so important that my mom has a lump. I have lumps, bumps, and bruises all over my 10 year old body—from climbing over fences... and falling, up trees... and falling, up stairs... and falling down those too. But how could Mom have gotten a lump? She's always taking me down off things, not climbing or falling herself. Confused, I shake my head and head off to my room. Grownups are strange.

Hand caught, dragging along behind my mother, I'm pulled from outside, through the sliding glass doors, into the wide gray building's wide gray waiting room. In cheap black chairs arranged in lines, facing away from each other so that no coughing patient has to look into the eyes of another hacking patient, the sick wait for their turn with the doctor. But there'll be no waiting for us today.

"I'm Mary, 9:40 appointment," my mom tells the nurse behind the waiting room desk.

"You're late!" the nurse barks back. "C'mon, this way, the room's ready."

As I'm pulled inescapably down the hallway, I begin to notice differences between this place and my normal pediatrician. Though the same burningly clean smell fills the air (a staple, I will later learn, of every doctor's office), the spicy scent of herbs also drifts in the air. Although the hallway I'm dragged down and finally the room we stop in does have the white walls typical in doctor's offices, the carpeting...
is black, and the walls are covered in paintings, not prints. Unusual. My pediatrician’s only allowances to decoration are the pictures of all his patients on the walls, the effect of which is more creepy than comforting. The room is also different. No exam table covered in crinkly white paper as I’m used to. Instead, there is a desk made of a dark wood, covered in books, maps, calendars...all layered willy nilly on top of each other. The other side of the room contains four comfortable armchairs, with a table in the center. Confused, I peer around for the containers of needles and cotton balls I was expecting. What kind of doctor was this? Too young to guess that a comforting doctor’s room is a bad sign (it is when things really go wrong that we start trying to fix the smaller comforts instead, like ice cream to quell a heartbeat), I settle down onto the plush carpet, leaning against my mother’s legs, to read as the doctor comes in and begins droning at my mother.

My mother’s face is usually pretty in a homespun way, evenly featured, wrinkled where years of laughter and smiles have worn grooves, but as the doctor speaks, it twists in sadness and horror. Her wide set blue eyes dilate and open wide, the blonde, almost-not-there eyebrows raised high. Nostrils flare on the medium, but quite pointed nose. Even the freckles that dot her tanned cheeks and the tips of her long, straight blonde hair seem to twist together for comfort. She makes quick, birdlike movements, first putting a hand up to her mouth, then lowering it, fist clenching before finally relaxing into weary surrender. I look up from where I have been reading on the floor, ears perked up for a new big word I can use.

“Mommy, what’s malignant mean?”

The school bell rings, shrilling through the fifth grade classroom. Around me, other kids pack up as quickly as possible, shoving books, wrappers from lunch, pencils and rulers, into their backpacks without a care, eager to find their parent’s car in the line-up outside in order to speed away as quickly as possible from the cold gray office building that disguises itself as an elementary school. I pack up slowly. School gets out at 12:15, one benefit (so it seems to the students at least) of budget cuts. But no one will be coming for me until in between 3 and 4; a doctor’s appointment keeps my mom away, and she hadn’t been able to find anyone to take my little sister Amy and I. Amy, a second grader, will be perfectly fine. The principle lets her into the gym storeroom, and Amy can amuse herself endlessly with a single ball. But the gym storeroom holds no such delights for me. Instead, I decide to break into the school library. It is only officially open for students on Mondays and Wednesdays, a reward for sitting through our hour long chapel sessions. But the building is old, the locks nearly stripped, and so I snap a paper clip on my way past the teacher’s desk to pick the lock. There is too much hustle in the main hallway, the shrieks of children, young and old, scouting for parents, for any student or teacher to notice one small, quiet ginger girl picking the lock quickly and soundlessly, and slipping in the cracked door. I quietly close it behind me, relocking it so that no one will sense anything amiss and come bother me. The school may have once been an office building, but the room that is now our little library seems too narrow to even have been a broom closet. Windows cover two of the walls, but fortunately the addition of bookshelves makes it so that I can crouch in a corner, unseen to any outside. I reach up onto the eighth grade shelves to find a “Choose Your own Adventure” book, climbing up on the one desk to reach. Successful, I crawl under the desk with my prize—only three more hours to go.

“Your mommy’s going to be okay.”

I look up from my math book into the startlingly clear blue eyes of the blonde girl in front of me. She’s breaking the rules of the waiting room, interrupting my homework time like this.

“Thank you?” I try. I had never thought, before this instant, that my mother wouldn’t be alright.

“She has cancer too, right? She always goes through the same door my mommy does. I haven’t seen you two,” her glance and gesture include Amy, who hasn’t even looked up from her spot on the floor playing ponies, “here before.”

“We usually stay with my grandma or at school,” I explain. “Mmmn...” she hums to herself for a minute. “Want to come play with me? We could play tag.”

The invitation, this whole encounter, is startling, and sudden,
and I don't want to play, but she's trying to be nice and is obviously bored herself.


The minutes pass by quickly, blurred from running, diving, and squirming under and around chairs, each of us striving not to get caught by the other, filling the empty grey waiting room with giggles floating like soap bubbles on the air.

The door to the main body of the doctor's office squeaks open, and a tall figure, bald and dressed in baggy clothes in earthy colors stumbles out and toward the door to the outside.

“Wait for me!” the other girl squeaks, rushing to get her backpack and tugging on her mother's pants as they walk. At the last moment, she turns, waves to me. I wave back, then return to my seat, stare at the door, waiting to see if my mother will return bald and walk away without me.

“What is this?” I shriek as I poke at the sandwich I've just unloaded from my brown lunch bag. Some kind of green ooze binds the two pieces of cracked, dry wheat bread together. Green sprouts stick out around the edges. I rustle through the bag again, looking helplessly for my usual peanut butter and jelly on soft white bread—no crusts. As if adding insult to injury, all I find is a bag of carrot sticks—lightly salted. Finally, I take a bite of the green sandwich, glare at it, and throw it back into the bag. I wander over to the park bench where my mom is talking to her grown up friends. She looks up as I get closer.

“Didn't like it then?”

“I told you it wouldn't work Mary,” one of her friends laughs.

“Any kid can tell the difference between avocado and sprouts and a PBJ.”

Mom sighs and looks back at me, “The doctor said it may have been unhealthy eating that led to the cancer, so no more junk food for you, young lady. Now eat that sandwich like a good girl; there are plenty of children in Africa who would love a sandwich.”

“Not this one,” I grumble as I amble away. How many times had I heard the “children in Africa” line now? Obviously there will be no rescue from my parent. I find a stick and a bit of string. Maybe the crawdads in the park stream like avocado better.

Whistling proudly, I carry in my card filled shoe box. This Valentine's day had been a profitable one. 15 classmates equals 15 cards equals 15 pieces of candy, just for me. I stop dead in the kitchen as I notice a Beanie Baby on my and Amy's dinner plates. Mom’s cooking—something with lots of vegetables I notice, wrinkling my nose—and not paying attention to me. I inch closer, peeking at the tag on mine's ear. I'm Dobey the Doberman, it reads. I cuddle Dobey to my chest. Mom turns as I tug at her leg.

“You weren't supposed to see that yet! Oh well, I suppose dinner's ready anyway. Amy! Ken! Time for dinner!”

Dad and Amy rush into the kitchen—Amy squeaking in surprise and going to cuddle her new pony Beanie Baby.

“Before we eat, I'd like to read something to you. You both know Mommy had an operation for her cancer a little while ago, right?”

Amy and I stare at each other blankly.

“Honey, I don't think we told them about the operation, just that you needed extra rest after your doctor's appointment last week.”

“Well, Mommy went to the doctor to get the cancer taken out, and today I got a phone call from the doctor saying that it's gone completely. I wrote this letter for all our friends and family who have been praying for me, and I'd like to read it before we eat.”

She beams around the table and begins reading. A page or so in, Dad takes over—Mom's sobbing was making the words of the letter unrecognizable. For the first time, I grasp that cancer was not something my mother expected to survive—at least not so easily. Amy, meanwhile, is playing with her pony, but that's acceptable; I don't understand half of what the letter's going on about either, but a few things I do grasp. No hair loss for Mommy, no more grey doctor's offices. No more waiting after school... but the vegetables—they're here to stay.
Sonnet for Jennilee (Redoux)

*Dylan Evanston*

I told you to call if you were in need.
I never thought you would think of me when recommended dosage was payed no heed.
Miles glazed in your eyes, seeing the Siene.

Was it his yells or her bottle that drove you to encapsulate your pained, frail cries?
Or was if from some other thing you dove, some sinister secret your smile belies?

Heels slid on ice, I picked you up and led you back, my coat round your shiv'ring shoulders
to mother, home, then to hospital bed admitting, straight back, catch basin holder.

As death drained from your lips, I fell, I fear, and we broke down together, both, my dear.
A Sharp Knife

Ruthie Nelson

It all happened so fast. Three days ago, my beloved five-year-old Portuguese water dog, Molly, was her usual silly, spunky self. She was happily digging holes in the back yard all day—her favorite hobby. Now as I sat with her in her last few moments, I marveled at how things could change so quickly, without any warning. The sharp knife of a short life.

Three days ago, I noticed that Molly was especially lethargic—she was usually a little drowsy in the morning, but she always perked up at the sound of the bag of her favorite treats being opened, or the promise of a walk around the block. Today was different, however. Today, she just lay on the couch, not moving. I offered her a treat, a slice of cheese—her absolute favorite food on the planet.

She still did not budge. I walked over to her and asked, “What’s wrong, Mollster?” while placing my hand on her soft, jet-black fur. She looked up at me with her big, beautiful brown eyes with a sad expression, and I knew something was off. I started to pet her, and I noticed she was really skinny—odd for a dog that ate literally everything in sight, from thumbtacks to candy wrappers to her favorite cheese. Now I was nervous. Molly never lost weight unless she was really sick. She had been sick a month or so ago, and she lost ten or fifteen pounds. This time, I could almost feel her ribs.

I called my mom—the nurse in the family—and asked her to take a look. We brought Molly’s food over to see if she’d eat anything. It was a struggle. Ravenous, she devoured every last bite. However, every time she lifted her head to get another morsel, it looked as if she was trying to lift an elephant. Something was really wrong with Molly. She is only five years old. She never acted this way before. Why is this happening now? My mom called the vet and they wanted to see her immediately. My heart doubled its pace.

Our local vet was unsure about what was ailing Molly—they said it could be either cancer, Addison’s disease, or kidney failure, so they suggested that we go to the emergency vet to get her checked out.

The 30-minute car ride it took to get there was agonizing for everyone. Despite the obvious pain she was in, Molly insisted on sitting in her favorite seat—the front passenger seat—which meant that she would be sitting on my mom’s lap, a difficult task for a dog who weighed around 60 pounds. Even when she’s sick, she still wants to sit in her favorite spot. The pain in my heart and the unsettling feeling in my stomach marred my smile from the pleasant thought.

On the way there, I remembered how Molly used to dig countless holes in the back yard. After keeping her nose to the ground to sniff out the best spot, she would dig a shallow hole the size of her body, and collapse in it exhausted but content. Every now and then, she would decide that this hole was imperfect, so she would get up and dig again until it was flawless. At the end of the day, she would come back into the house, trailing dirt as she went. She smelled like dirt so often that it eventually became a part of her—her personal perfume brand: “Eau de Dirt.”

With a jolt, I was sent out of my reverie when we finally got to the pet hospital and immediately seeing the doctor. “Your vet called and let us know you were coming,” the receptionist explained. She brought us into an exam room in the back while we waited for the doctor to come. When I was just a few steps away from the door, all I could hear was the sound of a heart breaking into a million jagged pieces: a man was sobbing down the hall—he just found out that his beloved pet would not survive. A shiver went down my spine. I hoped with all my might that Molly would receive a different fate.

The doctor came in to our medium-sized room. She filled the beige room with hope, and made the dull walls seem brighter with her bright smile. She was a kind-looking woman with dirty blond hair styled into short spikes around her head. Tattoos of paw prints, birds, and horses covered her arms. Halfway imitating a dog, she crouched down low so that she could be at eye level with Molly after introducing herself to my family.

“What's wrong with you, sweetie?” Wouldn’t we all like to know? The doctor said that she would like to keep Molly there for observation overnight, and while she was there, they would run a bunch of tests so they could figure out what was wrong with my
Galoob—a word my family invented specifically to describe Molly’s goofy demeanor and sometimes stupid actions.

On the car ride home as I was sitting in the back seat with my brother, I felt a sense of dread in my stomach: an awful combination of nausea with a heart beating too fast. I tried to push this feeling down and forget about it for the moment. Although I was twenty years old, I was not prepared to deal with this. Nothing could prepare me for this.

When we finally got home, the house felt empty without Molly. It was ominously quiet. The usually open and airy feeling in the house was replaced with an oppressive shadow. Molly was everywhere and nowhere at the same time: her favorite toy remained underneath the dining room table where she last played with it, and her food remained scattered around her bowl as if she was saving some for later. Forgetting what happened earlier in the day, I almost expected Molly to come running to the door as I entered, as was her usual greeting. My heart sank when I remembered that she wasn’t home. My miniature poodle, Daisy, greeted my family at the door with an expression that asked, “Where’s Molly? Where’s my buddy?” She knew something was wrong. I pulled her close to me and hugged her tightly, as if that would keep all pain, sickness, and suffering at bay.

The next day, after waiting for what seemed like an eternity, the vet called us. My family anxiously gathered by the phone and heard the diagnosis. “I have good news and bad news. The good news is that Molly doesn’t have cancer.” Relief. I exhaled the breath I didn’t realize I was holding. “The bad news is that Molly definitely has something wrong with her kidneys. We think it is either Addison’s disease or kidney failure.” My heart sank into the pit of my stomach. Addison’s disease is easily treatable—Molly would need medication for the rest of her life, but we expect that she would be able to live a long time. Unfortunately, if it is kidney failure, it would be lethal. We could…” The vet’s voice trailed off into the background and I was lost in my thoughts. Addison’s disease? Kidney failure?! How is this possible? This can’t be possible. She’s healthy! She just has a stomach bug, that’s all. This can’t be happening!

Suddenly, I remembered that the vet was still on the phone. “We’re going to run more tests, and I will call you back as soon as I have more information. I promise.” My parents thanked her, and hung up the phone. We all looked at each other with the same expression: concern, empathy for Molly’s pain, and most of all, fear. The room was silent.

Time was disjointed—at times, it seemed like one minute lasted for hours, while other times it seemed like an hour passed by in the blink of an eye. Everyone tried to keep busy in order to keep his or her mind off of Molly. When the vet called back later in the day, her voice was filled with a warm sorrow that I knew spelled danger. “We ran more tests, and I’m sorry to say that Molly has kidney failure.”

Once again, my heart made another trip into my stomach. “Unfortunately, this means that Molly isn’t going to make it. At this point, you have two options: you can either put her down now, or you can bring her back home and let her live out however many days she has left. I’m sure you want to see her, so feel free to come whenever you want. I know this is a tough decision, so I will give you guys some time to think about it. I’m so sorry.”

Teary-eyed, we hung up the phone.

Silence.

The room was so silent. I could almost hear my heart pounding in my chest. The sharp knife of a short life.

We all decided that we couldn’t let Molly die at home. It would be far too painful. That meant we had to decide when to put her down. I couldn’t believe that we had to decide when to end the life of my beautiful, loving dog that had been my constant companion for five years. She was there for me when my family moved from a small town in Connecticut to a town outside Seattle after my dad found a new job. She was there for me when I had a hard time making friends in my new school because I didn’t fit in. She was always there for me, and now I had to decide when she would take her last breath? It was beyond cruel.

After a long conversation with my family that ended with
everyone—especially me—crying with heaving sobs, we decided that we would see how she was doing the next day, and if there wasn’t any improvement, we would put her down. Once we decided, we immediately left for the emergency vet.

When we got there, we were directed into an exam room that was similar to the last one we were in. Nothing could brighten the beige walls now. We waited.

When one of the doctors brought Molly in, I could tell that she was much worse than when we had dropped her off the other day. Her paws were huge—a side effect of kidney failure, which prevented her from properly getting rid of excess water in her body. Her breath smelled like bile, another side effect. Although she wagged her tail enthusiastically when she saw my family, I could tell that it took a lot of effort to muster such a small reaction. It seemed like the mere act of walking over to our room from the kennel where she was staying completely drained whatever energy she had left, and she panted from the exertion.

I sat down on the floor and scooted over to her so that I could pet her. Her fur was still like the downy soft pillow I remembered. Trying to hold back tears, I talked to her and tried to comfort her. Gingerly, I held her face in my hands and gazed into her big, beautiful eyes. They were a little watery, so it looked like I was peering into pools of dark bronze. Her long, curly eyelashes framed her eyes beautifully—I always called them “diva lashes” because it looked like she was wearing fake eyelashes.

As I sat with her, talking and softly stroking her fur in order to avoid hurting her, I remembered the very first day I saw her. I was on a mission trip to West Virginia with my mom, brother, and a bunch of teenagers from my church. I spotted her under a parked van, and was instantly in love. She was only a puppy—maybe eight months old—and her small frame was covered in small, green burrs that seemed to be determined to remain in her fur for all of eternity. She smelled like she had recently swam in a sewer, and since she didn’t want to leave, we decided to give her a bath with a cold hose in the back of the church. Everyone she met instantly adored her. It was impossible not to. The kids at the church where we were working decided to name her Oreo because of her jet-black fur with a white stripe running down her stomach. My brother and I begged my mom to let us take her home, and she said we could if we convinced my dad to agree to it. Not expecting that he would, she was surprised to learn that we would be taking Molly home with us at the end of the week. He told us he always wanted a second dog. Once we were home, my dad announced that he didn’t want her to be named after food, so I perused a baby name book and suggested that we name her Molly. It stuck. It fit her personality perfectly.

As the pleasant memory faded, I looked down at Molly who had since lain down on a blanket the vet provided. She looked up at me and I hugged her, but not as tightly as I wanted. I didn’t want her to be in any more pain. Eventually, my family had to leave so that Molly could get some rest, and we promised to come back the next morning.

When we got home, we decided that it would be in Molly’s best interest to put her down the next day so that we could end her suffering. Although she put on a brave face, we all knew that she was in pain. The next morning, I woke to a tear-stained pillow. She’s leaving me. I can feel her slowly slipping away, no matter how hard I try to hold onto her.

We went to the pet hospital, and this time there was no way to hold back my river of tears. The whole time I was there, a line from the song “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry was stuck in my head: The sharp knife of a short life. I now knew what that meant. It really did feel like there was a hot knife carelessly stabbed into the deepest parts of my heart, shredding as it went. That lyric kept popping into my head, reminding me that this was Molly’s last day.

After visiting with Molly for a couple hours, we decided that it was best not to delay the inevitable. My dad and brother couldn’t stand being there when the doctor came in to give Molly the injection that would ultimately end her life. I, on the other hand, could not bear the thought that Molly would be with unfamiliar people as she took her last breath, so I decided to stay. I was with her in the beginning of her life, and I promised both of us that I’d be with her
at the end. My mom sat next to me, fighting tears. She never cried, so I was not prepared for the big, shiny droplets that slowly fell down the side of her face.

We called the vet in, and she came with a large syringe filled with a lethal dose of anesthetic; Molly would literally be put to sleep. She said that it is the most humane way she knows. "If I got to choose, this would be the way I'd want to go," she said. After reassuring us that this would in no way hurt Molly, the vet inserted the needle into her leg. She wobbled a bit, then slowly sank down to the floor. The whole time, I whispered to her, "It's ok, Molly. I'm so sorry. I love you," over and over again. I was glad that her hair covered her eyes, because I couldn't bear to look into them as her life left her. The eyes are the windows to the soul, I could not bear to watch those beautiful windows close. The vet used a stethoscope to confirm that she was dead, and the room seemed to close in on itself.

The sharp knife of a short life.

I had to leave the room. I couldn't be there when they took her away. It was too final. Suddenly unable to breathe, I ran outside and wrapped my arms tightly around my brother. "It's done." My family huddled together in the parking lot, and cried for what seemed like an eternity. All I could focus on was how my tears hit the black pavement with a small plop. It was sunny—Molly's favorite weather. She used to go to the patio in the back yard and lay on her back with her paws in the air, basking in the warmth of the sun while enjoying the heat from the stones beneath her.

A week later my mom and I returned to the pet hospital to pick up the dark red wooden box filled with Molly's ashes. In the car, I set the box on my lap and remembered how she used to sit like that as a puppy. It was strange to think that just as she used to be able to sit on my lap when she was so small, she is now able to do the same within this cold, dark box. My eyes instantly filled with tears. "It's so unfair," I sobbed.

"I know," my mom whispered.

The knife in my heart twisted deeper.
Down the Bee Hive

Ciara Laing

Of course Alice knows
The consequence of the cake
Elephant swelled pouch

Frame below pinching
Bones bursting through, creating
Exoskeleton

Pasty porcelain
Vicious hand opens to tear
The jade honey face

Buzzing echoes down
In low hollow ear canals
Kaleidoscope bees

They swarm swift, suckling
Alice shrieks with bloody lungs
Dangling in-between

The fifth and sixth ribs
Eat! Eat! The crazed voice vibrates
Off honey comb walls

To shrink it will take
Iridescent jelly cake
Obsidian lake

A trip in the woods
Hair of a caterpillar
One Cheshire whisker

Quick, evade capture
Or pinned down stingers ready
Force you to devour

Dunes of sour maggots
Slimy, wiggle down your gorge
Hatch in your belly
Simba

Gabriela Fora

“I Just Can’t Wait to Be King”
—Simba

When I was five my favorite Disney movie was The Lion King (well, I guess it still is). Simba was the epitome of the reckless version of myself that I knew I would never become. He was the king-in-waiting and had loveable and loyal friends like Timon and Pumbaa. Watching this movie became a daily ritual, and, like Timon and Pumbaa, all too soon I regarded Simba as my faithful friend.

This friend came to me as a gift in the form of a soft, floppy, plush Simba stuffed animal. I took him everywhere with me; to the grocery store, around the house, in the backyard, and, to the disapproval of my mom, even a few times to church. Over time and after numerous trips through the wash his fluffy vibrant outer coat became dull, fuzzy and rough, but still I loved him. Every night I went to bed curled and comfy with Simba wrapped securely beneath my arms; he would accompany me in my wake and in my dreams where, together, we would fight off Scar or wander through the Pride Lands in search of new adventures.

At the time my imagination ran wild, and thanks to the show The Wild Thornberrys I fully believed that, like the main character, I too could communicate with animals; a stuffed animal was no exception. I shared my secrets and my schemes with Simba (though most of them were thought up by him) and in return he kept them, and I could always count on him to remain quiet when authorities questioned my mischief. He was my partner in crime, the alliance that I knew would never be broken, until that fateful day.

Our move from Gresham to Clackamas presented many “news,” including a new life without my best friend. Sadly the box containing Simba was lost, misplaced, or stolen, along with a box containing my mother’s wedding dress. Like what the dress meant to my mom, Simba was invaluable to me, and he always will be. He was a great friend, and, like him, I learned how to live life “Hakuna Matata” and with a willingness for recklessness.
Notes from the photographer:
The deer in Nara are so "friendly" that one bit me while trying to steal my food. I swatted it, but was promptly informed that the deer are sacred, and one does not swat sacred deer. These little guys were smaller, and content to chew on each other. The structure behind the deer, a Torii, is thought to be a gateway to the spirit world.

Summer 2007
Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima, Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan.
Canon Powershot A520

Home

Dylan Evanston

23rd and Alberta.
Nightfall.
I sit on the couch with a notebook open in my lap.

The page is blank but the walls sing.
If I could peel the script off their pitted sides and bolt it crudely and press it to the glowing screen to leave blots of ink in stark twelve point Times New Roman array it would display a masterpiece

Six chickens,
Five room mates,
Four sleep schedules.
Three stories.
Told one on top of another.

Too much to absorb with only Two eyes and two ears. You have to let it seep into the soles of your feet.

One gas stove, cooks fifteen servings a day.
The dining room got
knocked up with
boxes of vinyl
and battered bicycles.

The old drink-ringed piano
she is often played,
ever tuned.
She spits bars of rust,
coughs up satin angoras of dust,
blown up her skirt
by the cat calls of the
run down furnace.

I split for the bar up the block
to sit under the whir of patio propane
beer-golden glow
the murmur of strangers
tap too many notes
to guess the key.

Poring over sheets
laundry day in reverse
struggling to lace them with
pungent prose
succinct silences
and hair grease.

I pour detergent
into my swirling skull
little suds rising
bubbles bound from under
one another
in the head.
Trying to get something to stick.

Til the tattooed head laundress
tells me it is time to go home
and rest.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS:

Alex Anderson is a Pre-PA Biology Student at Concordia University. She trained in photographic arts at Barnsdall Art Center, Los Angeles, CA. She received her diploma from L.A. Co. High School for the Arts, majoring in photography. She was raised, taught, and encouraged to pursue the arts by the late Helen Slater, ceramicist. “Art is the balance to the scientific side of me. It serves as an enhancement of life to my emotional well-being.” Alex has three children, who are also artists.

Keegan Baurer is a psychology major at Concordia University, which he moved to upon leaving his hometown of Estacada, Oregon. When not immersed in his studies, Keegan is producing, recording, and performing hip-hop music and is a mainstay in the local rap scene. Much of Keegan’s writing and music has been influenced by his struggles with substance abuse as a teenager.

Michael Black has lived in Oregon, Washington, Kansas, Texas, and Hawaii. He has been in twenty or so homes. He traveled a lot growing up. He moved out when he was 17. He writes for the sake of expression, not for writing’s sake. It is his desire to live in Northern Europe when he is older. He hopes to enjoy 3 more years at Concordia before pursuing Cognitive Neuroscience as a Grad student in the Northwest.

Louisa Borecki is a sophomore. She dislikes Piña Coladas and long walks on the beach. She once ate cat food on a dare. Louisa resides in Portland, OR with a friend and their pet ferret, Mumford. She is currently working on collecting her life’s library, which contains about 460 books so far. She hopes one day to teach English as a second language to gorillas. As always, DFTBA.

Anna Breithaupt is a senior music education major at Concordia University. Her hobbies include playing flute, reading, and making her friends laugh. She intends to one day become a middle school band teacher.
Karissa Cooke is a junior English major. She transferred to Concordia this year from Clark College in Vancouver, WA. Karissa can't wait to become a high school English teacher. She hopes to inspire students the way she has been inspired by some of her teachers and peers. Along with that, she hopes that people will love her poems and get a lot out of them.

Two autumns back, Benjamin Crane left Colorado for Portland, OR. After switching his major countless times, he settled on psychology. With psychology, Benjamin wishes to pursue research in clinical psychology, counseling, and teaching at the collegiate level. Before such ventures, however, the dear author wishes to teach English as a second language in Asia. His hobbies include playing piano, surfing Reddit (Google it), volunteering, and, of course, long walks on the beach during monsoon season.

Cole Dahle is a senior Business major on track to graduate in May of 2013. He is a student athlete who competed for the Men's Soccer team for 4 years and Track & Field for 2 years. He is originally from Wilsonville, Oregon where he graduated from Wilsonville High School in 2009.

Angela Davis is currently a student at Concordia University. She is close to completing her degree in education with an endorsement in Language Arts, and is looking forward to fulfilling her life-long goal of becoming a teacher. Angela lives in Corbett, Oregon with her husband and four children, ranging in age from six to fourteen, and is the head volleyball coach at the local high school.

Sunshine Dixon is a local community member who loves to live creatively!

Jamie Dugas is a senior at Concordia University. A love of words, reading, and writing prompted her choice to become an English major. She is a hard worker and spends most of her time studying in the library. When Jamie has free time, she loves to spend it with her friends, reading, taking walks, and listening to music. After graduation Jamie hopes to pursue grad school, aspiring to become either a science writer or technical writer. Since being at Concordia, Jamie has had ample opportunities to improve her writing and is excited to showcase her senior thesis at the end of the term.

An aspiring writer, photographer, server, computer technician, former psychology major, occasional hitchhiker, and cycling enthusiast, Dylan Evanston is constantly up to something. A CU graduate as of Spring 2013, he can be found biking to and from photo shoots or walk around the Alberta Arts neighborhood, or dashing down the I-5 corridor for a good show. He hopes to one day publish a book worth reading and teach English.

From a young age Gabby Fora has had an unhealthy obsession with fashion, all things Disney, and cereal. Most of this semester was dedicated to watching Lost and reading The Wind and The West, so now finished she may actually have a life again. Gabby is a self-proclaimed nerd who loves telling stories, reading, and making others laugh.

Dara Halvorson is a sophomore Elementary Education major.

Originally from Saigon, Vietnam, Hibery Ho moved to America during her high school years. After graduating from Portland Lutheran in 2010, Hibery began her studies as a pre-med student at Concordia University, where she is currently a junior and is projected to graduate with an undergraduate degree in Biology in May of 2014. While Hibery is an aspiring student with the goal of being a dentist, she has many other hobbies, including painting, and reading.

Ciara Laing is a senior English major at Concordia University, looking forward to graduation this May. She has been very busy this year writing her thesis, being Managing Editor of The Promethean, Vice President of Concordia's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, and the Writing Center Student Manager. After graduation she intends to complete a
post baccalaureate and go to medical school to become a psychiatrist. However, she hasn’t ruled out the possibility of completing an MFA with a concentration in poetry.

Andrew Landstrom is a junior Biology major.

Alexa Lepisto is a junior Social Work major.

Monica Logan is a graduating senior this year with a Bachelor’s Degree in English. She is very excited to be attending Willamette University College of Law in the fall. She doesn’t particularly like writing, but when she does, she tries to make it inspired. Her favorite thing to do is read the Brontë novels and other classical literature. She just happened to compare Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights for her graduating thesis this year.

Regina Maag is a junior English major. She plays flute for the Concordia wind ensemble and is in the hand bell choir as well. She makes her own tea, plays ultimate Frisbee, and has frequent Lord of the Rings marathons. Her favorite books are The Hobbit, Hero and the Crown, East, Jane Eyre, Pendragon, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Harry Potter. She prefers to play as Mordor in the Lord of the Rings Risk game.

Sara Molyneux is a senior at Concordia University and will be graduating with her degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a Primary in English. Sara spent four years competing for the CU’s Golf team, earning awards such as All American and Player of the Year. While she has a great deal of passion for athletics, she finds comfort in her writing, particularly non-fiction and poetry.

Ruthie Nelson is a junior at Concordia University, majoring in chemistry. Her story was inspired by the antics of her beloved Portuguese water dog, Molly, who passed away before the start of the fall semester this year. After graduating in 2014, she plans to attend graduate school and eventually become a chemistry teacher.

David Nuttelman is a junior Business major.

Masha Polozova is a Biology major in her Junior year at Concordia. She likes to spend her free time snowboarding, running, and playing Minecraft on a friend’s server. She’s interested in pursuing higher education in Ecology and Wildlife Conservation, and wants to travel to Alaska and Australia. Her other interests include reading, drawing, and sculpting a variety of different jewelry, which you can find for sale on her Etsy shop: marshmellow.etsy.com.

Garret Potter is cursed with a consideration he has learned can be turned into poetry—heart-pounding, mind-delving inquiries and observations on vulnerability, community, and sustainability. He likes moments with students/friends, libraries, bicycles, forests, and gardens. Author of HIDE AND SEEK: A Poet’s Memoir, coming from nine states and Japan, he finds himself part of the National Poetry Slam community—competing in the Individual World Poetry Slam, winning competitions in Portland, Little Rock, and Springfield.

Patricia Purviance is a senior English major here at Concordia University. This is her first work in The Promethean. Ever since she was very little, Patricia has enjoyed devouring books, usually fantasy and science fiction. When she’s not in her room reading, you can also find Patricia at the Writing Center, where she works as a tutor, or somewhere outside around campus, where she works as a campus gardener. Patricia’s mother is fine now, and has been happily cancer free for 11 years.

McKenna Rinta loves Elvis and the Aristocats. After visiting every state in America she is going to retire in the mountains, where she will write and illustrate a children’s book. Kaila is her doctor, and she is the most beautiful nurse in the world.

Kayla Suvak is a sophomore English major. Kayla has been to 94 countries, ridden a camel, and has been in hand to hand combat with
both a cougar and a great white shark. Kayla is only twenty years old. She’s pretty much the coolest person in the world. And for those of you wondering, she isn’t stuck up at all. She’s not even writing this. She’s that humble.

**Tia Tsugawa** is a freshman Marketing major at Concordia University. Tia became interested in photography in 2011. Her favorite place to take pictures is at Tsugawa Nursery and Farm.

**Ana Voronko** is a junior Middle/High School Education major.

**Katie Wartell** is a junior and is an Interdisciplinary Studies Major with an emphasis in English and a minor in History. Katie is a Portland native. In her free time she enjoys writing poetry, capturing photography, and baking goodies. She is also a FRIENDS T.V. show addict.

The author of “Not Perfect” is **Peggy Wood**. She explained that the inspiration of her story was written while trying to understand what one of her close friends had told her- that she had yet to come out about her sexuality because she felt that her parents and friends would hate her. Peggy does not believe that will happen, but doesn’t know how her friend’s family/friends well enough, so she will continue as secret keeper.

**Allison Woodruff** is a freshman from small-but-beautiful Kalispell, Montana. She is studying Elementary Education and English at Concordia University as an honors student, and she is trying her best to live in a lovely way. Old-fashioned, optimistic, and tender, Allie is “the sweetheart” in the room, eager to have an adventure every day and spread some sunshine. She enjoys curling up with a favorite book, playing outdoors, holding hands, and having space to write.

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*Float to Sleep © Dylan Evanston*

**Notes from the photographer:**
Getting up early for work one morning, I picked my camera up off the floor to put it away, but I couldn’t resist snapping a few.

Fall 2011
Brook Boese
Woodlawn, Portland, Oregon
Nikon D5000, Nikkor 55mm f/3.5 Micro P
Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, 
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*
The Promethean is a publication of the Associated Students of Concordia University-Portland and the College of Theology, Arts, & Sciences

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