

Amaranth

THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

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Space Monkey, by Andrew Gellman, 2006

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THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

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Amaranth: an imaginary flower that never fades.

To the contributors: We would like to thank the Lehigh University student body for all their unique work. The seeds of your imagination have grown into a flower of creativity — forever blossoming, never to wilt.

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Bob Aluni

SPACE MONKEY ODYSSEY

The Monkey leaped up higher on the charts
Of human acceptance. The explorer
Was sent to find what no man knew. Into
The sky we launched a midget half our size
With twice the hair to see if space was safe.
He was paid with fame. We found no need
To retrieve him from an outer place.

Aaron Bergman

FROZEN ECHOES

It was freezing out. Biting almost. White-knuckling cold, runny nose cold, one of those uncomfortable colds where your pants stiffen if you stand still for too long. Feet at the edge, yelled at from behind and all I could think was why the fuck I paid 150 bucks to stand 150 feet above a gorge in the middle of winter. New York winters.

“150 bucks for this shit dude. I paid a dollar for every fucking foot so I can stand up here on top of a bridge so I can shit myself,” I spat out into the wind. “I better grow another set of balls, Toddy.” My eyes watered. The wind hurt. What the hell is it going to feel like when I drop. Like Hell exactly.

“Matter tells space how to curve, and space tells matter how to move. That’s our motto buddy. Go for it. Let go my man, let it carry you,” the unfamiliar voice faded.

Three bodies stood behind me. Still all alone, it didn’t matter. First time up to visit Ithaca and this is my gift. When do you pay for own gifts? Three bodies standing arms crossed, wrapped over their chests, waiting for the last of the customers to drop. Two bodies that stood like bouncers waiting for me to jump. One best friend, hands on his knees now. He sees humor.

Hands on his knees, bent over laughing. Cold breath circled his head from too much laughter. “C’mon Aaron,” he finds room to speak.

Toddy wheezes on his exhale, "Dude, dude," he extends a free hand from one of his knees and reaches out, "dude, Aaron, listen." A roar from behind me erupts, I turn, 180 degrees. Its 18 degrees cold up here. "Listen," Toddy says, he wipes warm snot from his nose with his sleeve, "you just pissed yourself." He pushes out a final high pitch chuckle. I turn, 180 degrees back to face forward. Alone again. The warm sensation down my right leg, down my fleece lined jeans, runs to my sock and I paid 150 dollars for this. "C'MMMOOOONN! JUMP!" Toddy's impatience.

"It's alright kid," I hear behind my back from a foreign voice, one of the two guides. "I've seen it too much, no biggie brotha, we've done this for 12 years, believe me man I've seen worse from people standing up there, its happened before." The wind hissed. His words carried over to me, brushing over a wet right leg and up to a set of clenched jaws. Teeth frozen to teeth. "But listen man, it gets harder with every second," he sucked in, barely finishing his sentence and sneezed violently, "Excuse me." God bless you I thought. God bless me.

My legs shook, the warm piss froze the right side of my jeans, my mouth began to ache. My feet wiggled at the edge. Frozen toes. Balled fists. Sweat trickled from my back down to my ass. No way I'm staring down. Fuck! That never works. The bottom was invisible, I wanted to step out, let go, swallow the air, eat the wind, get these damn butterflies out of my stomach. I swallowed my vomit. The bungee connected to my feet battered against the railing where it was attached. Metal banged metal and echoed out into the gorge. I felt myself breathing as the warm air rushed out of my nose and cooled to visibility. I couldn't hear the people behind me.

I pulled my mouth apart. Neck cocked sideways. Yelling at the trees. Yelling at everything out there. Talking to Toddy, "This is how you get me back man," clumped spit shot out from my mouth. I watched

as it floated down, white, like little snowflakes. “This is the most horrible decision I’ve made to hike up this bridge with you and jump off into fucking nothing. Why are you doing this to me, we’re supposed to be friends” my voice shook, it trembled 150 feet above stone and snow. 150 feet of what defined my confidence, my character. 150 feet of waiting. Waiting for space to tell me how to move because I couldn’t tell myself.

A voice spat out again from behind me. A slight comfort rushed through me. Toddy cupped his mouth, “Aright Aaron, its really fuckin’ cold up here man. You need to do this. It’ll be good for you. Take that step, just do it. Stop waiting around all the time, go man, stop being so scared.” The word “scared” faded out around me as the echo of Todd’s words deteriorated.

Right. OK. Do it now, laugh about it later. I stared over the edge, once more. 150 feet, 18 degrees, 150 dollars, gotta do this one myself. I filled my lungs once more. Cold air turned warm inside. As my body lowered itself from the last exhale, feet still wrapped over the edge, an unexpected, abrupt inhale shot cold air back into my body. My back jerked forward, my arms flew out, body arched like a letter C, my head snapped back from looking up at the sky to staring directly under me. 150 Feet-In-The-Air stared down to a body bouncing 10 feet above upward jutting icicles. Toddy stood there with it, watching me as I fell, watching me fail.

Aaron Bergman

EUROPE TRAVELED

David's office was cluttered with books and papers and jackets and pens. He swiveled around to greet me when I walked in. He was a nice guy, quite approachable and seemingly comfortable with strangers. I explained the procedure to him and started on the interview. His British background had led me to think about my time abroad. I looked to make connections with David by recalling places and stories but many failed. There had to be something. I certainly thought his trip from London to America would relate to my move from America to London.

It was a stretch. It had to be argued two against one. Kev and George versus Aaron. Something we had never discussed but had always thought about. Traveling throughout Europe was an adventure in itself. No bookings, little money, new cities, new languages and everyday, "travelmode," dealing with one obstacle after another. We signed up for it, refused organization and accepted frustration from the day we boarded the plain to fly to Prague. 32 days away from "home" –even home couldn't spell permanence, temporary space/flat in London for six months- with one bag on our back, one hotel booked and to our knowledge 7 to 9 more countries to visit.

We worried more about our flat in London than our own wellbeing. The two may have been one in the same with all our possessions tucked away under bed frames and kitchen sinks and our electronics hiding in holes in the wall or inside dishwashers. Out flat in London, a place where a woman and her

11 year old daughter were hung 2 doors down, a place that had been labeled as "one of the worst estates in London, England," where three locks weren't enough and neighbors "stay time" averaged one year. Hiding the last valuable, shutting the last door, locking the last window turning the final lock shuttered the three of us. You ever really just not feel good about something?

At 6 am, after a reluctant transfusion from a carrier who gave us blood type *nervous*, we pushed out of the door, pushed people out of the way and pushed on to the Tube for the first push of our first real excursion, one month plus away from home and "home.

Eastern Europe gave us cheap food, long train rides and passport checks that seemed to occur every three hours. Slavic speech rattled our head and turned our stomachs. Prague. It was an exterminated communistic state that spoon-fed you too much goulash but suffocated you with years of culture. We walked through gothic churches, fighting hangovers and passed over bridges and baroque architecture. It was a short stay. Over night train. We met with friends in Budapest, long term residence, and shared Absinthe shots and pot filled afternoons. Budapest lead us to one day in Vienna. A bike tour sufficed

A week of traveling and only 2 pairs of underwear used. Eastern Europe in 300 digital pictures and we still had three-quarters of the trip ahead and yet to taste the worst of it. It was the down time that got you. The days were tiresome and obstructed but you were moving. New sites, different tour guides and as long as the scenery changed, our attention was shifted from each other and those little annoyances that started to breed after an over extended time with overly charged individuals.

We had grown up with one another and the time we had previously spent before the trip was never diseased with money problems, over night train cars or the constant presence of George, Kevin, Aaron...George, Kevin, Aaron...George, Kevin, Aaron. We had always had a break and usually that revolved around sleeping, separately, away at separate houses in separate beds. This trip was

force feeding us shovel-filled amounts of each other until one of us exploded. Pet peeves that you never knew about were secured tightly in Petri dishes, pocketed inside your brain, and began to multiply.

1) Coughs

2) Sniffles

>long sniffles, short sniffles, wet sniffles interminable sniffles

3) Bad breath

4) Bad Hygiene

5) Belching

6) Farting

7) Smokers

8) Nose picking

9) Inconsideration

10) Indecisiveness

I don't crave attention. I distinguish between manners and attention. I distinguish between the two; manners equal politeness and attention equals selfish. It's necessary to preface this segment. It's necessary to preface this segment because I share with you a piece of me that you will, or you may twist. It's necessary you understand I have a collection of peeves that irritate me. Move me. Scratch me. Wrestle me. Pin me and try to change. But it's necessary to understand, before you label me as irritable, moody, weird or unstable, you must share this piece with yourself and see what angers you.

Before verbal arguments could escalate we got a scenery change. Plane trip to Sevilla and now a new country. Spain was home to more friends. 6 nights in Sevilla, late nights or early mornings (either one) but both returned us to hotels at 7 am in the morning. Midway through our stay in Sevilla we rented a car and drove to Portugal. 3 days, new days, to flip the trip again and keep our brains fed with new stimulants.

We returned to Sevilla for two more nights. The first morning back, we followed the windy one-person-wide streets around to seek out some sort of place to wash our clothes. Easier done than said. We avoided questions for directions despite our high school credible español and depended on our luck. Within minutes we arrived at our goal and within an hour we were discussing a trip Morocco to with some random American travel agents. "So all we do is get to the border by a cab, walk across, get our passports stamped and arrive at a 'taxi' stand? OK, then bargain with the taxi driver like at a flea market. Its really that easy? I mean yeah we're from Manhattan we can handle that. Then just let him know where we wanna go, oh, but don't accept his new price once we get in the cab? Sounds kinda fun. Cool."

We had never relied on itinerary previously and saw no reason to begin at this point. Morocco excited the three of us. The Jew spoke up with concerns, *a Muslim state, what if...?* The two Irish kids convinced him otherwise *c'mon man you think we'll ever get to do this again* and within minutes we had finalized our next stop for our trip. Within 24 hours we had a 6 hour bus trip and a 1 hour ferry booked to North Africa from Sevilla.

I tried to get stories out of David in our interview. He was an avid traveler and I heard this from his own mouth as well as credible outside sources. Cambodia, Japan, Britain, Haiti and these were only a few that David had listed. My mind had begun to circulate, wondering how many stories he would have. Endless? There was no doubt that his travel log was filled with stories. I felt like a little kid sitting under a book waiting to hear what would be on the next page. Unfortunately, I never saw the page turn. David seemed reserved. He spoke of a story in Haiti where he had landed in a village without a place to stay and found place with no beds but had to bargain a native down from \$1,000 a night to \$2. I laughed, a reserved laugh, hoping that this story was simply an appetizer, hoping that the next story would have escalated into a machete driven chase into the fields of Cambodia because David was a foreigner and they wanted his Passport and

to escape he and his buddy had to hide out in the jungle for a few days until they wandered back to civilization. My expectations were satisfied with my own imagination and in reality, his Haitian story had concluded our interview, it had concluded his travel log, THE END.

Regardless of David's comical yet seemingly uneventful tale, my mind had already pushed away a third world heroic tale involving Mr. Hawks and made room for a tale of my own. Our Euro Trip gone sour, the fly in the soup, the buzz kill –Our “trip” to Morocco- the one occurrence in my life that in retrospect still has the nightmarish quality to duck, dodge and clear knock me out.

We had no idea about Morocco except what we had heard through hear say. We arrived at the border and unlike most borders, one had to walk to cross the border of Spain to Africa (*check*) It was 9 in the pm and the ocean crashed against the rock cliffs to the left of us. To the right little children ran around us, 3 Americans, back packed and confused. They were begging money for gum, money for cigarettes, money for pencils. The children followed us the 300 yards we had to walk until, through deductive reasoning, we arrived at window where passports were cleared (*check*) -*how long will you be here? For what? Why? And where are you from? Where are you studying? For how long? ...OK, you're done.* 10 more yards and we arrived at a gate (*check*) and met a man who checked over the passports one more time. He laughed, chuckled, and wished us good luck.

We walked passed the gates. Africa. Muslim Africa. 3 Americans, 1 Jew out of the 3 and a circle of cars swarming with people appeared in front of us, taxi stand (*check*). The situation had consumed us, we had been consumed with fear of 100 Muslim men eyeing the only 3 Americans approaching them at 9:45 at night. *But there were supposed to be more Americans, the travel agents said.* We were inside a cab before we knew it, we had agreed to a price that was too good to be true. We had taken our first offer. A young skinny man, all of his teeth in tack but all of his teeth stained dark brown. He wore a sweatshirt and a skull cap. He was talkative and seemed

inviting. We were not naïve but his approachable nature had prayed on our vulnerability. We had tried to break him down, tried to use our city wit and front toughness by questioning the credibility of his car (it had not *taxi* sign on it) but he retaliated, quickly grabbing a *taxi* sign off of a nearby car and slapping it on his, “good now?”

The ride began fine. We spoke Spanish because he said it was better than his English. We agreed on a price, he tried to drive us higher, we drove him back down and finally we all agreed. The roads were well lit, a city appeared on one side of us and the lights comforted us. Our bags were in the trunk, 2 of us in the back with Kev in the front. American music, switched from Arabic music in his CD player. He spoke more Spanish to us. *No we don't need hash, muchas gracias* My knuckles, gripping my back pack had turned cold and pale white. I never looked at George, George never looked at me and Kev stared straight ahead in the front seat. We were in no control at this point, no language, no culture and no knowledge of the situation. 3 Americans in the back seat of a man's car at 10 pm at night in the middle of North Africa. Destination, Chefchauen a mountain city. Distance unknown. E.T.A. = 2 hours.

David told me his transition from London to America was easy. David came to New York City on Fulbright Scholarship from Columbia University. He said Manhattan was a big city just like London. He never felt uncomfortable. The culture never shocked him. He told a story of walking into a convenience store and asking to buy 5 beers for him and his 4 buddies. The storeowner told him to just buy a 6 pack. David had never heard of a 6 pack and he could recall a sense of embarrassment that overcame him. 1980's in Manhattan and the only trouble he faced was ordering beer in a bodega. He didn't own any shameful or frightening stories and was never robbed, mugged or tormented. His accent, to my knowledge never caused any problems. It seemed as if he slipped through the crowds, floating down the street like a plastic bag, never even shoulder bumping. David said he had there was an occasional instance of seeing someone smoking crack on the street but for the most part, nothing came unexpected.

The music soundtracked our ride. The loud, shrieking voice of an Arabic woman whining over a fast paced almost hip hop beat, seemed almost perfect as we drove past city buildings and run down houses. I couldn't tell if there was an earthquake that had just passed through or if the country had refused to re build fallen its fallen structures. We had been driving for 20 minutes and none of us had seen signs for Chefchaouen. Arabic tattooed signs had math equations translating words into English but none thus far had even started with a C. George and I exchanged wide eyed glances of concern asking where we were going and replied with wider eyes as if to say, "I don't fucking know."

The driver sat comfortably, making turns where he needed. Right arm outstretched on the wheel, left shoulder touching the back of the seat. His head moved to the music. We sat stiff necked, white knuckled and fearful in the back. The road began to wind and turn into the heart of the city of Tetuan and then sheer confusion.

We had known from the travel agents that we had to make it past the city before we traveled to Chefchaouen but we weren't sure why we had made a left at a major intersection to turn down a side road. Little boys ran around with shoes off, rubble represented what was a building, stray dogs wandered and men strolled around with full length robes and KKK pointed hoods, covering their eyes. We were helpless. *Por favor, señor, necesitamos ir a la ciudad de Chefchaouen. Debemos pagarte más, no es una problema, pero queremos salir Tetuan.* My voice cracked during the plea. I was shaking. We had turned down hash twice from the driver. He insisted that we buy it and regardless of our decision he was going to find some for himself. We continued to stare out of the windows at people who, to our knowledge, did not like Americans. It was 10:20, we had been driving for almost 45 minutes and no forward progress towards Chefchaouen.

Panic surged a racial mindset, stereotypes pushed to the front of our minds and I went over situation after situation in my head. *Perhaps he would stop the car, pop the trunk, lock the doors, rob us, hit us,*

kick us out in the middle of the street and we would be food for the lions. Then he stopped. Pulled over to the side of the road. Fuck. A man approached. Wide eyes met again in the back seat. Words were exchanged with the driver. He asked us if it would be ok to pick up his friend and drive him up to Chefchauen. No No No, solamente nosotros, señor. No más!. He drove on, my mind scratched at my head. What if he wants our passports. We would give it to him. But then what if he takes us to some house, keeps us there with his friends. Holds us hostage until the US pays. We would be a live feed broadcasted over the internet and then on tv, tied up and pleading for help while reading a note with two ski masked men holding AK-47's. He continued to turn down streets. Off of the main road and following the capillaries of Tetuan into its heart. Music off. Another pit stop. Maybe this is where we gonna have to get out. Men exchanged words, they stared in the back, and looked at the driver. Hands were grasped and money exchanged. How much did he just pay to give us up? The driver turned around and smiled, no problema, si amigos?

Hash, he needed hash. We had been taken on a 20 minute hash route. Riding around and through the city looking for drugs. We had no idea. No one would have had the idea of such a thing. We made our way back out of the city and found a sign for Chefchaouen. The last hour of the ride consisted of a drive up into the mountains. Passing trucks and cars around sharp turns on roads that were as wide as a two person car. The driver smoked two joints of hash, turned the music back up and brought us to our hotel. Our stay in Morocco was less than 24 hours. We slept for a few hours. Stayed up until 8, called a cab and left. We were happy to be alive, happy to tell the story although knowing we never wanted to. We had been snatched away from everything we knew and the cab had swallowed us. We were useless, three 200 pound dead weights willing to be pushed, pulled and spun around in any direction Morocco had wanted.

It's funny. In helpless situations you aren't broken down to the true core of yourself. You don't find out anything about yourself.

You freeze. Lock up. Turn weak. We were helpless with no understanding of the language. We were completely stripped naked and waiting for what would happen next and whatever it was he had no power to stop it. In the back of the cab we were stripped down to nothing. It's hard to instill the feeling. Three guys averaging 200 pounds each and if he had made a move on us there's no way we could have fought back. Odd how that works. We were clay. He could have told us to do anything and we would have complied. We felt our lives were in jeopardy. The feeling is unable to be duplicated, its as close to death as I ever felt. One blow to the heart and we had nothing in us, we couldn't pry our fingers from our bags when we finally arrived at our hotel. We had perspired through our shirts. It may be better described as one of those, "you had to be there situations" but regardless of how you twist it, we had an awakening. You can only go through so many possibilities in your head of what **could have happened.**

2ND PLACE (*tie*) — AMARANTH/WILLIAMS PRIZE IN PROSE

Sari Biddleman

WEIGHTED DIFFERENCES

She was doing it again. I hate listening to her, keeled over the toilet, heaving whatever salad she just had for lunch. She was in such a hurry to gain control and lose everything else that the door barely closed and I could see the ends of her feet, her toes twisting and curving around each other, stubbornly sliding across the linoleum floor. Her veins unsuccessfully pushing through her thin skin, trying to breathe. She did this after every “meal,” every test grade under a B, and every fight she had with her parents. The toilet flushed, she blew her nose, and walked out of the bathroom as composed as ever.

This was the usual routine. Nobody looked up any more. And nobody would talk about a “problem.” It was easier to not talk about, but impossible to ignore. She wasn’t always like this. There was a time when her neatness was quirky and not compulsive and when her eating idiosyncrasies were inconvenient and not dangerous. Freshman year, we ironically met in the bathroom. It was my first night in the dorm, and there wasn’t any toilet paper in the stall. Fortunately, she was in the stall over and saved me when she passed a neatly folded wad of toilet paper under the aluminum partition. I ran my hands under water so that we could formally introduce ourselves and dried them on my flannel pajama pants.

She turned the hot water on full blast and soaped her hands, looking up and closing her eyes in order to ignore the feeling of the scalding water on her perfectly manicured hands. She wiped her hands on the periwinkle towel she brought from her room, and

pulled the belt on her matching robe closed tight. "Hey, what's going on? I'm Sarah," I said as I held out my hand, "thanks for the help."

"Alison," she responded. And then she placed her hand in mine as if to indicate that I should kiss it. I shook it awkwardly and said to stop by if she ever wanted to grab something to eat or hang out, "I'm in room 223."

From then, we started going to meals together and hanging out. She didn't like to go to parties, and wasn't very social—studying always came first. She came to my room most of the time, mainly because I felt so uncomfortable in hers. Walking into her room was like walking into the house of a friend whose parents think you're a bad influence, and where the furniture is for looking at and not sitting on.

It was a Thursday night when Alison first came to my room with intentions other than to go and look at food in the dining hall or just watch T.V. Her face was splotchy and her eyes swollen. "May I please..." she blew her nose, "come in?" she asked. She nudged my arm that was around her shoulder off, and I retreated quickly, afraid to hurt her delicate frame. Delicate was how I described her then... she's now being held together by lettuce and laxatives. She shivered sitting there on my bed, starting each sentence with hesitation and then stopping. "What's up Al?" I encouraged her.

"They don't understand me." After hearing lots of stories about "back home," it was implied that "they" were her parents who desperately wanted for her to spend the summer working at her father's law firm, while she wanted to travel. "I don't want to do it!... Let's go out." Right eyebrow raised, I looked at her, waiting to hear Alison second guess herself and decide that she would start preparing for her bio test that was in two weeks instead. I waited, but nothing. Rather, she proactively concluded that she would go get dressed and would meet me back here in 30 minutes, adding, as she opened the door to leave, and wiped her eyes with her folded Kleenex, that I really should do something about my garbage. The door slowly closed, and I looked over to the aluminum can, unlined

with a garbage bag, that was overflowing with tissues, scrunched up pieces of paper and EasyMac wrappers.

Precisely twenty-nine minutes later, Alison knocked on my door three times, leaving the exact amount of time between each knock. From behind we must have looked like a variation of George and Lenny. Tall and thin, she strolled down the hallway, clutching her designer purse, her lip-gloss glinting in the fluorescent lights. Next to her, was me. Shorter and chubbier, my jeans didn't fit perfectly and were a little too big in the waste, but very snug in the back. And, unlike her sleek, catwalk-worthy stroll, my walk resembled that of a 7-year old boy's who was closely following his cool, big brother.

We walked into the first party that we saw on Main Street. No sooner than I could dodge the red SOLO cup coming flying at my head, I ducked and saw her pound two colorful shots of whatever the loud drunk guy that people were calling "Cockface" handed her. Cockface was pale and the contrast of the black Sharpie-written words on his pale chest was very dramatic.

Walking further into the house, the music got louder, and as Alison walked deeper and deeper towards the back of the party, I could only see part of her groomed pony tail, bobbing up and down every time someone gave her another shot. "What is THIS?!" she looked at me, pointing to a beer funnel that was coming at her. Kneeling on the beer-covered tiled kitchen floor, she put the tube in her mouth and closed her eyes, listening to the drunken cheers of encouragement from the rest of the people in the kitchen. When the last of the piss-colored beer floated through the tube, Cockface who was leading the cheers, helped Alison to her feet and pulled her arm in the air as if she had just won a boxing championship title. She couldn't have been more than 110 pounds, and after her next shot, when she bumped into the door frame and thought it was so funny that she had to sit down on Cockface's lap, I knew it was time to go. "Hey, Al... I'm getting tired, maybe we should go."

Angered by my attempt to stop her from having “the most awesomest time of her whole wide life,” she stood up with Cockface, whose lips had been slowly and sloppily making their way across her neck. She partly yelled and partly slurred; I know she was trying to look at me, but she couldn’t quite manage to get her eyes to focus on me. So, yelling and slurring at the quite confused, drunk and shy freshman boy just behind me, she pointed her finger in the air and screamed “you can’t contlorrol me! And... and... and neither can theeeeeey!”

“I’m ... sorry...?” the freshman behind me confusingly apologized back to her.

“It’s O.K!” she smiled and screamed back, accepting his apology.

O.K, what the hell just happened here? “Let’s go,” I repeated patiently. Putting her finger back in the air to once again start her rebuttal, she paused. Alison looked down, curling her lips. We all knew that face. “Maybe someone should take her to the bathroom...” suggested the freshman.

“I’m... fine,” Alison managed to blurt out... right before she blurted something a little less wordy, and a little chunkier.

“Duuuude! That’s sick!” Cockface slurred. I found it ironic that a shirtless, Sharpied guy named Cockface was criticizing compulsively perfect Alison.

“Saaarahhh,” she whined, and then whispered, “let’s go,” emitting her sour vodka infused breath on my face. With Cockface officially dislodged from her neck, we oh so ungracefully stumbled out of the house on Main Street, leaving behind a vomit outlined size 7 ½ foot print trail.

We made our way back to the dorm and our return down the hallway was slightly different than it was before. There was no longer a sleek cat-walk like stroll, but rather a sad limp. She wasn’t holding her head up looking forward to something, but instead was looking down at her feet, holding her stomach and sulking in shame. And, I wasn’t the shorter, stubbier, side kick anymore; I was now her

support system—holding her up so she wouldn't sink to the floor like a wet noodle. "I'm soooo sorry," Alison looked up at me with pathetic eyes, partly apologizing for her behavior, partly for her yacking on me, but mostly for losing control. For that, she wasn't so much apologizing to me, but to herself. Her top lip heaved up and I reached for her garbage-bag lined, periwinkle wicker trashcan and got it underneath her just in time. Had she been coherent, I think she would have complimented me on my preparedness, probably implying that it was so unlike me. As I held her hair back, I didn't think that this would be the only time she would allow me to do so. But, looking back, this would be the only time that her body, and not her conscience, would force something out of her. She finally purged herself of the evening and got into bed. "The garbage can is right here if you need it," I sympathetically told her.

"Thaanks," she embarrassingly moaned back at me.

"Good night." I closed her door behind me, leaving her room in an uncharacteristic disarray of dirty clothes, used tissues and partially empty water bottles.

The next morning, I went to check on Alison, being ready to totally sympathize with her. I'm no stranger to wicked hangovers and walked down the hall armed with Advil, a water bottle, and some crackers, just in case. I knocked on her door and with a serious, no-nonsense "come in," I did. Alison's room was not the way I left it last night, but was back to the state it was in before we went out. She was not laying in fetal-position in bed with sheets over her head like I anticipated. Alison, true to form, had already showered and started studying for her bio test. "How ya feelin?" I lightly asked her.

"Fine."

OK, so she clearly didn't want to talk about it. "Oh good! Well here's some—"

"I'm fine," she interrupted, "but thanks," she continued under her breath.

“Yup.” I sensed that she didn’t feel like talking at all, so I left, strategically leaving behind the water, Advil, and crackers, again, just in case.

That was the last time Alison and I went out for fun. We still watched T.V, did homework, and went for walks together, but she stopped wanting to go to the dining room. When I asked why she hadn’t wanted to eat with me in a while, she gently tugged her pants back up to her hips with her bony fingers latching on to her belt loops, laughed and simply said “temptation.”

That summer she convinced her parents to let her go to Europe, but it changed their relationship. Every vacation afterwards, she either came to my house or stayed at school. My mom watched her walk to the bathroom after family meals, and heard Alison turn the faucet on to muffle the sounds of my mom’s dinner sloshing against the porcelain bowl in a swirl of liquid. We looked down at our plates and had all noted our concern in silence. When she came back to the table, I would tell my family what Alison and I had in store over vacation. We would go shopping, hang out with my friends, and walk around, just relax. I couldn’t share that we would be bypassing food courts and any social setting that was based around eating—something that proved to be difficult in an area where eating was an event in itself when surrounded by college guys. Alison recognized the absence in the conversation and ignored it, pushing her potatoes around on her plate, telling my mom how good they were. Yes, her potatoes are quite good at sliding across china.

We continue to remain friends and now, in our senior year, we share an apartment with two other girls off campus. Alison now barely reaches 100 pounds and makes no attempt to even watch T.V with us anymore. Her pants hang flaccidly on her hips, and only thanks to the help of a belt. On the few times we can get her to watch a movie with us on the couch, she sits as far away as possible from our mandatory movie-watching bag of popcorn. The intoxicating, taunting, and horribly mean odor of the salty and buttery popcorn

provoke her to reach her hand towards the bag. As we try not to wishfully watch her about to take at least a kernel from the steaming bag, she catches herself and shamefully sits on her hands.

This time on her way back from the bathroom, Alison's routine has slowed down. The toilet flushes as usual and there is more time between that and the slow struggle to make her frail hands turn the doorknob. I watch her walk down the hall towards her room and notice a familiar slurred stagger that she used walking back from the party on Main Street freshman year. It wasn't a controlled walk—she was dragging herself, subtly zigzagging her way to her room. I watched her reach for the off-white wall, boney fingers clinging to puttied holes where former tenants' pictures once crookedly hung. There was a slight thump when her back hit the wall and Alison slid down trying to compose herself. "Alison, are you ok?" I knew she wasn't. I knew that three years later was too late to ask. "I think I'm gonna call someone."

Alison wasn't at school next semester. She did graduate, but finished school from a rehab center closer to home. I went to visit her every now and then, but we were both different. She was working through the same stuff she always had been, and I had started something new. I would sit with her at a table, my jeans still awkwardly fitting, and talk to her about what she had been up to, feeling guilty every time I would talk about my parents or graduation or my life after school. We ate lunch together and she would pick up a fork full, count to three, and put it in her mouth. Alison cringed, but it wasn't at the macaroni and cheese that tasted like feet.

When she had eaten all but two bites on her plate, she pulled herself up from her seat and walked towards a chart that had dates and meal-- breakfast, lunch and dinner, and a grid for snacks. She put a check in red marker under today's date and the lunch category. The red check didn't connote positively like on a correctly-done homework assignment. She checked it off painfully.

While she walked back towards the table where I remained sitting, her walk wasn't anything that I had seen before. It wasn't the confident stroll, the drunk stagger, or the weak drag. This was different—it was a new, unsure shuffle. She sat back down in the same way that she walked.

After our awkward ice-breakers, she would ask me about what school friends I talked to recently. Oddly enough, I had actually seen Cockface on the street. He hadn't recognized me, having only seen me that one night, and without even having a story to go along with having seen him, Alison laughed. Her laugh was sincere and substantial—qualities that could rarely have been used to describe anything about Alison before. We made more jokes about Cockface and both laughed 'till it hurt. She held her stomach that ached from laughing so hard. "Al, you ok?"

She gasped for air, and said "yes." I think I might have answered "yeah," if it was me, but it was comforting to again see the Alison that I met in the bathroom freshman year.

Chris Campanioni

BUCKINGHAM BY MOONLIGHT

She chased me from city
street to street our footsteps
like shadows slipping
discreet under pale lamp
lights, laughing sporadic past
dreams and drawn eyes;
romantic convictions were never
more trite than they were
at quarter to 3 tonight.

While the whole town slept
and dreamt I dreamed of the silence
of the night sky subtle and clear.

You cannot buy a view like this anywhere.

Chris Campanioni

THE ROAD

It's like a long line of cars and I'm the only one on the road.
Trailers, old, dilapidating with more rust than shutters
signaling no way out of the dump yards and one shot motels,
clutters of sex toy shops with lurid signs pointing "this way"
with phallic symbols, looking *that* way to the dust, crust
and rubble of an ancient civilization
whistled away like tumbleweed
decay and West Coast lust.
The night only gets darker, and more clear.

Half lit neon signs with all the important letters
missing, promising " he steals" here arrest
the pig squeals of a client to his lover for the night.
Past the borrowed Hawaiian romance clones
serenading almost no one is a young boy
staring at the sky, alone, his face
a mix of wonderment and fear.

Dream chasers stop here; fumbling
for their wallets on instant money plans and dollar-ninety-nine
religious scams to straggle a road much worse.
Between the long stretch of luster is the loneliest place on earth.

2ND PLACE (*tie*) – AMARANTH/WILLIAMS PRIZE IN PROSE

Chris Campanioni

THURSDAY NIGHT

Psilocybin shadow searching very often ends in winding trails that *end* where they started coked up sorority chicks and dumbed down shamans can disagree to agree shake rattle and roll singing in the rain smoke curtain clouds from the shower steam melting everything in between – Ötzi the Iceman included – orchestral accompaniments arrive in giddy laughter hyena howls and gorilla undulations head exploding tongue decoding starting fires nearly shit my pants when you're done you might be left asking yourself only one thing: "*You ever feel as if your mind had started to erode?*"

Heady told me mushrooms on a peanut butter sandwich taste good. So I tried it.

"So when do I start to feel this shit?" I asked immediately after ingestion, smiling wide-eyed expecting to feel anything, something. In the shower soon after I was giddy as hell, waiting for it, waiting for it, waiting for

"40 minutes," Liam said. "And you'll be tripping over your balls."

"Okie."

Now I'm lounging on a couch in our fraternity's chapter room huddled around a fire God knows who started staring at the Exit sign on the right hand corner of the room.

"You know we really did this the right way," Keibel is saying, waving his long spider arms wildly. "I mean, really. Look at this."

"I mean, think about where we are right now," he continues.

"Philosophically?" I blurt out, "Like where we are in life, or where we *are*, like"

"In the chaptah room," Brain says matter of factly, his Brooklyn accent running rings around my head. "I'm gonna get some watah, you guys are crazy," he says, hopping off one big couch and walking away.

Two minutes later he rushes into the room yelling and screaming, "Yo, do I 'ave blood on my hands? I swear, I got blood on my freakin' hands!"

"Nah, yo you're just *trippin* out *kidd*," Heady says, grinning like the devil, his eyes glazed over relaxed.

Brain hurries out the room scratching his cropped brown hair quick and frenzied and comes back a moment later.

"Oh, it was a toona cut, I remembah now."

"Toona cut?" someone is asking.

"Yeah, I cut my finger on a toona can, ya know."

"Oh," voices say in unison.

"Toona."

And here we are, two comfy couches overlooking a jumping fireplace on a Thursday night on the first day of December. The mushroom crew. Heady, Keibel, Brain, Dougie, Perks, Johnny, me, and Liam who's dressed like he's just come out of a fuckin' *Lifetime* Christmas movie in his striped green wool sweater.

And if this is a movie it's a bad comedy with an ensemble cast. The weirdest group of eight people you could ever assemble into one room; you'd need a playbill to remember all the names and faces.

And if this *was* a movie it'd be time for the montage of all those faces and memories, quick cuts to the past and daring leaps to the present this time with each character's name written in big bold letters below while something catchy from *The Cars* blares, if you're lucky.

There's Heady, Jew-froed and spacey, who has never gone a day without being high on some drug.

Keibel has blacked out before a party even started on more than one occasion.

Brain's real name is Brian but freshman year he was cited for underage drinking and the cop spelt his name wrong. He plays rugby because he enjoys hitting people.

Johnny couldn't do a single pushup during pledging. That was two years ago. He earned the nickname "Sketchy Johnny" around the same time, when, for like a week, he started pushing up against complete strangers and making out with them at parties. He's also known as "Rock bottom Johnny" for reasons I won't get into.

Liam is a huge slob with tousled brown hair and a moon shaped face. He looks like John Cusack's grossly deformed inbred.

There's a good chance Perks is still a virgin but no one gives him enough shit for it because he still has a tough time getting into PG-13 movies without an ID. There were rumors that he was a hobbit extra in *The Fellowship of the Ring* but no conclusive evidence could be found after repeated viewings of the first 20 minutes of the film.

Dougie is the most awkward person I know. Last year, when we had strippers at our house, one girl told him to get down and he bent over on all fours like he was prepared to take a rhino horn in his ass. His hair never moves but he's always brushing his hands through it anyway at parties when he thinks no one's looking. He looks like the main character on Nickelodeon's *Doug*.

When we were looking for wood outside to throw into the fireplace earlier tonight I asked if anyone had ever burned rocks before.

"Rocks?"

"Yeahh...like stones. Shit like that."

I wasn't even feeling it yet. I'm just that retarded.

"Does anyone else see the frogs hopping around on the ceiling," someone is saying now.

"Hmm...no, I think that's just you," Keibel answers, and walks out the door, muttering something about the room shaking.

"Dougie, you *feel* this crazy shit?" Heady asks in his best 1965 flower child voice, the resident drug expert of the group and Dougie just nods his head and stares into the dancing flames, the embers turning blue and green and if you're lucky, clouds of dark red smoke.

“Yo, try this shit out,” I say, so excited I can barely get it out. “Like, stare at an object or a place for awhile, right? And then say something, like, ‘I have no legs.’ And you won’t have them anymore...”

“Huh?”

“Yea man, it’s fuckin *wild*. Out of this world shit,” I mouth. “Like, it doesn’t have to be your legs. Just try anything. Like, say: ‘I’m Doug Warzoha right now.’ And maybe you will be. I dunno,” I peer at Dougie expecting something wild to happen, “I haven’t tried that one yet.”

“Oh, watah. That’s what I was lookin’ for,” Brain suddenly blurts out, and hops off his seat on the couch again while the whole crew sputters and the room shakes with laughter and the howling wind outside creates a crescendo of thoughts and realizations that won’t ever be remembered again.

You wait for some crazy shit to happen; everyone is always asking, ‘have you seen anything yet, any visuals?’ some mind altering, out-of-body experience, you’re almost afraid to say “no.” You keep waiting for it to happen and while you’re waiting for the psilocin molecules from the mushrooms to bind with the serotonin receptor sites in the brain and cause the mind to do strange things it’s already started and suddenly, it’s sitting on your face squashing your brain like a fat chick doing cartwheels but even I’m not sure what that feels like.

“Yo, just follow the trail, follow the trail,” Perkins remarks, elf-like with his hooded sweatshirt drawn close over his head, his eyes moving back and forth from the ceiling to the floor and back again.

“What are people doing right now?” Liam ponders.

“Yea, do you ever wonder like, when you’re *here*, what are other people *doing*? I want to know,” I say.

“Yea, yo, he’s right. Like we’re in a different world right now. People just don’t get it,” Heady joins in, scratching his goatee while I try to count the number of grey hairs on his head.

“We’re on a different planet,” Liam adds.

Five minutes later, Keibel and Brain are back and we’re tripping balls as promised. Whatever that means. Heady is drooling with his eyes plastered looking out the window, Dougie is nodding his head frantic like some extra from *Jakob’s Ladder*, Brain is chilling outside with a shovel saying stuff like, “Be the person you want to be – no really, I’m serious now...” Liam is making up words to the CSNY song playing on the radio someone was keen enough to carry up, Keibel is lying across one couch, lanky and disjointed, jaw-dropped speechless like a newborn baby, and Perks is just staring at me, terrified and amazed at the shit spitting out of my mouth. Johnny ran away somewhere because he was afraid of what he might do to himself.

Animal noises evolve into laughter like a hyena and suddenly, I lose control. The next thing I know, the whole room catches it, laughing one big mushroom laugh and I laugh so hard tears are running down my cheeks, my contacts hazy and dry and I keep trying to stop, but it’s not me. I am looking at my body through someone else and that person is tracing *my* outline with a stencil. High pitch devil laughter keeps spitting out of my throat until I’m slapping my face wide-eyed grinning and crying at the same time mouthing protests and Brain will later say that although I was grinning ear to ear you could see in my eyes that I was terrified.

I try standing and fall backward, sinking into the couch and the ground underneath it, seeping into the wooden floor until there's nothing left of my body but my laugh, and that really isn't any part of my body anyway.

"I dunno, I'm fucked *up!*" I scream, high-pitched like a teenage girl or an opera singer, delirious, terrified, I'm not me. "Ughh I gotta...get out of this *room,*" I manage to blurt out even while laughing and if you've ever felt like you're head was going to explode in a good way this is it.

Five minutes later I'm no longer crazy. I'm chilling out, kicking back, enjoying the vibe. The way Dr. Jay P. Granat used to say about being in the zone, I am feeling it.

"You all right over there?"

"Oh, I'm marvelous. That was some scary shit but I'm great," I reply in quick words, speaking fast and in my own voice like I'm afraid I'll lose it again. "Actually, I'm completely normal right now. I think I'm back home from my little trip."

"You're not normal. You're just on a different level," Keibel assures me.

"Whatever you say dude."

And he's right. Because I'm staring at the carpet just like any normal person might, zoning out a little maybe, bored with nothing to do and I forgot how to spin my thumbs and the next thing I know I see George Washington's face, big and grey and grinning coming toward me and he's eating a cake and I have no idea why.

"Yo, when's G.W.'s birthday?"

“The President or the car company?”

“That’s GM, ass-hole.”

“Anyone?”

“Who knows,” Liam finally says. “I mean, I’m the history major so I should know, but – *wait*, why are you asking me this?”

“Cuz he’s eating a cake, man.”

“Oh,” everyone in unison.

“I feel like I’m in a giant Christmas cookie,” Keibel says.

“What? Don’t you?”

“That’s an awkward situation,” someone volunteers.

“I feel like I’m locked inside the Crayola Factory,” Perkins says.

“Look at these fucking colors.”

“Crazy,” I blurt out in static response but inwardly I’m remarking how much he looks like Pippin.

“Hey, where’s Johnny?” someone calls out.

“Who knows, dude. He was tripping *hard* though,” Heady says.

Meanwhile, in Johnny’s room...

“Smokey the Bear gets after it *so* hard. And he’ll yell at you from across the bar if you’re not getting after it,” Johnny says, his gold blonde hair strewn wildly in all directions.

"I mean, I feel like Smokey used to be straight edge and then one day some dumb fuck burnt down his forest and he said, 'goddamnit,' and just started getting after it and now he's a big time alcoholic. Like serious."

"You know what I mean? I mean Smokey the Bear is just sitting on his stool pounding down shots and you *want* to be his friend because if you aren't, chances are he'll rip you a new ass-hole."

Johnny is lying in bed wrapped under a blanket staring at the ceiling talking to himself.

Back in the chapter room...

"So has anyone tried the leg trick?" I ask, my hands on my lap nodding my head from side to side.

"What? The one where they disappear?" Perkins answers, barely audible, eyes shifting body shivering laughing hysterically unable to get the words out.

"Yea, it *works*, I just tried it again..." I answer, on the verge of being annoyed now.

"Yo, we should have documented this shit," Heady interrupts.

"Yea, I feel like I could rattle off some Kerouac right now," Dougie says, running a hand through his one-piece stagnant hair, probably his first words of the night.

"Cardiac?" Keibel asks.

"Kettle corn?" Heady asks.

"Kerouac. He's a...poet, I think -- no, an author -- he wrote some short stories."

"*All* right Dougie," voices intone in unison.

"Dougie, you are so *weird*," Dougie's mind says. "Like you're so goddamn *awkward*. I feel like when you're alone in your room it's still very awkward, like 'so, how was your day?' you're saying to your computer and when he doesn't say anything back you just shrug and walk away, am I right?"

"What?"

"Liam, who's Kerouac?" Keibel asks, taking action, impatient, seriously wanting to know at this point.

"He's that guy we order our hot dogs from."

"Oh," everyone sighs in unison.

And the crackling fire molds with the voices crooning from the radio while I stare into space and drool forms at my mouth, searching for something, anything meaningful to say because if there ever was a time for being prolific this is it.

*"The lights turned on and the curtain fell down.
And when it was over it felt like a dream,
they stood at the stage door and begged for a scream"*

"So did anyone try the leg trick yet?"

1ST PLACE—AMARANTH/WILLIAMS PRIZE IN POETRY

Carissa Daino

BLUE TO GRAY

Night will callously drag
the dying day away
and step upon the remnants
of the blue that turned to gray;
the stars will loyally align
in their positions in the sky,
vainly compensating
for the sun that said goodbye.

All your guards are down
and distractions are asleep.
The streams of consciousness linger,
but the water is too deep.

There is no light to hide behind
as the pillow hits your head;
the darkness will expose you
and rape your thoughts instead.

Doubt and fear and hopelessness
circle through your mind;
in the air of lucid clarity,
you feel so undefined.

Reflections are illuminated
in the blackest of the night;
you close your eyes and try to blind
your thoughts from your clear sight.

But soon enough the day will crawl
and stand to blue from gray.
The sun will reassume its post;
and the stars will fade away.
Clouds of all uncertainties
will hover in the sky.
You'll hold your head up to them
and kiss the night goodbye.

Anthony Francis Dzaba

TEDDY

When the wooly bear of winter cold
Comes to the window with the stars
On his back, when the wooly bear's
Smoking

Maw brandishes teeth
From the bottomless black, you can
Wrap you arms around my chest
And I

Will tell the bear to go back.
You can hide your head over my
Shoulder when his shaggy coat waves
In the black.

I'll make it so the bear goes back
Where he came, under the covers
In the black of the night, I'll tell you
A secret

When you are afraid that his grizzly
paws will reach in to touch us.
The freezing stars in the cold-cold
Black

Are jealous of us when we are sleeping.
Those jealous stars on the back

Of the bear, dream of the warmth between
You and me.

I've already told him, my baby
Is sleeping, and why should he wake you
With itchy brown arms, or a cold
Wet nose

To poke in between us and sniff
At the warmth, that wraps us in dreams? See how
The stars watch over her dreaming,
Dreaming

Maybe of her and me. Look how
Jealous the stars have watched her,
Look how my baby is tender
And sweet.

Nina Granberry

DREAMS INTERRUPTED

I had only been to my Granny's house once before now. Before the first time I came to visit I had heard from family that she had been sick with throat cancer. They said she lost a lot of weight; she weighed ninety pounds. Even though I had already been told these things prior to seeing her, it still did not prepare me enough. Tears welled up in my eyes and lumps attacked my throat as I tried to be upbeat and excited to ask how my Granny was doing.

"Oh I'm alright, baby. How you?"

I kept my eyes looking upward so that the tears wouldn't come out. Who was this little wrinkled old lady? This wasn't the same Granny I knew that would drink gin and dance the night away with a huge grin always on her face. This wasn't the same Granny that could curse you so bad that you'd want to go and hide yourself shamefully in some corner. No, this was not her. Now she was tender, small, and quiet, no longer lively. She could barely hear when you spoke to her and would barely open her mouth when she spoke to you.

"That's nice, baby. You all grown now!"

I sat close to my Granny, really close to her on the couch that sat in front of the television. I slowly took her hand in mine and held it softly. She was so fragile. I sat close, convicted about all the time that I could have spent with her but never took the time to. I sat close, looking straight ahead at the television. Thank God for that television...it helped me suppress the regret and heartache. It would

serve equally well when I sat on that same couch reuniting with my dad.

“What do you need, Daddy? Do you just need jeans and shirts or do you need other little stuff too?” I was eager to help my daddy get on his feet and have what he needed to try and find a job.

He had just got out of prison in Cameron, Missouri after being incarcerated for three years on some type of drug charges. Now he was back in Kansas City living with his mother, my Granny. He had a low haircut, wearing gray pants, a white t-shirt, and a dusty plaid jacket. He was smoking Newport menthol, a habit I guess he regained over the years of his absence. I sat across from him, staring at him as if in a trance, but quickly looking back at that television when he looked at me. I was extremely bashful for some reason, that nervous feeling I get when I am being interviewed for a job. I had not seen him for about ten years except for once or twice here and there before now. I don't know much about him anymore. I do know that he remarried and divorced and had a son by a white girl that used to be a prostitute until she met him. Anthony was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. I took Anthony to church with me once and I tried my hardest to convince my mama to adopt him—a son of her divorced husband—but to no avail.

“I need some jeans and a couple shirts, Nina. Whatever you can get me will be enough.” My dad smiled hard and nodded his head, I guess a proud man's way of saying thank you without showing too much emotion. He took another puff of his Newport and we both fixed our eyes on the television once again until one of us thought of something more to say.

I went to Gordman's, a name brand bargain store, and bought two pair of pants, three shirts, a belt, and a watch. He was very grateful and I was glad to get him out of the customary prison attire, a white tee and gray pants.

He looked different from what I remembered him to be. His teeth had spread out and were cocaine stained; defeating the good

work braces had done on his teeth back in high school. Back then he was very dignified and took pride in the way he looked. Mama said that he was the only guy in their high school that wore suits and carried a briefcase. This was one thing that caught my mom's interest.

But now, now I hardly recognized him.

"So how are you, Daddy? How you feelin'?"

We were sitting on the couch in front of the television in the living room, the customary meeting place at Granny's. Finally, I am looking into my dad's eyes. The sun is shining in through the blinds so I see him clearly. It feels awkward and I realize that I normally don't look into people's eyes when I converse for some reason.

"I'm good, baby. I'm glad to be out and able to get back into society, doing things the right way and starting over again. God has blessed me to be delivered from drugs...I don't do that stuff anymore. I'm just eager to get a job in what I'm good at and get my own place." These last words reminded me of when he said this before and didn't keep his promise. I remember vaguely him calling and telling me he was on his way but never showed up.

"Well daddy, I'm glad that you're out and that I get to see you again."

"Me too, baby." He smiled and grabbed my knee and shook it a little, an act of reassurance that I believe the both of us needed.

We reunited while he was in prison. My Granny had given me his address and told me to write him, so I did. The first letter I wrote was full of compassion. I had time to think about how I felt about my dad. Was I really angry with him like rappers were in songs I had heard? Beanie Segal told his dad that "yeah you gave us life like, fruit from a plant/we ain't eat right from them foods from them stamps/and to think you was my pop/man I gotta stop this shit." Did I hate him and could I really not forgive him for abandoning my siblings and me? No, of course not. In fact, I missed my dad dearly. I missed how when I was a child I'd see my dad lay out all his records, numbering in the hundreds, and just play music all

throughout the day and into the night. You couldn't even see the floor because his collection was that serious. My dad loved Michael Jackson. He would always do an MJ dance move when he danced with me and Nikki, my older sister. The moonwalk was his specialty. To this day I still cannot figure out what went wrong and why things have turned out the way that they have.

"I hope that you can find a job and stuff too. Do you have a resume?" After spending a semester in college and going to a couple career etiquette workshops, I now know the importance of having a resume to sell yourself to employers.

"No, no I don't have one of those. I don't have any work experience anyways. I've been in jail so I wouldn't have much to put on there." He wasn't smiling anymore. He slumped back into the couch and took a long, deep sigh. He started up another cigarette.

"Uh hunh Daddy, you got an electrical certificate while you were in jail. Plus, you can put jobs on there from before you went to prison. I'll come over tomorrow and make one for you. All you have to do is tell me your work history and I'll type it out." I smiled at him and looked into his eyes with certainty that things would work out. I got up from my distant place on my own couch and came and sat by him.

"You would do that for me?" He seemed shocked that I would.

"Yeah, daddy. It ain't nothing. I'll be here tomorrow."

The next day I went to my Granny's house and created the resume. Afterwards, since the Subway that we were going to was close to my mom's house, I had suggested that we go by there so my dad could see Shell, my little sister. He hadn't seen her since she was four or five.

"Oh Nina, I don't know if that's a good idea." We both started laughing because we knew there was tension between him and my mom. I was only making a suggestion.

"It's cool daddy. I don't think it will be a problem."

So we ended up at my mom's front door and rang the doorbell. I didn't have a key to this new house, my mom's and Herbert's house. Herbert was my mom's new husband. He and I didn't get along because I never could accept his low level of manhood. Thus, although I knew that bringing my dad here could end up in conflict, I could care less if it made Herbert mad. So be it.

My mom opened the door and was stunned to see who stood before her.

There was an awkward delay before my mom gave a greeting to my dad. "...Hey... how are you doing?" I led the way into the living room because it didn't look like my mom was going to move out of the way to let us in.

My mom has grown to hate my father; at least that's what she says. She never forgave him for leaving us and cheating on her and throwing his life away, I guess. I can remember one time talking to her about my father and it was obvious that she had no care for him. We were folding clothes that day...

"Nina, I know you might not want to hear it, but I hate him. I just do. That's your daddy so you wouldn't understand what I mean. But what he did to me I just can't forgive him for."

"So how have you been, Pat?"

"Good." Mama was easily distracted because she wasn't trying to pay him any attention whatsoever. As soon as the phone rang she jumped up and walked to the back room.

While we were all making small talk Shell came into the room. Shell is my younger sister and she is handicapped. She's fifteen and she doesn't talk, she wears diapers, and doctors have "intellectually concluded" that she thinks on about a five or six year old level. My dad was never really close to Shell for some reason and Shell could sense that. She's the type of person who knows when people feel weird around her or is scared of her for some reason. A general hypothesis in the family is that Dad felt guilt for the way Shell turned

out; that she got some of his mistake in her system that made her mentally disabled. No one will ever really know if that's true or not.

"Hey Shell! How are you doing baby!" Shell rushed to the front door to see who it was that rang the doorbell, something she always does because she's always ready to go for a ride.

When my dad said that, Shell totally ignored him and came over and hugged me, as if she didn't even see him standing there.

"Oh you gone do that to me Shell? It's alright. I didn't think you would give me a hug anyways, baby." He laughed one of those semi-real, uneasy laughs to try and brush off the fact that he had just been rejected.

I could sense that my mom was angry with me for bringing this man into her husband's house. I hastily suggested that we head back to my Granny's house so that things wouldn't get ugly. As we were leaving, my dad felt that he should make one more attempt to embrace the child that he hadn't seen in years or ever truly embraced her entire life. Amazingly, Shell let him embrace her and even hugged him back. It was a beautiful thing and everyone in the room couldn't believe it.

"Oh damn, Shell. You're about to make your daddy cry, girl. I didn't think you would hug me, baby." He was so happy; his eyes had begun to water.

It tears me up inside to think about where my father is right now or what he is doing. It hurts my heart so because I love him so much. I sometimes envy people who have both of their parents with them and are a healthy family because my family was once like that too. At one point in time things were good for us.

Daddy loved to take us national parks. He wanted us to see the things that he was unable to as a child. I remember when we lived in California and went to the Redwood Forest. It was 1991 and my two

sisters and I are standing on the inside of this enormous Redwood that had fallen and my dad is filming us as we make this great discovery.

I know that he has reverted back to his old ways. No one knows where he is or how he's doing. My older sister, Nikki, and I sometimes talk about him.

"I thought about daddy yesterday and started crying because I think I know why he probably went back to being a crackhead. Wouldn't nobody give him a job. Nikki, I know that he had to have filled out like seventy applications and none of these fools would give him a chance."

"I know. And that wasn't nothing but the devil setting him up too, making him think that he wasn't shit since he couldn't find a job."

"I know, right? Daddy wasn't trying to work mopping nobody's floors for no stupid pennies either. He was so anxious to get out and do what he had to do. That's so messed up, man. He was smart and qualified to do some good stuff."

"Plus, daddy shouldn't have been trying to counsel his crackhead friend Ricky. How you gone try to help a recovering addict when you just got clean yourself? That shit ain't gone work!" She was getting loud now. When we start talking about stuff that's messed up, we tend to end our conversations basically yelling, mad at not being able to do anything about the situation.

"But he was so close and me and you were right there to help him with whatever he needed just to give him support, you know? I so wanted him to make it." Lumps began to form in my throat just thinking about the desire I had for my father to recover and get his life back together.

"All I know is that daddy is okay. He probably somewhere shacked up with a woman he convinced to take care of him because

he's always had that power over women." Nikki said jokingly but it was very true.

"Daddy is a pimp though. Ever since I can remember he has always gotten someone to take care of him. He's so smooth...but I'm glad that you think that he's safe and still alive."

I, however, imagine that my dad has returned to a darker life of drugs and loneliness. Of course, he will always know how to take care of himself and manage no matter what type of situation he's in, but once again he's gone. I had so much to tell him, to try and catch him up on the last ten years of life that he'd missed out on. I wanted to tell him about how I made it to college, how I met Cornel West and the real Coach Carter. I want him to know how hard I worked to make the basketball team in college and didn't succeed at doing so. All these things, these seemingly small things that have affected my life in some way, I want him to know. I need him to know.

Holly Kent

PREY

The breathing of that beast of prey was in my ear always; his fierce heart panted close against mine; he never stirred in his lair but I felt him; I knew he waited only for sundown to bound ravenous from his ambush.

Charlotte Brontë, Villette

I will not be haunted by you. After all, it is you, and not I, who always said that he preferred ghosts to the living—the past to the present—what *was* to what *is*.

And so though I sleep in the bed where you once slept and work in the rooms where you once worked and walk in the halls where you once walked, I am determined not to remember. I am determined to purge this place of memory—to strip it of recollection—until it is as bland, antiseptic, and soulless as the most anonymous possible hotel room in the most anonymous possible hotel.

And I will do so. Have no doubt about that.

And so I will not remember your first night, under this roof—will not remember the way that you touched me, then, as delicately as though you feared that the slightest contact might tear my veins like spider's webs—as though you feared that the slightest pressure might shatter my skin like glass.

And I will not remember your last night, under this roof—will not remember the way that you shut the door behind you when you left, as gentle as a mother leaving a troublesome baby she has just

soothed into sleep—as terrified of disturbing its peace as she is of failing to escape it.

I will not let the past entrap me. After all, it is you, and not I, who always said that the past is a living thing, as fierce and relentless as a hunter who has just scented blood.

But I—I refuse to be hunted. I refuse to let the past bring me to earth—tear out my insides—leave me for dead. After all, it is you, and not I, who always said that the past was a thing we could no more escape than we could change—no more elude than we could alter. But though I cannot unsay what I have said—cannot undo what I have done—I can learn to care more about tomorrow than I do about yesterday—more about now than I do about then. And I will do so.

Have no doubt about that.

Martha MacKenzie

HELPLESS

She handed him two dollars even though the rose was only one. He went to give her the change but she turned before he could, knowing he needed that dollar bill more than she ever would. One, two, three... ten, eleven... twenty-three... It would take her two hundred and forty-nine steps to get home. She walked the route every day. She counted only on the days she didn't want to think.

The icicles on the houses were permanent decorations. Wind howled louder than the dogs in the alley that belonged to the homeless man selling roses. She went to zip up her jacket and realized it was closed all the way. Cold air has a way of getting into even the smallest of holes.

She wondered how the man would survive the bitter winter in a cardboard box selling roses. His eyes were of blue ice, but they told the story of sadness. Once a wealthy steel worker with a pension plan, now a benchwarmer with only one glove.

Will he use that money to satisfy his hunger? Or will he pacify the anguish with a drop from the local tavern?

One hundred sixty-six... she stopped counting. The man was but a speck behind her yet not invisible like he was to most other passerby's. They must be counting their steps, she thought. They don't want to think about him either.

Francesca Murasko-Blank

A NATURAL DESTROYER

A mighty force of sheer strength and power
As fearful and helpless mortals await,
Dreading tomorrow -- postponing the hour
A day to destroy what took years to create.
As the bass stops pulsing, the winds strengthen
Dark shadows lie down, as the moisture pours
Into the homes on streets that have lengthened
To cause chaos, leaving all open doors
Loud echoes of screams and babies crying
Mammals floating lying quiet and still
Killing, robbing, while others are dying
Lonely and lost in the woes of the chill.
Nature takes its course without concern
What she has destroyed will now be reborn?

Jessica Ohebshalom

IN THE PARK

His knees, bent, push hard against her knees;
She's frozen frightened against coarse bark.
The birds roam high through the trees.

She can't feel anything, not even the cool breeze
Trailing over her warm skin because his dark
Knees, bent, keep pushing hard against her knees.

A pot bellied orange bird drinks with ease,
It quivers from the cool air that sinks beneath the stone arc
While the other birds roam high through the trees.

The sweat pours through his underarms and he's
Moaning, with each push her future moments look stark
Because his knees, bent, push hard against her knees.

Fifteen are flying in a deep V shape with ease
As they smoothly embark
On a flight. They roam high through the trees.

She's crying, dreaming of cool summer seas
And watching the birds glide over her head into the park.
But there's only his knees, bent, pushing hard against her knees;
And the birds just roam higher through the trees.

Jessica Ohebshalom

NIGHTS ARE JETTING

The nights are jetting past
Us. We've got liquor in our hands and sharp
Marlboro breath. Tonight is blinking by
And the cold air on the porch is getting staler
By the second.

Hold in the smoke for just one more breath-
Holding it in deep won't make the high
Last longer, but you'll feel it the effects twice
As hard. SLOW(H)ER down.

We're singing old school rap out here, we've got a rhythm
On the pavement. It's so cold outside-
Let's go in where it's warmer.
Warm sounds so good right now.

I walk inside with red lipstick
And some coal blue eyeliner on, some shadow
On the lid and higher up on the bone.
Light at the bottom and darker at the top.

The pulse of the music is thickening up-
The vibrations are strong
Enough to make a hearing man deaf.
Deaf I tell you, deaf.

The sounds in here aren't like water smooth. They used
To be like water smooth, like cats slinking in dark alleyways,
Gently walking over cans, now all the sound rattles
And kicks the trash over onto the center of the floor.

Let's go up-
Stairs. I hear there's another party up-
Stairs. Climbing up never seemed so painful on the thighs.
It's so hot up here...getting staler by the second.

Jessica Ohebshalom

LIVING FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF DUTY

Dust off the sweat from your hands
Her dark hair is swaying
Down her back, dites-moi pourquoi
Her palms are shaking

That guitar song keeps playing
Not just in your head anymore
But in mine.

So when you first played for her
Did she weep or beg for more?

Moral thinking begins
A pile of birthmarks and scars,
Two choices sit in shy water:

If you pick desire, stir
With mint leaves and bark from a
Chestnut tree
And if you pick ethics,
Arrange to have a jail cell
With a punk name sketched in,
Ready for you by sunset.

Grab my shoulders now
Bones in your hands yeah,
Breathing is synchronized now
We've woken up the sensual now,
Moral thinking has walked out
Accompanied by some guitar playing,
So soothing, just play

That darkbroke wooden house
Beer branded, ice picks shuddering off
The roof no thinking there, just
Some heavy breathing

You get that
Spanish wine, filling us up till my
Eye liner leaks and
I'll take some mint leaves with mine

Sweat from your hands
It keeps playing, playing
She's dancin' for you now
Look at the desire it's waking.

1ST PLACE—AMARANTH/WILLIAMS PRIZE IN PROSE

Gwen Purdom

BROKEN

Pressing the phone to my ear, I wait. The dull ring echoes into the emptiness of the other line. With each ring my breath catches in my throat and I wait.

He'll answer on the next ring.

I wait. I can feel my heart floundering. I try to ignore it, but I sense a heavy weight tugging it under. It struggles to remain afloat, grasping the fading sound of the telephone's rings, white-knuckled. One last ring. My heart's grip falters.

He doesn't have his phone. That's it. Something must have come up. He knows I'm in town. He can't wait to see me. That's what he told me. He would never lie to me. Those other times didn't count. He only bent the truth so he wouldn't hurt me. It didn't count. He would never hurt me.

I am interrupted by the answering machine beep. It stings my ears. The shadow of his voice greets me. It's distant. Inanimate. I can hear his warmth, but it hurts not to touch it. Suddenly, I am not listening to his answering machine. I am listening to him laugh. When he really laughs the sound rumbles from somewhere deep inside him then thins and escapes as almost a giggle—a very manly giggle of course. I hear him whisper, "I love you" in my ear accompanied by the lapping tide and the hair on the back of my neck stands on end. I hear nothing but the answering machine's harsh beep.

My tongue trips over the words. I don't remember what I said. It doesn't matter. I wait. Something creeps up and I push it down. I'm not ready yet.

I shouldn't have called him. Why would I call him? Of course he doesn't want to talk to me. If he wanted to talk to me he would have answered his phone. Why would he want to talk to me? Who am I to him? I'm just that girl now. Why would he tell me he couldn't wait to see me if he didn't mean it? He meant it deep down. He just couldn't tell me because of her. She wouldn't like it.

The phone rings. I am shaking. His voice sounds excited. Or is it scared? I want it to sound excited. I force myself to hear excitement.

"Tonight? I'd love to get together tonight. See you then."

Hope stirs in my head until I feel dizzy. Maybe this time he'll remember. He'll remember the long letters he wrote, falling asleep with the phone nestled between his ear and the pillow, brushing the hair away from my face and grazing my forehead with his lips. He must remember. It's been over a year since it happened. But that night he made me a promise. He would never break his promise.

The monster rakes my insides. Its claws are threatening but I turn up the music as I polish myself in preparation for our reunion. It drowns out the anxious beast waiting inside. The monster readies itself, but I hear only the hypnotic beat of the bass.

The hope is almost frothy now. I wait for his arrival.

He is late. Three hours late.

He must have gotten caught up with something. He can't wait to see me. It's been so long. She doesn't even compare to me, he told me. I'm always in the back of his mind, he told me. He promised. He wouldn't disappoint me.

To see him in the doorway is like collapsing into an overstuffed armchair after a marathon. He is twinkling. Relief sweeps over me. It consumes me. My hope swells.

He remembers. Of course he remembers.

His strong arms wrap me in security. The wave of the last two years devours me. Every moment of our togetherness flashes in front of my eyes. I relive the discovery, the awe, the amazement that one feeling could seep into our fingertips, our eyelashes, the tips of our

toes. And it was our amazement. Never before had I been surer of something than the feeling we shared. We grew together.

But his arms let go after a second. I am entranced by his presence. We spend the evening under the stars. Our arms brush and lightening shoots through me. I want to rest my head on his shoulder and I do. He presses his temple to mine ever so gently, but only for a second.

He makes elaborate plans for our next day together. My hope gains strength. Everything will be the way it used to be. We will interlock our fingers and return to the path we had begun to pave two years earlier. Now I am sure of it. He tells me goodnight.

"I'll see you tomorrow, call you as soon as I wake up."

I smile and the smile intoxicates me. I feel weak and anxious for the morning. I wait for our reunion.

The early morning sun shifts to midday.

He said he would call me. I can't call him. He'll call when he's ready. We had a whole day planned, he wouldn't miss that.

I wait. The thing inside me growls so fiercely I swear I can hear it. My resistance has weakened by early evening.

The thing overpowers me.

It rips me apart and leaves me broken and numb. I feel nothing. My heart slips and plunges into the depths of darkness. I hide in the dark hole to which my heart led me. A wall crashes into place between me and the outside. Those who attempt to enter my hole are not discouraged by my anger, nor my humiliation, but terrified by my silence.

For three days I burrow deeper into numbness. I am numb but I am hidden. The back of my mind wants to keep listening for my phone to ring but the thing has obliterated that hope.

They drag me from my hole. I am kicking and screaming. But they see only stillness and silence. I am placed with another. He is family. I reach out for my hole. I want to hold onto it. I frantically grasp for its edge. I feel my numbness wavering. The other puts a hand on my paralyzed shoulder and the shell encasing me cracks.

Only a tiny crack, but a crack all the same. The crack is jagged and sharp.

My numbness pours out of me. I weep onto the other until he is soaked with my numbness. I can feel again.

But that numbness never really vanishes into thin air. It turns into this hidden disbelief that fades and lingers, only showing itself on those occasions when a trace of cologne jogs your memory, or the radio plays that one song the two of you listened to that one time. But it never really goes away. It changes you.

Kevin Riling

REMEMBER HIS BOOTS

Dinner bells toll in a mother's mind
And children head home
For washings and scrubblings
Of fingernail grime and gathered black soot.
Set the napkins with forks and spoons,
And circle the table in familiar fashion.
"Dinner must be ready by the time..."

His boots track in the doorway and pause
For the peeling of coats and flannels.
Beige boots soaked and stamped in sawdust,
Smeared in oil, grease and tar,
Stomp on a wooden foyer.
His shoelaces too, frayed tufts of hair,
Are crusted in mud like kiln dried clay.

Boots crawl to the couch as I
Pounce on their tired backs.
Rip the shoelaces loose
Like an early Christmas gift, tug
On heels of rubber harder
Than strings of speaking dolls

Until the boots come off and
Rest in peace until
The sun makes light of morning.

Bedtime bells toll mother's mind.
Look at family albums with missing
Members and empty spaces.
Picture pointing and
"One time when he"-enchanted stories.
No I didn't know but I
Remember his boots.

3RD PLACE—AMARANTH/WILLIAMS PRIZE IN POETRY

Kevin Riling

SNOW-STORMED LIVES

Snowflakes fall and frost wire fences,
An early bell echoes; boys fire orbs of winter tension.
A wind blows quick and whips Johnny's lips
With whispers of jagged thoughts of home
And hanging on his bedroom door
A belt—cracked leather—bruised and black.
A man sneaks in late to bed, his icy
Finger slithers through a golden ring—
Her snoreless sleep of silence deep deceived.

We are the cold, the shallow men of snow
With artificial eyes and buttoned smiles.
Our fleeting lives of beating wives
Strangle the world with impure ice.
Summer's warmth has fled. We are stuck in winter.

Ben Rosenau

YOU THINK I NEED A BIGGER VOCABULARY

I could start this poetic passage of prose by saying
'She only calls me when she's drunk'
But that's just pretentious
So I ponder and predict and prophesize
But there's no point, no power in portraying you own prophecies
I think of the possibilities which just provide problems
Pause- I'm not living in the present- press play
I thought I'd be a poignant piece of pumpkin pie... a piece of cake
From a pseudo- subtle posthumous compilation
It wasn't petty potpourri, it wasn't some light hearted Pollyanna
It had weight, it had pounds

I don't know how you perceive us, as playful peers?
It one tiring Paradox
I do know because you presented one particular truth
But how predictable, you were plastered on the phone
So smoke your pot and keep pretending
Just look me in the eye don't say that it ending
And forget your peripheral vision

You're a phoenix who takes photographs in Philadelphia
A vibrant passive phenomenon
But there's peaceful pandemonium in the city of politics
Provided property of the VP
When we stood where the presidential monument presides

I thought practice what your preach
Because your policies are pathetic

You inspired me to be profound, prolific
...I told you about potential
Because I've learned what's practical isn't what's most precious
I'm trying to be progressive, trying to push forward
But I'll procrastinate and probably just pull an all nighter, prolonging
the experience

So pardon me for sulking in the pain
While I'm preoccupied with the Smashing Pumpkins,
n' you the Sneaker Pimps
But were still just self-proclaimed music elitists

So swallow the pill
Though there's no prescription for this prognosis
Cause my syndrome is perpetual

These passionate perennial petals are falling into poverty
And they can't be put back into place, they can't be prevented
So who's gonna save me and be my Natalie Portman

Ironic to hear you say 'I am a P' and ask me when I'm coming home
You say park that car
You say I need a bigger vocabulary
Your say post-modern
I say paradigm

Liz Wysocki

REFLECTION

The chilling breeze and smell of fallen leaves
Brush past me as I gaze upon a mixture of colors,
Holding an abundance of yellows and oranges.
Glowing. Burning. Entrancing.
Caught upon the beautiful bareness of the trees,
I stand from a hilltop, following the path
Of deep red laced delicately
Between the seas of green and yellow, teasing me.
Colors dance across the ground
To the delicate tune of swaying branches
And the gentle hum of windblown leaves,
As the cold begins to pierce the skin,
Leaving my knuckles cracked and bloody.
I inhale the smell of autumn.
Rustic. Fragrant. Sweet.
And watch the sun fall into the sea,
Submitting to the melancholy
Of a receding sunset.
I turn my back, feeling the beating of my heart,
Shielding me from the cold. Glancing back,
I see the dawn of a new day.

Liz Wysocki

A TREE NEAR COPPEE HALL

My foot steps down, the steps are steep.
Each is coated, each is littered with leaves.

A golden tree flashes before me.
It burns brightly against the grey sky.

I step forward again; I am drawn to the flames.
I watch them slowly rise.

Every leaf dangles carefully, the colors delicately arranged.
The edges are lined in blood.

My eye sharpens like a lens,
Focusing on the blinding yellow,

I ponder for a moment, wondering if this image
Could ever recall these sensations.

(How I longed for another moment,
Another capture, another breath.)

I watch the light begin to flicker.
The branches glow against the menacing sky.

Every spark, rising and falling;
Coating the ground with specs of gold.

The lens snaps shut as my eyelids close,
And rapidly open again.

I inhale, watching the remaining embers
Radiate into the darkness.

I tear open the side compartment,
Rip the film away from the roll, exposing it to the remaining light.

Quietly, I let the camera drop to my feet.
Lifting my head – I stare.

Liz Wysocki

YOU AND I

Let's drive together
You and I
Top-down on the highway
Wind-blown hair and music playing.
Drive a little faster now;
We'll sing with the radio
Carefree and flowing aimlessly,

Let's laugh a little
Laugh until it hurts to breathe,
Smile until our lips
Can't stretch any further,

Let's forget our troubles
And walk by those waterfalls,
Kiss as our clothes
Are covered in the mist,
And tiny droplets cover our bodies,

And after a day
Has come and gone,
Let's lay together
You and I
Get lost in a sea of skin,
Lose track of time,

Synchronize our breaths,
And stare at the ceiling;
Watching it spin in circles
Until sleep finally comes,

And when we wake in the morning
Let me stare into your eyes,
Then we can grab the keys
And drive.

Aliza Jennifer Zelin

RESUMPTION

“What?”

“You heard me, Peter. I think this is a really great step, you know, in our relationship.”

“Oh, my god...this is... great! You couldn't be more right!” My index finger pulled at a hangnail on my thumb, voraciously, under the table. I didn't stop until my teeth clenched and I was able to rub my warm blood between my fingers until it dried and rolled into thin slivers I could flick at Claire's calves. She smiled a toothy grin, which made her look absolutely retarded, and stood up. My eyes followed her and for a moment I was sure she'd jump on the table and start clanking her coffee cup to make an announcement. Worse. She took two steps towards me and, rubbing her belly, said, “Kiss it.” I looked around at the pother patrons, in disbelief that she was pulling this right here, right now. Felipe's Baked Goods and Café should have known before we ordered our coffee and frittatas that serving us would result in an embarrassing scene that would forever haunt my nightmares and turn everyone within a 10 foot radius of us gayer by proximity.

The room is swimming swimming swimming in florescent lights and my body shakes like a leaf in a hailstorm. My toes are cold against the floor they wiggle like worms in a bag and I can't think of anything else but a blanket and mother and hot chocolate with marshmallows. A lot of marshmallows, so they foam in the heat and give me a white, sticky moustache. My teeth chatter and my eyes close and inside my head I see

things that make me happy when I'm scared, but like doctor's office scared, not this scared, so I don't if they'll work this time or not. Play-dates at my friends' houses with grilled cheese and Ovaltine lunch breaks; building tents with dad in the backyard in the summertime and looking for grasshoppers and daddy longlegs; TV before bedtime in the middle of mom and dad in their big bed that smells like sleep.

My eyes looked up and met hers, then focused slowly on the flat stomach she was nudging in my face. I put my left hand on her stomach then glanced around the rest of the restaurant, where, save for a 30something woman dressed in a tracksuit sitting alone at the next table, no one else looked our way. I puckered my lips and pushed them against her belly, keeping eye contact with Claire the whole time, noticing that she saved her smile until only after I made an audible, obnoxious smooching sound. She glowed and her coffee-colored hair fell thickly over the mounds of her breasts and for a second I remembered why I initiated conversation with her 11 months ago at the ELMA Philanthropies fundraiser.

I spotted her from across the room; her eyes intensely fixed on the silent auction pamphlet she held in her hands as she stood at the bar. I could see her cleavage rising and falling as she breathed rhythmically. I presumed that she preferred sweet scents over heavy florals and that her skin smelled of berries and vanilla, especially after a bath. Her eyes weren't heavily lined, like the other women in the room. She was a natural beauty, and her blue eyes complimented her brown hair so well that there was no need for artificial enhancements.

"What, do you suppose, was she thinking?" I had asked her as I stood at the bar, on her left, and gestured towards a woman clad in a fierce lime-green taffeta Gautier. She giggled haughtily and I caught her smoothing out the silk on the bodice of her own gown. Caroline Herrera? Possibly. I couldn't tell. But I did smile back.

“Don’t get me wrong – it’s a valiant effort to stand out, however, if that was her goal she’s probably overcompensated by the amount of botox in her forehead. The lights in here are reflecting off all the Harry Winston tonight as it is; we don’t need her forehead acting like it’s a sun shade in the windshield of an ’88 Honda at the beach.”

“I’m Claire, and you, you’re absolutely terrible!” She playfully hit my lapel and I almost grabbed her wrist, but I stopped myself.

“Good evening, Claire. I’m Peter and the pleasure is mine.” I heroically kissed the back of her palm which was when, I believe, it was in the bag.

Later, at my place, I came after biting her lip until it bled.

My eyes are closed and I wont open them they’re mine and I wont see can’t see. I’m hiding and he can’t find me here with my eyes closed and my toes on the ground and my body shaking and cold cold cold. I know what’s coming and I wont cry, can’t cry, if I do I’m not 7 years old I’m a baby again and I’m not a baby, nope not anymore. I know he’s here but I won’t let him know because I won’t say anything at all. I’m quiet, just like a mouse, but not even a squeak. My mouth is closed and my eyes are closed but my body, I can’t hide my body.

After we finished breakfast, and the later crowd began to trickle into the eatery, we climbed into my CLK and I drove faster than usual towards Your Body, Your Yoga, where Claire spends 4 mornings of the week contorting her body into positions that ultimately spice up our sex life. She turned around to wave goodbye and blow me a kiss, then walked towards the door where, for dramatic effect, she turned around once more and rubbed her belly and mouthed “I love you” to me. I smiled back as my molars grinded against each other furiously.

Instead of driving to work I headed home. I had enough flexibility now as a fifth year financial advisor that I could come in when I wanted, even though I rarely abused that privilege. The wrought-iron fence opens for my car automatically; it's the newest technology based on laser license plate identification. The house, a 3 story inspired by the French countryside, sits perched on a cliff high above curvy Route 101. In the mornings the floor-to-ceiling windows facing the Pacific let in enough sunlight to warm the tiled floors. The veranda sits in the front of the house and, on a clear warm day, with your back to the floral ivy that is perpetually climbing the façade, you can sit with a cup of coffee and a newspaper and look to the horizon, in the ocean, and see dolphins jumping, playing.

I couldn't throw her down stairs. Could I? No, too obvious, too dangerous. (Legally). What about a car accident, I could get us in a car accident. No, too unpredictable. There's no guarantee nothing would even happen to her. Shit, what else. Chemicals. Shit kills children all the time. This should be easy. Actually, the kid could come out with 3 arms or something, Chernobyl style. Fuck! Isn't there a pill or something? There's a pill for everything nowadays; shit, I take like 10 just when I wake up in the morning.

I paced around the house, tearing off my suit and clothes until I was naked. I power-walked through every room of my house this way, sweeping my arm over dressers and knocking photographs and other shit onto the floor, especially Claire's shit. She moved in a month ago. None of these ideas were going to work, of course, because aside from our new little "addition," Claire was the main problem; our Friday reservation at Dolce was going to be my clean breakaway. I'm fully aware of her proposal expectations but as fuckable, arm-candy, she is in no way meant to be the woman I will marry. What a ghastly institution, anyways. I inserted porn into the DVD player, "Backdoor BDSM," and masturbated for an hour and fifteen minutes. At the end of my session, I turned the TV off, put my suit back on, and left the hand lotion and used tissues on the bed. Claire would be home in 15 minutes.

Where is mom where is dad I can't feel my body and I never want to ever again no matter what anyone says. I'm pretending it's not my body it belongs to Ra's Al Ghul, the evil villain in Batman comic #232, and he's finally getting what he deserves for trying to kill all the people in the world and start fresh. Now Ra's deserves it because I don't think I do even though he says I do and says that it's a prize for being such a good boy, but I don't think it's a prize, not like the prize I got last year in Mrs. Koven's class when I guessed that there were 450 M&Ms in the jar when there were 452 and won the whole jar for guessing the closest number. If mom knew she'd put him in the corner because he's hurting me and you're supposed to keep your hands to yourself. She'd put him in the corner for 2 hours, doubly longer than I've ever been in the corner. But she can't because if I tell then mom and dad will leave me alone, he said, and there won't be a spot between them for me to sleep anymore.

I drove in the direction of my office but I could've been driving to Kentucky; my actions were more robotic than cognizant at this point. When Claire was vomiting all last week I never thought anything about it, considering her bulimia often reappears whenever she starts to feel fat, which for her is anything above a size 2. How could she want to have this child? Does she even know how much weight she'll gain? Does she even know that her life will no longer be her own, and she could have ended her modeling "career" this morning when she so thoughtfully surprised me with the news? She never even took *my* life into consideration. How *my* life will change. I refuse to raise a child I do not even want. My bringing one into this world would be one of the most irresponsible, foolish undertakings of all time. Children's lives are meaningless; the last on the food chain, unfit for survival and I refuse to be a member of the procreating masses. I took my left fist and slammed it against the driver-side window two times, the third creating a crack that

radiated quickly outward into hundreds of little veins that spread my fury farther than I intended. But I liked it.

Home. I was sitting in my driveway. The office would have to wait. Claire was home, I knew, because she always walks home from Yoga and leaves the fucking garage door open. Blinders shielded my eyes from anything but the garage door. I saw one of them, then two, then three, dancing around each other in my mind. Or was it real? I couldn't tell. I walked forwards, leaving my car idling in the driveway, blood dripping from my hand and leaving a trail. Hansel and Gretel popped into my mind and I'm not sure why. A child will be born and no child should ever be born. Born, born, born. Rhymes with porn. Where is Claire.

I want it over now and my head hurts because I can't cry but I want to cry. I don't know where my tears are going but I know they're not coming out, I won't let them. Something hurts inside like a bad dream but I can't wake up and I don't know how to stop it. The floor is so cold and I feel it against my body and I'm not even sad anymore I'm mad, angrier than I've ever been ever I hate him I could scream I'm going to scream I –

Remark to myself how Claire's hair looks like seaweed, spread in thick ropes on the kitchen floor, tangled with blood. Her eyes stare up at me and I crouch down and close her eyelids. Her abdomen is a mess because I mistook her upper intestine for an umbilical cord until I realized that she was only a month along and nothing like that would've formed yet. Blood is pooled around her body and I dip a finger in it. It's still warm and I put it to my lips. The sun comes through the windows, but there's no need to heat the tiled floors.

Susan Zelinski

RAIN

I heard it in the night
The sky opened up,
The clouds released their weight,
Jettisoned their burden.
Each drop signaled the death of a sorrow.
The rush was instant,
And the fury of the sky built
Like the maddened pace of a soldier's heartbeat;
Yet I could not see
The transport of a broken dream
Into the gutter;
The earth became saturated with loneliness,
But each single loss was obscured
By the multitude of the heavens' tears.
Though the wind whipped the trees mercilessly,
They did not cry out in anguish.
Instead the thunder gradually abated,
And the sun rose to avenge the earth's plight
With warmth and restoration.
The birds reemerged, undaunted in their quest
To infuse the fragile skies with song.