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2015 Spring Quiz & Quill Magazine

Otterbein English Department
Otterbein University, englishdept@otterbein.edu

QUIZ & QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE | VOL. 96 | SPRING MAGAZINE 2015

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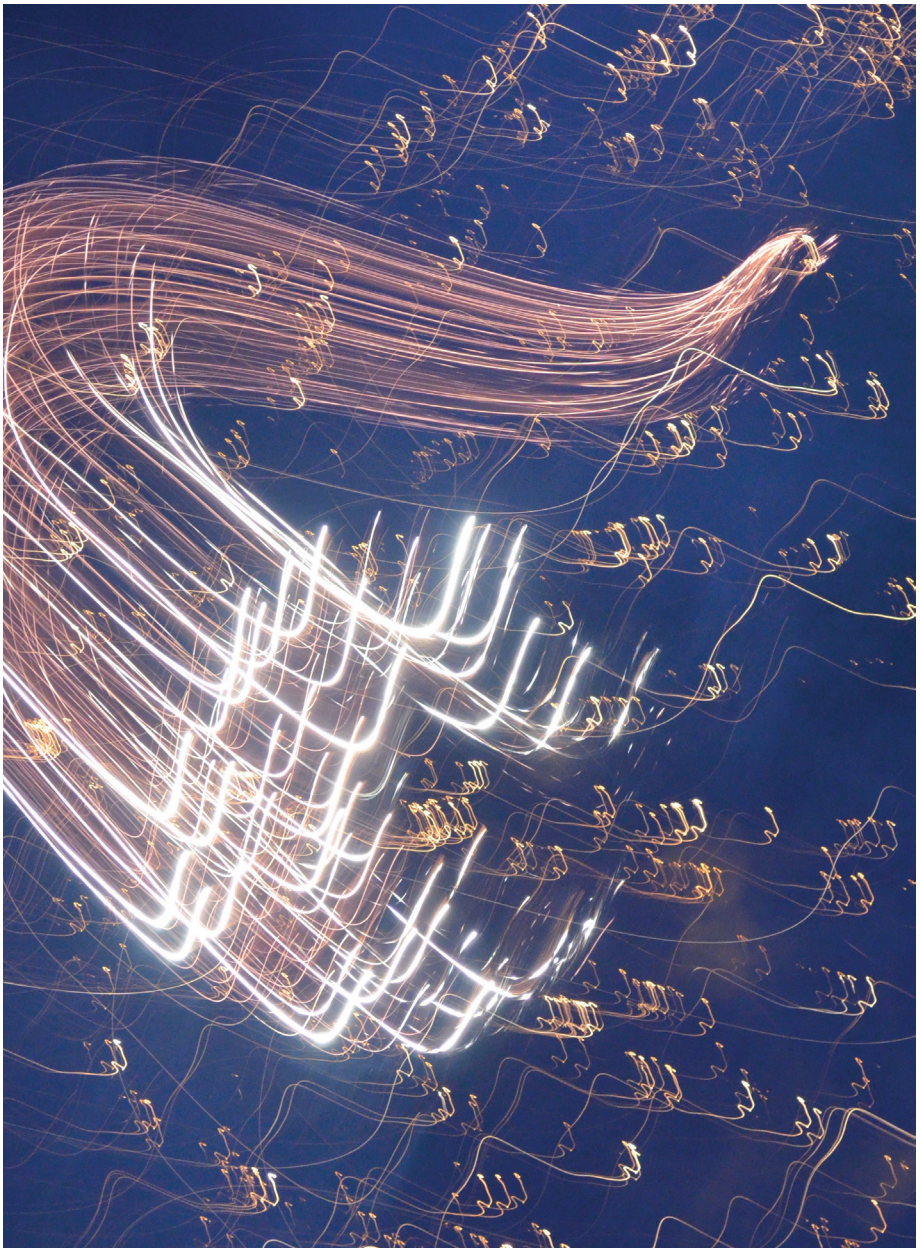

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SUBMISSION POLICY

Q&Q prides itself on publishing the highest-quality creative work. Therefore, every precaution is taken to assure writers' anonymity during the selection process. Only the advisor of Q&Q knows the identities of those who submit work to the magazine until after staff members' selections are finalized.

CONTACT US

Send all inquiries to quizandquill@otterbein.edu.

LETTERS from the EDITORS

DEAR READERS,

For me, this year has been nothing short of hectic. From holding multiple leadership positions, classwork, helping pass Gender Inclusive Housing through the bureaucratic pipeline, and dying my hair blonde—there's so much ground I've traversed. But it's things like this magazine—a tangible object of hard work, sleepless nights, and debates over Skyline chili—that make it all worth it. And while I've had a year to be reckoned with, I have so many people to thank. I want to thank my co-editor, Jess Campbell, for splitting so much of the heavy lifting with me (still hasn't hit me that she's graduating). I want to thank Shannon Lakanen, for taking more of the burden off of so many late nights than she'll ever know. This year's staff for their endless dedication to reading countless pages of submissions. And of course, I want to thank everyone who has submitted this year. This has been such a remarkable submission pool to wade through. I hope you, the reader, are as elated, amazed, and blissed out by the pieces in this magazine as I am.

Enjoy,

JOSH BRANDON

DEAR READERS,

As my last semester at Otterbein draws to a close, I have found myself becoming particularly sentimental. While I've been reminiscing on many of my greatest experiences of the last four years, it's dawned on me that almost all of these have involved Quiz & Quill in one way or another. From attending AWP in Chicago as the only first-year student to winning Haiku Death Match, from reading at open mics to helping host my first Spring Mag launch party as Managing Co-Editor—the extraordinary memories I have with Quiz & Quill will be with me for a long time. Never-ending thanks to Josh Brandon, my insurmountable co-editor, to Shannon Lakanen, my rock, and to this year's incredible Quiz & Quill staff who truly made this final year one of my best. This magazine is the culmination of considerable work done out of joy and love, and I'm certain that the contents reflect that.

Sincerely,

JESS CAMPBELL

THE NATURE OF BIRTH

Fadumo Abdulle

When I had given birth to you
I remembered what it was like
to deliver something so big that
I had to push six thousand three hundred and fifty-
five times and with each push I would produce
ten thousand beads of sweat,

That watered the gardens of Paradise Village,
producing in that season ripe mangoes
and juicy watermelons
that slid through the fingers of the neighborhood
kids and filled the purses of local
business women with *Xaawo Taako.*

I travelled through time always expecting you,
each day slowly
tiptoeing in the battlefields;
with my belly protruding,
I would duck from a spear,
slide past the pointy tip of a sword
and roll underneath the hooves of stallions.
The dusty tension of the conflict would
settle at the bottom of the Indian Ocean
and I would be relieved for a while knowing
that if you ever came, the coast would be clear;

Your tiny body and your tiny
little limbs that once used to fit into
my palms like a weightless feather
now feel heavy and foreign.
And as you grew bigger and bigger,
your greatness overwhelmed me, and
I became doubtful of how worthy of you
I was.

I panicked and unleashed
confusion and chaos and I forced
you to abandon me.
our hearts went East and West
And you climbed the Himalayas
viewing the world from a higher angle
than I could ever put you on.

ON DEADLINES

Amelia Christmas Gramling

Lately, every essay I write seems to be hovering just above the subject of birth. Or, what's more true, perhaps, is that every essay I write, inadvertently or not, slips into the space of the womb. I'm writing neither to conception nor labor nor especially to what follows—the daily living of new life. I write to the period of growth. The embryo searching and searching and finding its footing, the marvel of replicating cells, myopic patterns, of ancient maps and mazes emerging from the folds of your body you didn't know were listening, collecting, taking notes, crafting a mosaic of inherited objects and unfound dreams. Burying all of this and more in the cave beneath your ribs (the one you've never heard or felt or can, even now, conceive).

I know that this fixation, realistically, must come in no small part from a place I didn't necessarily authorize, and one I don't pretend to understand. I'm a twenty-one year old woman now. My body is syncing with my consciousness in a language older than God, *let's tell a story we know better than the heart's*. Lee's is fusing with similar conductive impulses. And together we mimic the sun spots and glass cut rivers of creation *I am death destroyer of worlds*. I am God giver of light. We catch and release glimpses of one another somewhere in the hum the moon emits as it eclipses the sun. But the illusion has no staying power. We are playing at making. The fix with no consequence. We roll over and off afterwards. We are safe. Wash our hands. We are safe. Shed skins. I touch his face as he's fallen fast asleep, *too much to risk*.

And so I know, reasonably, I can control the maternal impulse, can rationalize myself outside of this want, this cyclical internal alarm system, this pendulum that sometimes swings softer, barely audible, but never stops. And yet, here on this page I continue turning the possibility over and over in my mind, my fingertips, writing the essay that seeks to embody what I only simulate.

Jeff Porter wrote in *A History and Poetics of the Essay*, "In its directness and intimacy, the essay is the ideal literary form for the twenty-first century. Overwhelmed by an endless flux of information, we inwardly crave the momentary stay against confusion promised by the essay. We relish, as Scott Russell Sanders wrote, 'the spectacle of a single consciousness' confronting the chaos of cultural overload to which we awake each day."

I thought about this quote two mornings ago in my honors science class after my professor wrote on the chalk board *What makes us human?* After he instructed us, "discuss." My classmates came up with answers ranging from "technology" to "progress" and even "non-procreative sex." But all of these could be dispelled to some degree—apes utilize sticks to dig for grub, macaques masturbate, and elephants grieve for their dead. After conversation

had dwindled to a slow leak, a boy to my right raised his hand and hesitantly answered, "what about art?" The capacity and the compulsion to create. This seemed to me viable (if not revelatory) for all of ten seconds, but then a blue jay flew by the open blinds behind his shoulder blade, and I thought *what, then, is the nest?*

The beaver dam, the honeycomb, the spider web—the intricate architecture weaved in and out of innumerable species' genetic coding—the insistence in the very fact of their being: work tirelessly, risk death, make, make, make. Predisposed to certain patterns, stained glass. These, the delicate societies—the stay against coming rains. Some art is embodied by the creature itself—the butterfly wing, the mantis shrimp's shell, evolved over thousands of years to attract a mate or trick a predator's leering gaze. Does the peacock know he's beautiful? The compulsion to create outside of humankind is not one of creation's sake—a spider builds her web out of necessity, she must entrap, she must survive. Does this mean art, as we define it, is marked by that which is non-essential? Has an essay ever been *essential?* At what point did this haven of single consciousness become a spectacle, become a luxury, something momentary and novel?

My mother says most ancient Native American languages never contained an equivalent word for art. The Pueblo of the Mojave Desert made pottery from the earth's outer layer in order to carry water, entrap, go on. Home they built into the cliff face—family stacked on top of family—survival implicit in the design. When a death is suffered, the Pueblo don't bury the body but they still return to the earth that from which it comes. The clay walls they live and love inside of are thick with the bones of their ancestors. Cradle and tomb (coffin and womb) are both inhabiting the same space, both contributing to shelter that will weather the ages, that will provide shade from the sun.

In an overpopulated century, speaking from a post-atomic generation, a daughter of the American digital age, a writer of nonfiction a year after the *NY Times* best seller list was eviscerated by *50 Shades of Grey,* I am wondering if the essay I write is written to keep anyone warm. Is this thing that I make yet another product of ancient and irrelevant impulses we have as a culture outevolved? One we simulate for the fix, the momentary satisfaction. The essay as life vest, the essay as nourishment, the essay as home. Is it the ideal literary form because it mimics necessity best?

Several weeks ago I sat in a drafty Asian restaurant across from my graying poetry professor. We talked about these times like they are uniquely strung to buckle beneath our weight. Terry picked this tiny ear mark of a sushi place

because it's the only sweet sigh of its kind keeping a run-on strip mall from finishing a derivative thought. The restaurant is locally owned, and their single TV is relatively non-intrusive and muted (Terry subscribes neither to sound byte nor cell phone). It was windy. He pulled his tweed jacket tighter. He told me people hurry too much. We are too regimented, overscheduled, simultaneously overstimulated and inactive. I agreed at the time but not without an uneasy shift in my seat, thinking that if I'm honest, hyperdrive and stagnation are the two consistent modes I fluctuate between. Patched elbows, pockets padded down with endless notes—DNA makeup for vital organs of someday poems—an eye for sitting birds and uninterrupted twilights, Terry does not belong to this time. I didn't know how to tell him I don't wake at 5 a.m. to attempt a composition of the sun—I only write under a deadline. I'm not sure I've ever known an urgency, a significance outside of the demands of an assignment or the hope of personal advancement and success propelling my words out from my pores and my fingers to the keyboard. I need the line in the sand, the unbreechable brink to catalyze pressure, to stimulate that pendulum insisting *make make make.* Terry is teaching an environmental poetry class this semester, and eventually our conversation breeched the subject of climate change. He asked me for ideas—how can he dismantle his students' nonchalance, inject agency into their soporific pastimes, unhinge their collective shrugs?

I shrugged. Shook my head. I didn't know what to say.

I watched a climate change documentary recently called *Denial or Dysphoria* or some other rhetorical signifier for the so-called millennial condition. There's a scene in which a young Indian woman speaks in grave tones on behalf of her two-year-old daughter. She sits at a steel topped table and prescribes all of us, watching and not, including herself and the impression, the holding place (earmark) of a little girl in her lap, forty years, give or take. Forty years until that two degrees Celsius increase in the earth's internal body temperature will be reached. We Americans, as islands overflow, siphon off, can't keep each other warm; we excavate fossilized history and pump it into the atmosphere at such volume, at such speed, that the environmental ramifications, like the ghosts of stars dying billions of light years from this moment, run on a lag, so that estimation's only figuring the amount of fossil fuel already consumed, consummated, documented, spent. Via December 2014, we're staring down our noses, belly buttons, armpits, anywhere but at the sentence written across every news reel, in the line breaks between natural and disaster scrolling through the endless feedback belt loop of CNN.

It's already too late.

I know Terry came to me because the persona I embody in the essay, like the persona I embody in class, calls for action tirelessly, holds up the face of willful blindness, inertia, and demands that her reader carve *pollination crisis, deforestation,* and *extinction* into the open husks of their hearts; she does not, will not, give up—relent. But I'm finding it more and more difficult to separate that

version of myself from the one who spends hours on end with her sheets over her ears and eyes, eating peanut butter straight from the jar. I can't envision the reader, I no longer know what use it is to reinforce precautions and safeguards and preservation tactics to a generation of this species whose survival instincts can, at best, only recall (like a story preserved partially in the bedrock) residual salvation, lingering genetic memory.

It's only been in recent tellings of human expansion that many of our societies, like this version of America, have made the wholesale transition from delicate and dependent to dominating and exploitative. Less than a thousand years ago gigantic herbivorous birds were still scaling the winds, still foresting the countryside, still bedding seed into the earth's exoskeleton. But human hunting patterns and the rapid effects of climate change rendered these creatures first homeless, then extinct. The end (read: modern) story is one riddled with ecological anachronisms, one of dwindling museums of living fossils. According to *Scientific America*'s Connie Barlow, "Entire ecosystems, are missing some, many or all of the parts they co-evolved with. Plants produce specialized seeds and fruits for animals that are no longer around to … transport them, and prey species exhibit defenses for predators that no longer hunt them" (Barlow). We have no built-in defense mechanism for the phenomenon that we have become—predator and prey inhabiting the same body (both cradle and tomb, both coffin and womb). I am God Giver of Light. I am Death Destroyer of Worlds. My instinctual response to a lack of hope is to unearth loose soil, to straddle that risk, to make something grow. Even as I understand the impulse as antithetical, an act of creation which would only mean someone's someday hindered with less water to drink, less air to breathe.

What does it mean for a species headed for extinction to still yearn to leave behind a record, a map to water and compassion, blueprints for a life not better, not more than the one my father and mother were able to salvage, but something recognizable, something more or less the same? The *Kenyon Review* has this online series called "But Is It An Essay?" in which different contemporary essayists throw their two cents in on whether the parameters of the term essay can stretch to include whatever *it* may be. Installment Three makes the case for the Voyager Golden Records. Launched into space by NASA in 1977, the Voyager probes have borne witness, have catalogued data of the universe unreachable by human eye, ear, or whisper. In addition to sending information back home, the Voyager possessed a dual purpose as time capsule of the human moment: Bach, Beethoven and Chuck Berry; surf, wind and the volcanic hum of the sounds of the earth. In response to this query, essayist Jenny Boully expresses trepidation about the prospect of the records ever finding their way to the stars,

> 40,000 years is a long time to wait for a chance encounter. Only love is that foolish. So, when I think on the question of whether or not the Voyager Golden Records are or are not an essay, I keep circling around the matter of its intended recipient, and it seems to me that the hypo-

thetical addressee, being an abstraction and hope, make the records more akin to love letters or prayers.

One night spring semester, under tree cover in a park not far from campus and not-quite-devoid of ambient light, Terry told me a story. Twenty years ago, or so, (the last time he can remember knowing "alone?") He and his first wife bicycled across the Mojave, held hands through the darkness, slept on the ground. One night an unsettled wind woke them, pushing, insisting, propelling them into motion, action, into the holy crease of the West, a whisper of Pacific under its breath. With nothing but moon, stars, pale shoulders to light the unmarked highway under his feet, he rode. He drifted, plotless. The wind charted course.

Carl Sagan noted of The Voyager, "The spacecraft will be encountered and the record played only if there are advanced space-faring civilizations in interstellar space. But the launching of this 'bottle' into the cosmic 'ocean' says something very hopeful about life on this planet." The essay can't be read and can't be written the same as in 1977. The Record, unlike the honey bee, unlike so many living fossils on this planet, will evolve as we do. It will keep sending information back until 2025, until it departs from the breadth of our range, our ability to track, and we will only rely on what we can imagine. The cavern you can't feel. A reader on whom we can't depend. So, what possibility am I still turning over and over in my hands? Which pressure compels me forward to tap out these words, what Western wind?

I'm twenty-one, and Lee is twenty-three and when I'm not off at school we burrow whole afternoons away in his king-sized sheets. Sometimes I speak to his ceiling fan, the cracks between his curling palms, his belly button and the freckles paving coherencies in otherwise myopic planes of pink and olive skin. We still make plans. At first we named Colorado, why not lie beneath a sky that reinscribes all previous translations of the word *blue.* Our hypothetical *Shiba Inu* would have plenty of space to roll, dirty up his coat in the valleys of dust. Or maybe Vermont, I've never been, and the only thing that comes to mind when I close my eyes and picture it are endless swaths of trees like bookends for the Eastern coast, and my father who, at my age, hitchhiked across the state one fall break to live with a girl he'd never met.

Only love is this foolish.

I can't say whether the essay as a form is ideal to this century. I am still learning its dimensions, still taking its pulse, but I will say I believe the audience it seeks is unique to the age: we are no more or less lonely or dying or in love, but are bombarded with chaos and particular catastrophes uniquely imbued with expiration dates. All refuges dwindle. But our predicament is deadlined, our urgency prescribed. Forty years. Fifty. How long does it take to carve your name in a mountain's lip? Bike across Montana? The essay is me asking how to stay human. The essay is me saying "wait, wait, don't tell me." The essay is pulling a few partial threads from lingering histories of human kind and reminding

myself what we never really needed to survive, but have created anyway. *What was the purpose of etching impressions of mountain peaks into water jugs?*

This is not the absence of, not antithetical to the shrug: think of this essay as a slight deviation in a voyage toward the inevitable—a scenic route. The essay as love letter. The embryo as prayer. What can I stand to lose to a message in a bottle, which personas do I hope endure? Yesterday I missed a lunch date with Terry. Up to my eyeballs in tying up finals week loose ends, I simply let the chance to spend an afternoon talking poetry and sipping hot tea float on by. That night I emailed a fervent apology, deeply remorseful for what I'd missed. He responded only moments ago, "Amelia, don't worry. We'll reschedule for the spring. There is absolutely nothing that can come between

the coherence

we share."

MONOLOGUE FOR EMMAJO

Chelsea Craine

I bet you never cut through someone's stomach with your eyes closed never
Examined the backs of your eyelids. I know mine
Better than you know anything you've seen and
I'm still blind.
Before I was born I could hear my mother calling me
Peanut and my sister mother smiling with her
Fingernails
Pressed up against my plastic bubble
Popping someday my plastic I'll be popping it
Rip that IV right out of my chicken skin arm
Brandish it at the night
Nurse, if you try to turn me one more time …

Let me tell you about the outside world.
It doesn't know me.
But I know a thing or two,
Let me tell you I smell the whippings and whimpers of those hose mothers
Can't find the time to see
Mine's here six, eight, ten hours
Lives floating on the air, can't you pin them down?
Swaddle them.
But let me tell you about this hat.
This one right here
I'm sure you've seen it, at least
Three different times
It was forged in the kiln,
The heart of someone who loves me.
I met you
Once
Let me put it on my head the way the robins wear rainbows
To warm their ears
And drown out the silence
Within my bubble.

I know how long I've been here
I don't know how long I'll have to stay.
If you whisper in my ear, I will gladly run away.
Do you know what lies beneath the window?
Besides mummified tea leaves and the graveyard of the balloon race
Don't you see I need to go?
I sliced the elephant and home has fallen between the cracks.

SIPHONED

Gretchen Heisler

"…for books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them."

— John Milton

He was dying. Not that this was unexpected, but it had come on a lot more quickly than Nathan thought it would. At the beginning, he hadn't felt much more than a slight numbness in his limbs occasionally, but the days had turned into weeks, which had somehow become months, and now Nathan was nearing the end of his story and thus, the end of his life.

He took deep breaths to steady himself and briefly lamented his decision to not tell anyone what he was doing. He knew, though, that even if he called his mother right now, she would still insist he spend his last hours in a hospital, and his work would never be completed. Mother had always disapproved of writing, didn't understand its importance beyond the most basic level. He could still remember the car ride when he was seven, the first time she had ever brought up his future.

"What do you want to be when you grow up, Nathan?" she'd asked jovially. "A policeman? A firefighter? How about an artist?"

"I dunno," he replied, looking down at the sketchbook in his hand. His was full of random scribbles and poorly drawn pictures of animals that he saw. He knew that he was supposed to use it to make pictures of the things his teacher told them about history and other stuff, but a lot of the time he couldn't figure out what his drawings were after he made them, so what was the point?

Mother smiled kindly. "Well, you don't have to really think about it now, but what are you interested in?"

He thought for a minute about making something up, but decided not to. "Words," he said.

She laughed. "Well, that's a good thing. What do you like about words, hmm?"

"I like making them. Did you know there's these pictures called letters that—"

She had almost crashed the car. Nathan screamed and cried, but only

a little bit, because he wasn't a baby anymore. His mother was breathing hard now, and she pulled them over to the side of the road, turned the car off, and looked Nathan square in the face.

"Nathan," she heaved, "I love you more than I can say, and I want you to know that and listen to me very carefully." She leaned closer to him across the gearshift. "You do not draw letters. I know they can seem interesting because you just started learning about them, but Mrs. Brandt will teach you soon enough. They will hurt you. Do you understand?"

He only kind of did, but he said yes anyway because he knew it would make her happy. She leaned back with a nod and a forced smile and started the car up again to continue their drive home. When his mother spent the better part of the evening on the phone, he didn't think anything of it. It wasn't until he was older that he connected it to Mrs. Brandt's lesson on writing the next day.

"Siphoning," she said, looking very uncomfortable, "I—well, I think you all have heard of it, right?" Some kids said yes, while others looked around and then bashfully shook their heads. She inhaled deeply and continued on. "Well, siphoning is what happens when you put words onto a page." She went to her computer and pulled up the projection of the words "the," "dog," and "lose" that she'd shown them yesterday. "You see, class, a long time ago when people discovered language, they thought a better way to keep track of things was to find simple symbols that everyone would understand and could be put together to make up what we say. These were called letters. Remember when I told you this last week?

"However, they didn't know what they were doing. The symbols were easy, but they were very dangerous to use. That's why I told you so many times yesterday not to copy them down in your sketchbooks. People started to—well, they started to get very sick and sometimes they would even die. Eventually, they figured out it was the words formed by letters that were doing it. They called it siphoning. When a person makes these symbols on a page and groups them into words, a part of them gets put into the page as well. But people only have so much to give before there's nothing left. Do you understand now?" Everyone nodded, looking wide-eyed at Mrs. Brandt. "Do you have any questions?"

Many hands flew into the air, and she answered them as patiently as possible.

"Letters still exist because our ancestors—that's what we call the people who were alive a long time ago—wanted us to know the letters could hurt us. If we forgot about them, we might try to make them again.

"No, no one died putting those words on the screen. At least, no one died recently. They were scanned in from something already written, and it's likely

that the person who wrote them down the first time has died, but that's only because they wrote a lot of different words all at once.

"Yes, there are letters that still exist. Sometimes, people have decided that what they wanted to put down in letters was more important than living. It's very sad, but it's the reason we know so much about the past, because people put the symbols onto paper for us. That was why you're learning about it now; it goes with the rest of our unit on jobs. A few very special people get to look at the letters and figure out what they mean. Those people are called readers."

The questions continued on for a long time until Nathan raised his hand.

"What do they call the people who put the letters onto paper for us? Do they have a name?"

Mrs. Brandt looked at him askance. " … They're called writers, Nathan. You don't need to worry about that, though. You probably won't ever meet one."

Mrs. Brandt used that to change topics. She talked about how much easier it was to hear stories the way they were originally told because we could record things now. She gathered the class on the carpet to the side for Drawing Time, put on a CD with a female voicer talking about a bunny rabbit that wanted to be friends with a little boy, and walked around the room to look at the pictures the class drew to retell the story.

Nathan sat in the corner and ended up doodling a figure that looked suspiciously like the first letter of "dog" that had been shown to the class. It was difficult to tell, though, so he was only scolded for not drawing the figures of the story.

Those were some of Nathan's fondest memories. As he sat in his kitchen, eating crackers and drinking tea until his hands stopped shaking enough for him to get on with things, he wondered if it would've been better if Mrs. Brandt had just lied to them, told them that writers were horrible and selfish, as Mother had at every opportunity. Despite its intended effect, Mrs. Brandt's lecture had only increased Nathan's fascination with writing. Years later, in high school, he would get to see some of the pictures of famous writers, hear their tragic stories.

Nathan had raptly surveyed every picture of their stories and poems. He longed for the right to read the real words these writers had composed, but his junior English teacher had let him know that was impossible.

"Readers must have an impeccable memory; most of them have eidetic ones, in fact. You usually have to be at least a passable artist, too." Mr. Ramsford chose that moment to hand back Nathan's test with his barely understandable answers, almost as if to drive home the point. "You pay attention in my

class, and I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you're forgetting that I know your other teachers. With your memory and art ability, it's just not possible. Have you considered being a voicer? Maybe even a story voicer, creating your own work?"

Nathan had. He had given up on convincing others that he should be a reader and had spent his college years studying voicing. Most of his classmates had aspired solely to go into business, voicing memos for corporations, but there were a chosen few who had the passion and creativity to make up stories of their own. Those were the ones who'd become his friends, who listened to the recordings of stories by the greats, professional voicers' different interpretations of art sequences by artists like Chaucer and Shakespeare, Dickinson and Austen and so many others, friends who argued with him about the worth of those recordings.

"Don't you find it frustrating?" He'd ask the group. "We will never really know the ending of these stories! The authors are dead and so is anyone else who could tell us for sure. All we have are these pictures and a bunch of guesses."

"I think it's exciting," Julia said. "You can look at the drawings again and again and come away every time with a new idea of what happened. Sometimes the story is sad, sometimes it's happy. It's like you can tailor it to fit you."

"But it's not real! The author didn't want you to look at their pictures and come away with your own story; they wanted to tell you theirs. But we'll never know it, not really. I want to know what actually happens, not make it all up in my head."

"You need to relax, Nathan," said Isaac. "I get what you're saying, but that's just the way things are. They didn't have the technology we had to record the stories the way they wanted so they put it in pictures. There's nothing you can do about it, so why stress?"

"I wish," Nathan sighed, "I wish they would've just written them."

A tense silence overran the group. "That's not funny, Nathan." Julia asserted, "I can't believe you would even go there. There are people in this world who really die from that stuff."

The conversation had dwindled after that. Nathan had managed to patch things up with the group, but Julia never quite forgave him for his remarks. Once he left school, Isaac was the only one who really kept in touch, but that was fine. Isaac had frequently confided in Nathan his desire to become a reader, but some kind of disorder made letters and some other symbols look weird on paper.

"Things get flipped upside down," Isaac related. "Doctor said it's no big

deal, but certain jobs are out of my reach. Reader's one of them. Guess I'm outta luck." The two had commiserated on having to accept a secondary career choice, and Isaac was the only one to support Nathan when Nathan dropped out at the end of sophomore year.

He had worked odd jobs until his first voiced story had made it big. He had released it for free on the internet, and it had taken off quickly. Soon, recording companies were hounding him about creating stories with them. He wasn't very emotive, and his voice always shook because he'd skipped his Breath Control class all of sophomore year, but there was something in the way he told his tales, crafted his sentences, changed his cadence, that reached a part of listeners that was long thought lost. In under a year, he was famous. The news said that one of his recordings could be found in every household in the country. People flocked to him from all over. His mother wept tears of joy when a crowd of people 10,000 strong was kept screaming behind barriers as he and she walked to his first Authors Awards for fiction.

Still, Nathan had not been happy. He could remember the way it had felt trying to copy down the first letter in dog, a symbol he now knew as the letter "dee," and the excitement he'd felt learning that some things were worth the sacrifice. He hoped what he was making now was worth the sacrifice.

Nathan took his empty mug to the sink and washed it. This was the last break he was going to take from his work, and it would just be rude if his family or Isaac had to clean his dishes as well as take care of what was left of him. Shaking it off, he went back to his computer and opened up the file of terrible sketches he had made as an outline for this final chapter of the story.

Resizing the file where the remainder of his story had already been written so the two could sit side by side on the screen, he opened up his sidebar of previously drawn symbols. All the letters of the alphabet, symbols he had drudged the deepest pits of his memory and the Internet to locate, were sitting there waiting for him. Straightening himself up as much as he could with the soreness in his muscles, he moved his cursor and began to click the letters in the proper order to form the words he wanted.

The feeling in his body that had once been prickling was now simply pain. He struggled through, and not for the first time wondered if this was at all worth it: the scouring of illegal sites for information about letters, the enrollment in an online reader's class under a false name to regain his literacy after so long out of use, the agony as the life was sucked from him. Why was he doing this to himself?

By the time he was halfway through the chapter, his vision had gone hazy. He might have worried if muscle memory had not engrained the proper movements for each letter into him long ago, allowing him to watch the words form instead of looking at the sidebar. He lost his sense of time, and his breathing grew labored.

When the last word was written, he pushed himself back from the desk but quickly lost his balance and fell out of the chair. He lay on the carpeted floor of his office, gasping fruitlessly for the air that was supposed to keep him alive. His mind was filled with flashes of pictures, then; they were the pictures that his senior English teacher in high school had had them bring in signed permission forms to see: the medieval woodcarvings of brilliant scholars who thought they'd found a way around the power of letters, lying dead in their homes; the paintings of Enlightenment philosophers who had given their lives so that their teachings could never be misinterpreted or mistaken; the photos of his favorite modern authors, withered down to emaciated shells after the siphoning had taken everything from them. All paraded happily through his head.

Nathan was afraid. This was not worth it. The pain and the horror were not a proper exchange to just create a story he easily could have crafted with his recording equipment. He began to claw at the carpeting and tears poured uninhibited down his face. The panic and terror made it even more difficult to breathe than it already was, and in those few short, endless moments, Nathan came to regret everything he had ever done or felt that had led him here.

With his last exhale, Nathan experienced the rapid reliving of his life so many artists and storytellers had depicted. Yet his did not chart the whole course of his existence, only up to one memory of nine months ago.

He was driving home from a meeting with his recording company. They had been in talks with Hollywood for a movie version of his first recorded story. He was still unsure about it, but that hadn't stopped the sound editors from doing their best to convince him. Tired of the silence of his thoughts, he had turned on the radio and flicked through the different stations.

" … *and I think it's just despicable!*" A caller to whatever radio show he had managed to find said.

"*Couldn't agree with you more, Chuck*," the host replied emphatically. *"Thanks for weighing in. If you're just joining us, we're discussing the newest scandal to come out of Readers Corp, the largest employer of readers in the country, who are now suggesting the creation of what they refer to as Reader Recordings, also called Audiobooks by some. These may sound pretty innocuous, folks, but actually what they're proposing is to set readers down with a manuscript, an actual written text, and have them read it aloud, word for word, while it's recorded. This would then be mass-marketed to the public so that any Tom, Dick, or Harry could listen to it at home, at school. A true travesty. We've got a call from Louisa from Poughkeepsie. Louisa, what's your take on this?"*

"Well, Ron, I just can't get over how disrespectful it is to the writers. These men and women gave up their lives to set these texts down, with the knowledge that they would be viewed by a very specific set of people, and now Readers Corp, is trying to dishonor their memory by throwing their words around like they mean nothing, like they're something any old bum off the street is worthy of."

"You're absolutely right, Louisa! This is nothing more than a money grab by Readers Corp, and I'm frankly disgusted by it. Not to mention the number of voicers and artists that will be out of a job when Readers Corp decides they're no longer needed to interpret these texts. Thanks for calling, Louisa. We've got Esther from Middletown on the line. Esther, how do you feel?"

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to disagree with your other listeners, Ron. As a former reader, I think these words need to be spread around as much as possible, and everyone deserves the chance to have them. You underestimate the utter beauty of these works. Writing is not just for the privileged. I, for one, fully endorse what Readers Corp is doing. We should have been getting writers' true words out there this whole time."

"Esther, I think you're the only person in the world who feels that way."

"I seriously doubt that I am. I can tell you from reading those books that the writers felt exactly that way. I think if one of them had just had the forethought to put it down somewhere, we'd have been sharing this with the world for centuries."

"Esther, you make me laugh, I'll give you that. I think what you're not considering here is—"

Nathan shut the radio off, but the words of that woman reader remained with him. They echoed the hunger that had lived in him since he was a child. Ideas began floating through his mind, images that changed the lousy pictures he'd drawn for his newest story into new symbols, symbols that formed words. When he reached home, he stepped out of his car and rushed inside to turn on his computer. He brought up a search page and considered what he could draw that might give him what he was looking for. After a bit of thought, he realized exactly what he needed. Taking his cursor, he drew that same symbol he'd attempted at the age of seven and clicked search.

Nathan's fingers tingled. He smiled.

Q&Q

THE HOLLER

Josh Brandon

BREAKING: Mountain tops are decapitated

President Bush oversteps
judges' orders to protect the health
of green wanderlust to fill his pockets.
This otherworldly place—this
earth touched by the hands of gods
decays under the claws of
smoke and soot, and
this land so loved by
and belonging to
the indigenous people before us
is sauntered on, and
scarred, and
scorched
by these white men in machines.

"Water—our drinking water!"
The Appalachian cry, but
avalanche silences the day,
while at night
A child slumbers
in his hollow home, but
his eyes are flung open
awoken by a boulder
crushing trees,
crushing house,
crushing bones.

Floodwater spills into hollow streets
and takes people with the current—
their faces caked in mud masks,
making them strangers—
but the right wing muffles the screams
of the residents in the hollows,
and reduces their lives to political agendas.

And then there are those
outskirting the mountains—
meant to use these resources handed
by suits who take what has never
been offered. They are left unaware,
unsobered,
by the silent population
dwelling in the mountain hollers.

REVIVAL

Sarah Carnes

I held the warmth
Of the Styrofoam cup
Against my left cheek
And it absorbed
Tears

My chapped lips quivered
Too much—
—I could not
Take a sip

My hands were tired
Of holding,
Of being used
And the veins protruded
I never liked the look

There was *something*
About how I wished lotion
Could smooth fractures
And erase the marks on my skin

There was *something*
About listening
To one song over and over
And crying every single time

There was *something*
About the memory of a ghost
Being written into words
Of a book: reliving.

There was *something*
About the way he wrapped
Warm arms around me
Like my fingers did the Styrofoam cup

[I knew he was crying
With me
I could feel the muscles in his left cheek
Against mine]

Just when I thought
It was time to set the cup down
Is when everything
Spilled.

SPRING BURSTING

Erica Costilla

GUIDED BY FIRE

Katherine Gregor

"I think I was enchanted
When first a sombre Girl-
I read that Foreign Lady-
The Dark-felt beautiful-"

—Emily Dickinson, 1862

"Voices that did comfort me
are furthest from my sanity
and come from places I have never seen
But even in my darkest recollections
There was someone singin' my life back to me."

—Neko Case, 2000 ("Guided by Wire")

I tried to put it into words once. It was in an essay for my ninth-grade English class about how my favorite song (at the time; soon to change) made me feel. I used the word "comfortable," I used the word "powerful." I said I could physically feel it, like an explosion beneath my feet. I don't know if anyone understood. I hope they did.

This was the same class where I struggled to read Emily Dickinson aloud, not ready to hear my tongue disturb the syllables that had slept for so long in my head and between the pages of the little white hardback book I had bought, about a year before, at a church rummage sale—it was harrowing to do so; something about them was unpronounceable, not because the words were difficult but because they held too great a power, like the name of a Lovecraft monster. It was the sound of them, the way they slid past each other. Their beauty was profound, yet it also acknowledged grief and truth and death, and asked such untidy questions as "*Are friends delight or sorrow*?" This person, this poet—Emily was her name— knew the sensory ecstasy of insects humming, of flower petals, of light, and without drawing pictures of it, managed to capture it exactly as it was, or at least, as it seemed to me. No matter what happened, she seemed to understand—especially when nothing at all happened, and still I felt intensely. I hesitate to say I thought of her as a friend, but that is because she was something better.

***

Are friends delight or sorrow? This seemed to me slightly blasphemous. The hot-pink plastic and split-heart necklaces of my recent childhood

would have it that friends, no matter who they were or what they did or didn't mean to you, were the chief aim of a girl's life—that was why I had spent most afternoons for the last four or five years, from when I was eleven until when I was fourteen, with people who shot down every passion I dared to feel. This schedule was partly parents' doing—play dates with kids our age, to keep us entertained; influenced, in my case, by the mandate to "put the book down and go socialize for once." I don't think it's that my parents would have made me keep going if I'd said I didn't want to, but I convinced myself that I liked these girls, and that they liked me, partly because it got my parents off my back and partly because I knew a girl without friends would be vulnerable.

Their aggressions were small but many—tearing pages from my spiral notebooks full of drawings, dipping my peanut-butter sandwiches in water so I would gag on them. The thing about the concept of "bullying" is that children are taught to recognize it when it's outright malice, but not when it talks sweet to you. I always swore I wouldn't stand for the kid who kicked me in the shins and stole my lunch money, but I felt powerless against the kid who invited me to her birthday party, locked me in the closet for half of it, and then instructed everyone else there to shun me after her parents made her let me out. The difference here being that we were always "still friends, right?" when I tried to tell them that this was hurting, that I felt alone. I knew without them, I *would* be alone. I was always able to justify it to myself (and to my parents, who witnessed the struggle only very sparsely) one way or another—that's just how it was, I thought; acceptance was something that has to be continuously fought for. The next week, I'd be invited back to her house to do it all again, because those kids were the only ones who called me a deranged lesbian to my face ("teasingly") rather than behind my back. In any event I remember it all with perfect clarity. That's the other thing left out of the "bullying" construction of movies and comic strips—it's something that happens to children, yes, but even now that almost a decade has passed, now that I am an adult, a woman, an agent unto myself, helplessness can be induced, like a drug, by the sudden memory of my own friend holding my face against a lawn sprinkler so that water filled my face, whispering words directly into my ear—"You might be smart, but you will never *ever* be normal."

***

I did have a refuge in these years. It was a blue Discman and a pair of headphones and a CD from the public library with a photo on the cover: a red-haired woman eyeing the camera confrontationally, her dirty bare feet resting on the runners of a rocking chair, a hunting rifle laid casually across her lap. The title was printed down the side of the image: *Boys for Pele*, by Tori Amos.

Something compelled me to never show this album to my parents—I had started to get that distinctly twelve-year-old instinct, where you may not be absolutely sure that something is about sex but you know how adults sound when they're being under-the-table about it. It was my secret, and somehow that

made it even more comforting. After I ran the gauntlet of the school day that made me sick to my stomach, my friends who tormented me, and my homework that I wasn't allowed to leave the dining room until I finished (a rule that led to tears and yelling at least once a week if not more), I went to bed, pulled the covers over my head, got my Discman and my flashlight and read *Alice in Wonderland* or the white Emily Dickinson book or Tamora Pierce fantasy novels while listening to songs with names like "Blood Roses" and "Professional Widow."

In that brightly-lit cocoon of solitude, with Tori's crackly voice and Emily's words, I was, for the first time in my life, powerful—because no one could see me, no one could find me. No one knew, and no one had to. Barbara G. Walker's *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* would have been as forbidden as *Boys for Pele* at the time (as was anything, perhaps rightfully, that condoned sin or rejected God), but these nights under the covers were my first encounter with the age-old goddess archetype she so infamously catalogued. The lady warriors of the novels and Tori's invocations of the Sumerian Inanna and the Hawaiian Pele were the first depictions I remember of the awesome power of strange and rejected girls, and Emily—well, my idolatrous love of her alone made her fit the bill. I had learned that she was a recluse. I was less than surprised. Historically and biographically, she was painted as shy, almost feeble. "Nobody listens to you. You're too prissy and runty," my classmates said to me in daylight. The imaginary worlds contained inside me had no meaning, it seemed, to the outer one. Only Emily and I knew the truth about each other. Only we understood each other's power.

***

When I was thirteen, a year after my friend told me I would never, ever be normal, two things of extreme and related importance happened. The first was that I was diagnosed with ADHD and PDD-NOS (a mild autism spectrum disorder). The diagnoses and subsequent medication and accommodations didn't instantly solve all my life's problems, but it did make things a bit easier. I didn't spend half of each school day figuring out where I'd left various items. I slowly gained the ability to talk about more than three topics. I didn't feel like I was dragging myself uphill all the time. The specific competencies daily life required were not exactly easy, but they were within my reach, especially if I stretched a little. The hope existed that while I might always be disorganized and awkward, I wouldn't always be The Disorganized and Awkward Girl. Thousands of people are the former—I wouldn't be alone—but I couldn't take being the latter much more.

The second thing was that I heard a song on the radio—a song about a girl who is powerless, clumsy, flailing, but "*her love flows like a fountain, her love steams like rage.*" I clamored for the name of the artist—who? Who was this beautiful voice who understood? My dad told me I couldn't stay poised by the car radio to wait for the announcer to say; I had to go in to school. He promised

he'd listen for the name. That night I was waiting for him with my question. I remember insisting *this is important* when he hesitated. "Neko Case," he finally said. "The song's called 'Margaret vs. Pauline.'"

"Can you burn me a CD of it? Please? It's important."

He said he probably could.

I listened to it so many times that eventually it didn't even play right anymore. I needed it each day, just as I needed the fifty-four milligrams of methylphenidate, to keep the pressure from building in my brain. I found other songs from the same album and added them to my medication schedule. There was a freedom, a fierceness in Neko's voice that made something swell in my chest, threatening eruption. I came to realize that Tori's goddess imagery, for all it filled me with passion and potential, was not grounded enough in my reality to feel liberating—just as with my fantasy novels, just as with my secret relationship with a dead poet, it could only truly help in the world of my daydreams. Neko was down-to-earth. Her imagery was not from myth but from nature, and her strength was not hinted at or promised but rather carried, flaunted, even, in her voice and her posture. In my childish solitude, hidden in the womblike safety of my blanket fort, I needed Emily's trancelike attention and Tori's crackly, ethereal words of magic. But if I was going to be exposed, labeled, I was going to need nothing less than this full-color photo of a charging redhead with a wild look in her eyes: no passivity, no symbolism.

Correlation does not imply causation, but the facts are these: only weeks after finding Neko's music, I told the girl I'd called my best friend I hated her. I told her I hated her, I walked away, and I never spoke to her again. When I was safely home and locked in my room, I put on the new music and cried out of both loss and relief. "*For those of you who lost their way, murdered on the interstate, while the red bells rang like thunder—deep red bells…"* I distinctly remember whispering, "I am thirteen. I'm too young for this shit." Which was the first time I ever cursed out loud.

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Neuroscience tells us that cursing in one's native language activates not the word-processing centers of the brain but the amygdala, the most primitive generator of emotional signals that exists in the human brain. The words we label profane and impolite are connected, by inherent or assigned meaning, with fear, rage, pain, lust. *I'm an animal,* Neko sings. *You're an animal too.*

***

I began high school with nobody. I walked in with my headphones on. The morning of the first day, I ate cold pizza for breakfast, threw it up (still cold), and hiked my skirt up on the bathroom sink to write two messages on my

inner thighs in Sharpie: on one, "*A wounded deer leaps highest*," on the other, *"The most tender place in my heart is for strangers."* This would become a ritual: writing words in hidden places on my body like sigils through which I could access the strength of my heroines. Barbara G. Walker writes that even women who don't truly worship or believe in a divine female figure in the religious sense can benefit from having a spiritual connection, however metaphorical, to a goddess. Tori Amos said that she wrote the songs on *Boys for Pele* while drawing on the imagery of pre-patriarchal myth, and in doing so hoped to tap into the steadfast, passionate, explosive side of her femininity after years of feeling impotent and weak. The title refers to her desire to sacrifice the memories of men who had manipulated her to the Queen of the Volcano. I knew none of this at the time, but I knew fierceness, fire, passion. Two red-haired heroines had stoked it, and the third had thrown the switch on my controlled burn. It was happening slowly, as heat and brightness swallow the land, but it was happening.

***

I showed the white hardback book, with its painted pink and yellow roses on the cover, to my English teacher. I wanted to tell her how much the words meant to me. I couldn't do it, exactly. Language was not enough to describe the importance of itself. Behind this conversation, people I'd known in middle school were calling me a kiss-up, speculating that I had to get on teachers' good sides now to avoid the frequent detentions for missing homework I'd gotten in the past. But that stone was already cold in my stomach. There was a new stab: "This is the version of the complete poems edited by Mary Loomis Todd. After Dickinson died some of her friends took all the poems she'd written and made them ready for publication, but they changed a lot of things, and they deleted anything they thought was too … aggressive, I guess, or too strange. Have you ever heard 'My life has stood- a loaded gun … ?' That one's not in here."

I was reeling. How? How could anyone do such a horrible thing? (I knew, though. I could still hear the voices from middle school, laughing at my scribbled warriors and pirate queens as they tore out notebook pages). How could they change my indelible words, and more importantly, was the long-distance connection I had felt to the woman who wrote them a falsehood—an allegiance to a persona? She had felt so warm, and so real.

I checked out a copy of the variorum-edition *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* from the library, reasonably afraid to even open it. On the title page was a photograph of the house where Emily lived and wrote. I photocopied it. I drew it until I knew it by heart. *Emily's world.* A world of safety, a world of beauty. A woman's world. A world created by a goddess. Not perfect, by any means, but concealing behind its physicality one of history's most perfect mental refuges.

I know that Emily Dickinson—like Neko Case, like Tori Amos—was more of a person than I may allow her to be in my mind at times. All three of them are merely synecdoches for their work and their personas. Was Artemis

the hunt? Was Isis the Nile? My red-haired women transcend. They stand for something greater than themselves. They make me feel as if someday, I could too.

***

I never was quite satisfied with the way I—or anyone—read Dickinson aloud. Hers was a life of the mind, hidden to protect it from others, and protect others from it, even if in the end both efforts were futile—in the event that even the goddess, ultimately, is mortal. Her elusiveness doesn't bother me. Even Neko Richelle Case, incarnate on a stage and incredibly human almost ten years after I found her (her upright stance and piercing upward gaze and white Gibson SG guitar completely unchanged, but with a new grey streak in her red hair) refused to meet the eyes of her congregation and stood stock still as if lost in thought, only her voice in ecstatic motion. *Tell all the truth but tell it slant—*

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How else can it be told? A well is underwater, a volcano under earth. Power does not need to be visible to be used—loved—shared.

***

The restored poems did not ruin Emily for me—instead, they confirmed everything I felt I already knew. In fact, they revealed the connections in my pantheon of heroines: here again were the volcanoes (*Moses I know/ that you have seen fire/ but you've never seen fire/ until you've seen Pele blow*), here were the fragile sparrows (*The engine hums a sparrow's phrase/ for those who cannot hear the words*), here was the fury of nature. Neko's bees, Tori's loaded gun. A trove of symbols reaching out to hold us together—four women who had never met, standing around the crater of Vesuvius.

PERENNIALS

Amelia Christmas Gramling

He says it's legal to bury a body in Tennessee
If you do it fast.
He says this is income tax week, and I might not make it.
He says bury me in the scar they dug between the East's black shoulders,
and my eyes
open. He says keep your pennies, you'll need them.
He says I'm farsighted
says
when I was a boy
when Grandma forgot me at Tee Ball on a Sunday
when the wind carried my schooner to clear across that inlet
when your nineteen year old mother was blessing the feathers of her African parrot
with confederate dirt
two hundred miles south of my sleeping heart, murmuring her name.
One day, he says
these stars I harnessed as homing devices
will expand and swallow me
I might glow like the core of a Hydrogen bomb
I might burn from the outside in.
He says roll me into a joint
smoke me with your brothers.
He says if Mama wants to invite Jesus to the funeral, let her
he says bury me out back with the dogs
beneath the blackberry bushes
if the tips of my toes rise with the rain,
he says
the perennials are on their way.

I WONDER WHAT WOULD WORK

Daniel Kushnir

I wonder what would work. I can't help but wonder. This would have to be a very delicate operation. Something new and fresh would need to be done! She's experienced, been around the block, but in a good way! Sort of like a big colorful float made for Halloween or Macy's or something. That experience and intelligence is sexy. I feel a faint shock in my heart and know that I want her. I wonder what her lips taste like?

I can't help but wonder what would work. I would sleep at her feet, like a dog for weeks upon weeks, but that wouldn't work. No, for her I need more finesse. I can't really drive her anywhere, it's too early to presume her desire to travel with me. She would have to want to get in the car with me first though, and for her to want that, I would need to find something that would work on her. I must find her formula. Or else how will I ever see her hips swing in the moonlight?

I've been sitting on this bench in the park across from my building for three hours. I brought a book with me to look like I'm not vacantly staring. I've seen her pass by four times. I suppose I hoped that she would see me reading my big smart book and come talk to me about authors I'd never heard of and I could charm her in an intelligent, yet not well read way. But that did not work. I've always wanted to be a poet, but I've always been told I didn't have the "constitution" for it, whatever that means. Maybe it would work if I were a poet. I could woo her at some swanky club that I'm sure she frequents. The fourth time she came back to the building she looked a mess, yet there was something in that. The air of a woman waiting to be loved. And how I did want that. I've always wanted that.

I do not know what will work. I think I might be in love with her. I think I did the right thing today. I watched her as she left her apartment through the little peephole in my door. I carefully followed to see where she would go. I was right! I knew someone who smelled of such intelligence would go to a coffee shop. It was a cheap one, but it was still a coffee shop. I sat in the booth behind hers, so she wouldn't see. I listened to her slurps and thought that maybe if I ordered the same drink she ordered she would speak to me and fall for me. So I did and it did not work and the drink is disgusting. I left and instead opted to sit down at the bench in the park across from my building. This time I did not have a book and instead tried to look thoughtful. I saw her enter the building with a man. I think she noticed me, but I may have just imagined that.

That's it. I've decided I'm definitely in love with her. I'm going to write poetry about her and I'm going to see her in a train seat next to me on

the way to New York City, or Chicago and the golden light of the sunset will gleam in her eyes and illuminate her skin. And when that's done I'll treasure the memory forever. Well, until I die. And I'll die in her arms, because we will have grown old together. I'm sure she's not like the others. She's a rare one, I can tell already. I think it's starting to work. I've seen her shoot glances at me when I walk into that shitty coffee shop and when I sit on the bench looking thoughtful. I think I've figured out where she works, but I'm not sure, yet. Her glances speak volumes. They hiss like hearty snakes into my ears. If only I could speak snake, then I might be able to tell what they were saying. Maybe they were telling me what would work.

All I want to do is to swing from the tangles in her hair. I saw her looking pretty tired today. She came home very late. She looked roughed up. Her make-up was a bit smeared and she had grey circles under her eyes. Not make-up circles, but natural ones. I can imagine her wearing one of my shirts and nothing else and looking at me with those eyes. Filled with longing, I think they were. I didn't do much else. I stayed home today. I didn't want to seem too needy. I was planning on staying in at night too, until I noticed that she was coming back home with that same man from earlier. That hurt me. I can't believe that nothing thus far has worked. All my strenuous efforts and yet there is still nothing that works!

I still love her though. I forgive her. I left my apartment at the same time as she left hers today and sped my walk to meet her. I was going to talk to her. I think that would work. Maybe just saying hello and telling her I liked the weird gross coffee she likes would work. I thought I might be overthinking things and that that might be the reason nothing has worked. I wonder if she would appreciate that. When I sped my walk to meet with her she shot me one of her sultry looks and darted down the stairs. She didn't run, but she sure was in a hurry. I figured she must be late for something, and since I'm quite understanding I let her go.

As it turns out, I did figure out where she works. She works at the Waffle House on the edge of town, near the highway. A waitress is a cute job for her, though I think she can do so much better, a pretty young woman with her degree of intelligence and class. Maybe she likes it there. I decided I would try her venue's food. Unluckily I did not get her as a server, but I do think she saw me. She looked nervous. I bet that she's just as nervous about these feelings as I am! She must love me too. I'm happy that I've finally found someone who loves me back.

Today was the day. I thought about what I was going to do and about what

would work. I knew that she tended to rush to places whenever she left her apartment, so I wouldn't quite be able to catch her then, but I knew when she got off work and I would wait in the lobby of our building and hop in the elevator with her. She liked to take the elevator up the building, but would always take the stairs on the way down. I thought that was a cute quirk. I think that's another thing to write a poem about. Maybe I'll get to it later. Maybe I'll make a song out of it and sing it to her on a beach one summer in our twilight years. I finally got her in the elevator and I tried to civilly introduce myself. I'm sure I stuttered, but I believe I was clear and true. She did not react the way I thought she would.

She screamed at me and panicked. She told me to stay away from her. Her nerves were much worse than mine. I tried to explain my feelings for her. I tried to evoke poetic imagery, calling the feeling she gives me shivers and the desire burning in my heart as being an Elysium that I can retreat to at any moment. Finally I buckled, hoping this last ditch effort would work. I told her I loved her and that I wanted to see her hips sway in front of me in a hotel in Paris and that I wanted to see her dancing with me along to music only she and I could hear. I told her and she fell into silence. The ding of the elevator opening to the eighth floor ruptured her already nervous disposition. We stepped out of the elevator together, facing each other. With tears in her eyes, I expected an embrace and yet I got a spear in the gut. She told me she did not love me. She then turned around and ran into her apartment.

I decided not to go home. I walked the entire night. She does not love me. After all we have done? After all the times we shared? She dares not to love me! That's unnatural, that's not human! There is something wrong with her. I cannot believe that nothing has worked. I was so considerate, too. I knew where she worked, where she liked to hang out and I knew she was lonely. I knew that all those times I was around her that she did not speak to anyone except for customers at the Waffle House. There have been a few other men, but everyone slips! I knew that we would share our loneliness with each other and make it more bearable for the both of us. Loneliness is a terrible thing when you have to carry it by yourself. I must find something that works. I must find a way.

She had called the police. I'm getting so tired of these mind games she plays. I spoke to them the morning after her madness and gave them some excuses. I knew how to deal with this sort of thing. They told me to watch myself and that they hope I have a nice day. I told them the same. I reminisce. I wonder how many times I found women that did not work. Nothing ever really works on them. Untamable beasts, which will tear out your heart and run off with it. I think I'll come up with a plan to make her love me. Actually, it's not a matter of making her love me. I know that she does love me, she just simply doesn't see, or perhaps comprehend it. Love is a complex and scary thing, but it is not all that hard to understand. She must be broken and I must be the one to fix her.

I know how she moves. Just because she hasn't left home in two days does not mean that I do not know how she moves. I must confront her again, and this time I will fix her. I noticed that she resumed her regular schedule after four and a half days of isolation in her room. I prepare myself for Friday night, when she goes to her all-so-precious fucking coffee shop in the evening and stays late. I made sure she did not see me. I didn't want her to run off and ruin my chance at finding something that works. She walked out of her shop and I was watching from the shadow of a pawnshop sign two buildings down. I knew her path, so I went around so as to cut her off. She would be fixed. I knew just the place.

She slept very peacefully. I figured she would. My bed is a very comfortable place. Though I suppose it isn't technically my bed, as I only use it when I need it. It's an old bed and it's not exactly in my apartment, but this place is abandoned and no one seems to mind that I put a bed here, or that I use it sometimes. I stroked her hair and wondered where we had went wrong. I wondered why nothing worked. As she woke and realized her woeful error she began to act up again. I had put together a few tools that might help me in fixing her. I wished that I could take a long sweet draught from her lips, but I could not remove the tape yet.

I have failed her. I could not fix her. I saw the way that she looked at me. Her eyes never spoke of love. She never understood that I loved her more than any of the other women before. She never understood that I could sense a spark. That I could see us making sweet love on an upscale London balcony and that I needed to find what worked to get her to love me. I told her to stay calm and that I knew what I was doing, but she never did stop panicking and wailing. Perhaps that's why I could not fix her. She was crazy. She didn't think she needed fixing. But she did. I did get my taste of her lips, but it was bitter as she was no longer there.

It was some time before I was able to move past her, the love of my life. I think I finally was able to move on when the apartment she had lived in was cleaned out and rented to a pleasant old Indian man. That reminder was gone, so I suppose it let me move on. I hate that I'm this vulnerable. I hate that any beautiful and intelligent woman can do this to me. I wish I wasn't that soft, but as I look into the street from my favorite bench in the park across from my building I spot a young lady walking a tiny dog. She flips her hair to reveal a soft and nubile face. I longed for a lasting romance. I had the heart of a poet, after all. The rapid passion of these love affairs are beginning to wear thin on me. I smile to myself and wonder if I could stop falling in love. I sometimes wish I would. I think that might work, but then I remember that it is in my nature. Lions cannot stop killing antelope and I cannot stop trying to love.

THE CAVERNS

Jess Campbell

Despite how little I knew of Indian politics—
I could tell
A Tribe stuck selling tickets to the inside of a cave
Gift shop tacked on
Did not represent the wild Shawnee freedom I was taught

We descended in the caverns the first summer only once
Into dimly lit, frost covered tunnels
My arms, suddenly thin and white, felt breakable, foreign—
A stranger rubbed them to create warmth
Thinking I was a tourist, too,
And not something more

It ended at the water,
A stillborn, underground lake—
I wondered if the warm lavender light shining from underneath
Was real
With a depth of fifteen feet, according to the tour guide,
And I didn't believe him—
I watched instead shimmering purple quartz
Dance to the rhythm of nautical mermaid drums
Deceptively shining lilac like a crystalline sea—
How strange, I wondered, for something to be so large
That looked no deeper
Than my own familiar creek

I could walk back again with eyes shut,
Down that dusted path
To the gift shop full of gems and dying lights
Down into the glacial cave
And back again to the lake,
Still full of violet sugar water
Glowing like something from fantasy

I still believe I could step in, gently,
And walk across as if it were no deeper
Than the hard
Callous of my
Bare child foot.

PICK A DAISY

Lillian Mills

TO THE WAITER WHO THINKS MY BOYFRIEND IS A GIRL

Lydia Crannell

1. There's a poem I can't write
but need to.
Ink running in my veins
infecting my heart:
black
because all I ever feel when I confront these words is
anger.

But my mama always said
'Don't go to bed angry.'

2. To the Waiter Who Thinks My Boyfriend is a Girl:
You are either
blind or a
dick.

No, he is not a "she" and
No, we are not two "ladies" and
No, this icy death glare is not an accident.

With every "she"
"her"
"ladies"
I can feel myself losing him
slipping from my finger tips
a waiting hand empty and cold.

I can feel his smile fade
he's erasing his dimples.
And I know there's a sigh in his chest
because this is the sixth time this month
and
it's not fair.

It's not fair
and that makes me
mad.

It makes me remember
the night he couldn't look in a mirror
ribbons of hate wrapped around his knuckles
afraid that the world will never see the
light.

And I want to tell him
You are a man
flesh & bone
mind & soul.

You are a man no matter the arrows that
spring from their lips.

I want to tell him
You are man but
You are also so much
more.

You are the sun when it sets
and the sky turns
pink
red
orange

You are the song
the bird will never
forget how to
sing.

And I know I sound cliché
but it's a risk
I'll take
so that one day
you'll believe me.

3. Dear Leelah,
You will always be remembered.
Love, Lydia

4.
I've been writing this poem for five months
unable to put pen to page.
but
My skin crawls
with words I can't say out loud.
and
This is a poem I never wanted to write.
I shouldn't have to.

5. You are a man.
You are a man.
You are *my* man.

THE CIRCLE AROUND THE BED

Kate M Carey

Cast of Characters

SARAH, a 50-year-old professional woman confronting death

BETH, an 85-year-old woman dying of heart failure and lung disease

Non-speaking male and female roles for grief circle scenes

Setting

A bedroom in an old farmhouse set up for Hospice care. A hospital bed, a potty chair, and a well-loved recliner with a quilt thrown haphazardly on it are center; a small, antique dresser with a mirror sits against the wall. Various mismatched dining room and folding chairs sit outside the bedroom in a half-circle. Off to the far side, a beat-up folding table holds a coffee urn, cups, a plastic bowl with sweetener and sugar, an open can of powdered creamer, plastic coffee stir sticks, and an opened box of grocery store cookies. A pile of bargain brand white paper napkins sits near a half-used roll of paper towels. Tissue boxes are scattered around the chairs.

Scene One

(At rise: Lights up. Four men and women move into the room. SARAH sits close to the bed that is hidden in the corner of the stage. Once seated, a mumbled prayer begins.)

ALL: AMEN!

(A beat. Spot moves to SARAH. She speaks.)

SARAH: *(Disgusted.)* Every time. That damn prayer. Does Serenity come from mouthing empty words? Will absolution for sin follow unequivocally if you recite five Hail Marys, two Our Fathers, and take a second pass around the rosary? We know what we did. We committed the same crime. We all injected our loved ones. We drank the Kool-Aid. We read the literature. We smiled bravely. Hell, most of us had our loved ones sitting right beside us at intake. They smiled and nodded as the executioner's agent explained the process. They readily agreed to enter the program. We sat there and reassured them (and ourselves) that this was the right time for this choice. *(Angry.)* Choice, Hell! A lamb led to slaughter has as much choice. *(A beat. Spotlight still on SARAH.)* I heard my Mom make a clear choice. She wanted my help and I agreed to help. It's what a daughter does. *(A beat. Spotlight on SARAH.)* It exhausted me just to hear Mom's medical history. The pulmonary doctor looked at me when she said, "I want to go home and die." I made that stupid half grin thing I do when

I don't know what to say. He asked if we had contacted Hospice. I shook my head no. He said he would call them. I asked Mom, "Do you want to go home tonight?" She nodded yes, and off we went. I thought I was staying for the weekend. Get Mom settled in. Make some casseroles for the freezer. I took a change of clothes. I left my computer and phone charger. I didn't know … I didn't know her decision to die and mine to stay there would come with such a price. When we headed home, we smelled freedom. It smelled like fresh cut alfalfa, drying in the field, waiting to be baled into hay. We were relentless. Determined. She, to die. Me, to give her whatever she wanted.

Scene Two

(BETH in bed. SARAH at her side. Spots on each of them.)

BETH: *(Tired, but lightly, relieved.)* I just want to sit on the porch with my dogs.

SARAH: OK, Mom. Whatever you want. It's your life. You're still in charge.

(Spot off of SARAH. A beat. Spotlight moves to BETH, who sits beside SARAH.)

BETH: *(With conviction.)* I'm glad to be home. I am ready to die. I want to sit on my front porch and see my dogs one last time. That's what I told that nice, young pulmonary guy. What was his name? Dr. Teal? Tell … something. I'm tired of all that. *(Her voice becomes frail, older.)* I'm tired.

SARAH: *(Concerned. She reaches out as if to move her mom.)* Can I get you something?

BETH: *(Continues as if SARAH didn't speak.)* I am tired of taking pills for my heart. I am tired of breathing treatments. I am tired of an appointment with this doctor and that doctor. That Indian one said it, "You are not going to getter better." I want to sit right here on my porch at my farm with my dogs. C'mon, Ben. Here boy. That's a good old boy. You're a good dog, Ben. Good old Ben. *(Beth reaches toward the floor, stroking the invisible dog. Lights dim.)*

SARAH: *(Stands with her hands on a chair back as if at a lectern.)* People liked my Mom. She was a strong, independent woman. She was a woman ahead of her time. She did things that most women didn't do back then. *(SARAH sits and turns to BETH.)*

BETH: *(SARAH adjusts her pillows and BETH scoots up in the bed.)* You know, Sarah. I have seen a lot in my life. Just travel, for one thing—from horses and buggies to outer space! I remember my grandparents came to our house in a horse and buggy. Cars! I had that old Model A and I drove that motorcycle of Bud's. It drove your grandmother crazy when I did that because girls didn't drive motorcycles in 1940. And in the 40s, I flew a plane! I loved flying. It felt so free to be up there in the sky. Gee, I wish I had more money back then to keep taking lessons.

SARAH: *(Takes BETH's hand and hold it, talks to her.)* You have done a lot, too, Mom. Dad thought you were rich when he met you because you owned your own home and a car. When was that … in 1950? Hardly any women owned cars and houses then. *(BETH smiles, remembering with pride.)* Heck, you wrote for three newspapers and you didn't go to college. That's more than I did with my journalism degree! *(BETH chuckles and nods.)* And remember when that photo you took went out on the AP wire? *(BETH smiles. SARAH continues, proud, loving.)* I never said this, but I think the best thing you did was be a Mom … How you have taken care of me. When I left home at eighteen, you gave me care packages—beef when you butchered a cow, frozen beans and corn from your garden, spices from the Amish store.

BETH: *(Reminiscing.)* Yes, and in the spring we always went to the greenhouse to get flowers once you had your own house.

SARAH: *(Happy.)* You bought me a Japanese maple tree for my birthday one year. Look, here it is … on my phone. Look how big it is now! And the next year, you bought me a Harry Lauder's Walking Cane. *(Laughing.)* You called it one crazy mixed-up tree.

BETH: Did I give you some irises to plant around that tree? Those big pale yellow ones?

SARAH: You did. And some daffodils, which are in my back yard, and a yucca, with those crazy tall spikes of flowers.

BETH: You took me on so many trips. I loved them, and spending time with you and Megan. My other friends had Mother's Day dinners, but we took trips on that weekend—Lake Erie, the Ohio River—Marietta and Cincinnati, Lake Hope, and remember, we once went to North Carolina. That was my last trip to the beach.

SARAH: Those trips were so fun! You taught Megan how to play dominoes and UNO. For me, the best part of a trip was while she slept, and you taught me about life over a glass of wine. Remember we talked about Dave and Vietnam, about marriage; we talked about how corrupt Washington was. And we commiserated on how hard it is to raise a kid. Of course, I wish you would have told me how hard parenting was BEFORE I got pregnant.

BETH: *(Laughing.)* No, you don't. It's hard work. But it's the best work in the world!

SARAH: At the Lake Hope cabin, you told me how proud you are of my Ph.D. and my career.

BETH: *(Light laugh.)* And you said, "Thanks to the Bank of Bethel" … We had some really good times. I love you, honey. So much. *(A beat.)* I'm tired. I think I will sleep a little. Can you sit here a while longer?

(Stage goes dark. Beat. Spotlight on SARAH sitting on the edge of the sofa. She gets up and faces the audience.)

SARAH: Eleven days. Eleven days of fear. Eleven days of courting death. Eleven days of family and friends stopping by to say good-bye. On day four, Mom called a friend in California and another in Florida. I listened to her tell them good-bye. I listened to the cries she made late at night to Jesus and to God. "Please, Lord Jesus, take me now." Why didn't Jesus and God answer her calls? *(Beat. SARAH walks back to the chairs. She addresses the audience.)* What did she feel in those last days living in the bed, asleep, unaware, but alive? Her breath, deathly quiet. I had to lean over her to see if she was breathing. The last day, I left for four hours to see my family. Thirty minutes down the road my cell rang. My brother said he thought she was dead. *(A beat. Lights up to show the circle of mourners. SARAH continues, now angry.)* Why the fuck do I come here every week? Oh, I know. I come here so I don't have to sit face-to-face with the nice lady and listen to her say, "What I hear you saying about your Mother is …" I pay her $135 an hour to have her repeat back what I'd just said. A tape recorder would be cheaper, but Anthem won't cover that. Tiny tapes play over and over in my head. It's a digital wasteland.

(SARAH looks around the stage. Moves around a bit. She stares a beat at the bed. She looks back to the audience and moves center stage.)

SARAH: I come here week after week to placate my family and friends. I say the same thing to these losers as we practice our emotional circle jerk: "Hi. My name is SARAH. Hospice and I killed my mom." *(A beat.)* Mom. The woman who tucked me in every night as a kid. Paid for my college tuition. Gave me $5,000 for a down payment on my house. Cooked my favorite meal—meatloaf, mashed potatoes, green beans—when I came home from the hospital with my baby girl. *(A beat.)* I killed the woman who birthed me. I slipped the morphine through her lips. *(A beat.)* "Anticipatory grieving," the $135 an hour lady called it. I said to my husband every time my mom went into the hospital. My mom is dying. I said it every time we frantically raced the 60 miles north. My mom is dying. I said it to friends. And I enjoyed watching them cringe at my blunt, hurtful talk. I felt I was ready.

(SARAH stands and walks toward front, center stage.)

SARAH: I come to this putrid pink and baby shit yellow church basement week after week. I need a path of reconciliation. It's just … my navigation is off these days. I can't find true north. But last week, the irises bloomed again.

INST

Jennifer Hall

LITTLE NOTICINGS

Lillian Mills

The grass sways like the curves of a
Woman's waiting.
It is beautiful.
Unexplainable truths creep out
From the stumps of trees cut down that have
Rotted with age,
And in the fluttering of a golden orange Monarch
With only six weeks to live.

We cannot explain why some looks
Shared between friends turn into
Looks shared between lovers.
But it is beautiful.

Desire fluttering in the air,
Beginning lightly, gently,
Quickly turning into the hottest of flames,
Smoldering with time
Like the red poppies in my mother's garden
That are now overgrown.

Found in the veins protruding from your arms,
The way your hair curls above the lobe of your ear.
Little noticings become attractions,
Become things that grow harder to hide,
Harder to stop.

But it is beautiful.

SOMEWHERE THE SEA DEEPENS

Amelia Christmas Gramling

below Amelia's plane (still yellow heart beaten)
below Christopher's reckoning (still dead, deaf, detonating)
below blackened lip and bottled diamond ring (still bleeding)
below harpooned whale song (still sung, but quietly)
below English language
below bent thumb, warhead, vertebrae
below Russo, Franco
German (the color red)
below submarine
the history of humankind is written in waves of lost things
sunken, sinking
salty, rusted
oil spill or
black ink
below this, even
an oarfish is swimming
a life line, a life time of in between
never breaching the surface
of never scraping the bottom
every thousand meters, or ten-to-a-hundred
knots
leagues
orbits
returns
around a sun he doesn't see
until it's by the belly feel the breeze
search lights
play shadow puppets on his fifty-six foot silk ribbon, aurora borealis if you
look straight up in Denali stretch your arms out and spin, tail fin
and he calls this proof of God's
wings, calls this knowing there's so much
more than himself
and still that beautiful dove-in-too-quick now
to come up for air
dream deep
ache
of
alone—
we used to have a word for this, but three hundred years ago or so,
a sailor

a siren
a stowaway
went searching for the edge everything washes over
and lost it
to sea

CAPTIVE

Claire Winslow

> "Animals in captivity do not usually have the natural behaviors needed for success in the wild. Their lack of hunting skills and lack of fear towards humans are major disadvantages. We have suspected for some time that captive-born animals fared less well than wild animals. But here it is finally quantified, and the extent of the problem is critical." [1]

Please do not tap on the glass.

Please do not tap on the glass, it disturbs the animals.

Please do not tap on the glass, I am trying to sleep.

Please do not tap on the glass, for the glass might break and I will, on principle, be obligated to run.

No one can seem to make up their minds about zoos. Or maybe it's just me. Some condemn them as capitalist ventures, taking animals from their natural habitats, squashing them into too small cages to be gawked at. Throw them a treat and watch them dance. But many proclaim zoos to be sanctuaries; places for conservation, the saving of species, centers of study, priceless opportunities to understand the world in which we live, all within city limits, all for $8 a day.

> "Animals must be provided with an environment in which they can acclimate sufficiently to remain healthy and support their well-being." [2]

Most zoos are required to follow strict regulations in terms of the care and living conditions of the animals in their facilities. In order to be accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, institutions must conform to a long list of standards which ensure that all animals are well cared for. Those in the wild are left to their own devices.

Please do not tap on the glass.

> "All animal enclosures must be of a size and complexity sufficient to provide for the animal's physical, social, and psychological well-being; and exhibit enclosures must include provisions for the behavioral enrichment of the animals." [3]

Please do not disturb.

1 "Most Captive-Born Predators Die If Released" James Owen for *National Geographic News* January 23, 2008

2 Association of Zoos and Aquariums Accreditation Standards and Related Policies 2015 Edition

3 Ibid.

> "Planning and coordination for animal transport requires good communication among all involved parties, plans for a variety of emergencies and contingencies that may arise, and timely execution of the transport."[4]

Please keep your arms and legs inside the cage at all times.

Many animals in the wild do not care for their young. Eggs hatch, and children go on their way. The majority of animal species are solitary, only rarely coming into contact with others of their kind. Left to their own devices, they are able to live or to die as they please. Able to find no shelter, acquire no food, love no one. Imagine, the freedom of being alone. Or rather of choosing to be.

Nothing to gain, but also nothing to lose.

Throw me a treat and watch me dance.

Many zoos focus their efforts and resources on species conservation and breeding programs, with the end goal for most of these programs being the reintroduction members of endangered species back into their natural habitats.

On April 29, 2006, captive born Giant Panda, Xiang Xiang, became the first of his kind to be formally released into the wild. On February 19, 2007, Xiang Xiang's body

> "was discovered on snow-covered ground in the bamboo forests of Sichuan Province. The panda appears to have died from injuries it sustained in a fall after getting into a fight with wild-born males … Scratches and other minor injuries caused by other wild pandas were found on his body … Xiang Xiang may have fallen from trees when being chased by those pandas."[5]

Please watch your step.

Please don't let me fall.

To live your life behind glass. It doesn't seem so bad. Safe, happy, cared for, loved. That's all you ever wanted, wasn't it? A comfortable habitat, a tiny door through which food magically appears, a chance to sleep all day, and a sheet of glass to hold your insides together.

In case of emergency break glass.

> "All animals must be housed in enclosures and in appropriate groupings which meet their physical, psychological, and social needs … Display of single animals should be avoided unless biologically correct

4 Ibid.

5 "First Panda Freed Into Wild Found Dead" James Owen for *National Geographic News* May 31, 2007

for the species."

Please let me be alone.

Imagine, being safe, happy, cared for, loved. Maybe you remember a time, before, when you never chose to build your future, when you could turn around and have everything snatched away in one single instant, a snap of jaws or a well-timed pounce, in one shivering instant, one terrible, breathtaking, beautiful instant. You always assumed the worst. But then you were safe.

> "Captive animals could potentially have poor health due to … stress during the release process, and captivity may result in the inadvertent selection of individuals lacking key traits, such as fearfulness, or present a lack of opportunities for animals to acquire essential learned behaviors, such as predator recognition."[6]

Please do not break the glass.

> "More than half of the fatalities were attributed to human causes, such as vehicle collisions and deliberate shootings. Captive-born carnivores were also more likely to starve to death than their wild-bred counterparts, as well as become more susceptible to viruses and diseases."[7]

Please, I beg of you, do not leave me alone.

An animal can get used to life in captivity. There's no need to worry about competition or disease or starvation, shelter, love. And then the cage opens. And you step out, unsure for the first time in years. You had the time; you had the days in which to imagine a future, a future without fear. And you thought you could depend on it. And now you are free. Pushed from your cage, and you look around, and you realize you are alone. Standing there, trapped, staring towards the never-always-ending horizon, surrounded by nothing but space, and as I look, I can't help but hope to see a fence.

Please do not tap on the glass.

Please do not tap on the glass.

Please do not tap on the glass, for the glass may break and I will, on principle, be obligated to run.

6 "Developing the Science of Reintroduction Biology" Philip J. Seddon, Doug P. Armstrong, and Richard F. Maloney, 2007.
7 Ibid.

WITH THE FRONT DOOR IN SIGHT

Josh Brandon

In the dark folds of a concrete night
I am lullabied on a bed of sediment.
The clear blots in my sidewalk mattress twinkle
as if stars fell and crawled under my
aching body. I snore in harmony
with the wintry crickets who
coo me from their miniature graves.
I toss in tune with the rumble
of bright, bug-eyed cars. Tires
turn clouds that rain dirty tears on
my corpse.

I dream in color.

FLORENCE

Claudia Owusu

When I wake up in the middle of the night, her name is Florence. Her relaxed figure, drunken with sleep, heaves up and down, up and down, up and down, with each breath as her bed makes for a comfortable nest. The room is so dark, and the fan spins vigorously in an attempt to chase away the overflowing river of sweat that clothes my body. Her figure is nothing but a lump of black in the night. The moon aimlessly pours out milky light through the netted windows, and even that is not enough. I turn over to distance myself from the pool of pee working its way into the colorless carpet. My thighs glue together, sticky and uncomfortable; my legs begin to itch. It occurs to me that I need a bath. It always did. *"Morning,"* I think, stripping off my bottoms. I leave my place on the mat and stagger hopelessly to plop down on the bed beside her. Florence.

***

The sun is shining, and before I know it my body is covered in a sheet of heat more intense than the night before. She is gone. Shielding my eyes from the cowardly sun that solemnly goes into hiding every night, I look around the room. Fan, still intact. Wardrobe, shut lazily with clothes still peeking. Mat, crumpled up on the floor. A lame attempt to cover up the wet patches of pee. Panicking, I move my hands all over the bed. Dry. Dry is good. Dry is good.

***

She is not gone today. She is in the kitchen. She is cutting up sausages. Blending fruit. I walk up behind her, my bare feet slapping the cold tiles with a subtle hello. I shiver. White, lacy tank top complete with lace bows match my white underwear. Gold chain still clasps my neck from Sunday service. Ribbons dangle sheepishly from the now destructed work of art that is my hair. She always worked hard on my hair. Standing in the doorway of the mahogany kitchen, I rub my eyes to her back. I presume she hummed a lot. She hums, and I say nothing. I feel shame. I feel inferior. I feel tiny. Smiling, she leaves her arrangement of fruits and tells me to meet her in the bathroom. She knows. She always knew.

***

Shivering, I stand straight in the bathtub naked from head to toe. She is not there yet. I allow my jaws to chatter ferociously. The hot water is coming. I deem the shower curtains yellow. I deem the tiles yellow, and I deem the apron that she wears as yellow; if she wore one. It is not long before she is hover-

ing over me. Breasts, held tight by a black lace camisole, eyes kind. Eyes kind. Silent, I look at her. I look to her. One hand grasps my forearm as the other dedicatedly scrubs up and down in a washing motion. The sponge feels rough. It always did. The sun heats up the room. The hot water makes me feel even hotter. She leaves, and suddenly, I am standing alone. Shivering. I am shivering and she is gone. She returns with a pail of cold water and splashes it all over my small frame. I feel warm. She is beautiful. Her, Florence. Wrapping me up in a towel, she carries me away. In the living room, she dresses me. She dresses me for school—far away from the pool of pee that now perfumes her bedroom. She loves me. It seems like it.

***

I walk through the sunny playground, hands tucked into the pocket of breasts I do not yet have. My lunch is left alone in the desolate wooden classroom. I won't find it again until two weeks later. The sun is almost smiling, and I think he looks silly foolishly tailing after pristine clouds. I am hot. I am always hot. Chocolate children gather under the large tree growing proudly in the middle of the playground. We look like an army, clothed in uniforms of brown and tan. Brown and tan. Brown and tan. And … and and … and black, black, black. Mrs. Mary. Mack.

Sand is everywhere. We snatch off our shoes, and hurriedly peel off our socks. The sun drowns our feet in warm rays as we build castles for the ants. There is sand in my hair, sand on my neck, sand under my nails, sand in my shoes, sand on my uniform … Where is SHE? Florence.

***

Today, she is bleeding. Glass glitters like morning dew and lights flash enthusiastically. His skin is a charcoal of hard, brutal anger. His eyes are the shade of overripe apples, and I do not understand. I don't understand anything. I cry. Her blood is not yellow.

***

The sun belts tunes of light again today, and I am sure that she is smiling. I slip out of her mustard yellow car and wave goodbye half-heartedly. Soon, she is gone, and there is school. Again. I fidget in my seat until the class bell rings for break time, and finally, when it does, I run for my life in the playground. My life right under that gigantic motherly tree.

Today, I take from the tree. I look into the holes on its greenish bark, and I pluck away the tiny hairs of ember stored there. The brown army gathers around, chanting that I will be haunted for stealing the tree's children.

I wake up early that night in tears. The tree is calling. Florence hugs me.

"There is no such thing."

***

I call the rain today, and the sky cries in anguish. She is right next to me, Guinness bottle and kebab in hand—lipstick vibrant. She enjoys bringing me along on her many adventures. I think that music is playing. I think that the restaurant is empty. I think that I care more about the beef than Florence and her one scar that lines her arm. Our shirts match …

***

It is late. The moon's stomach is packed full and tired blemishes litter his greedy face. A lackadaisical lamp lights the room, and the radio plays loudly. A woman's panicked voice bursts out of the machine; desperate. Desperate. Florence is crouched low on the floor in prayer. Her heart looks like it hurts, and her tears are ripe. They slip down her cheeks in clusters and mask her face with the pain of a bruised knee. She won't tell me what is wrong.

Florence is crying. Florence is crying. Florence is crying. No. Florence is weeping, and every vein in my body is screaming for her to stop. She won't tell what is wrong, and my bones feel like they're breaking. *Florence should stop crying. Crying does not look good on Florence.*

Soon, I begin to cry too. Florence is a broken chair, and I cry. I cry. I cry. I cry. I cry tears similar to hers.

***

Florence is a hairstylist. Her store is full on some days, and on other days, the sun, the moon, and the dusty roads are her only companions. I take naps in her backroom, sometimes with my half-brother who comes to visit. I love him almost like I love Florence. I think that I love everyone, everyone except the brown soldiers at school.

Today, I am being stubborn. Florence seems to care. She cares a lot. But today, I am not listening. I hop on her gigantic chairs, and jump up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down. The chair's legs grow nervous, and Florence returns to the dark forests of a large woman's hair.

I jump. She looks. I am excited. She warns. I jump. She shifts. Uncomfortably. I jump. I smile. Laughter. I jump. I fall. I cry. *Silent tears, I hope.*

I do not know who Florence is, but she lives in my house and I love her. I love Florence a lot. I love Florence a lot, a lot. Does Florence know that I love her a lot? Does Florence know that I love her? Only her? Does Florence know? I really, really love Florence. I love Florence so much. I love Florence. I

love Florence? I really love Florence. I love Florence. I just love Florence. I love Florence. I love Florence.

***

The moon is a silver cooking pot today. Florence and I spend the evening in the bathroom. I am sick.

***

Today, the earth doesn't look happy. Rain crashes down on the ceiling like a thousand cymbals. "Florence, sing me a lullaby."

Florence *sings me lullabies.* The earth doesn't look happy.

***

It is late, and Florence wakes me up to pee. I am really warm, and my head feels like a balloon. Florence makes a joke. I laugh. She laughs, but the glitter does not reach her eyes. Florence seems worried. I think I'm ok, but Florence seems worried. The yellow curtains hurt my eyes.

***

Florence looks like *a sunflower. She is yellow. Her laughter sounds like thunder.*

***

I sleep. I sleep. I sleep. I sleep. I sleep. Sleep tastes like honey.

***

Florence is not next to me today. The bed is dry and the sun seems happy, but Florence is not next to me. My heart feels scared and worried. Maybe Florence is in the kitchen. I hope that Florence is in the kitchen. I jump out of bed, leading a trail of tangled bed sheets behind me. Goosebumps settle on my forearm. The sun is in my house, but Florence isn't.

***

Florence is outside. Florence is standing next to a cab, and the cab is yellow. Florence has bags. A lot of bags and they look heavy. Really heavy. My eyes pool with tears and Florence does not look my way. Her skin looks really yellow. Yellow like the cab. Where is Florence going? Where is Florence going without me? Immediately, my throat belts out tears. Florence won't look my way and she keeps packing her bags into the cab. The world is silently watching

Florence leave me. I am panicking. Where is Florence going?

***

njkhkdfh udfhsfhjkd j bjkv kjdvbjdkvbdjkbdvbu shfusefheuf jdvnskmnvx-mvnc xnvjnjkfndjfnd knfkjd fnkjdfnkfjnd jfndjfn jdfndsfjknfjndfjnsdjfknsjdkn-fjskdfnjksfnjskdfnsdj

***

I don't like Florence anymore.

***

eufaeufheufhefmuaheucfheufnfdhfkfhsdjfdjkfhdskjfhdsk jhfufauerhcui hae fhae fuheufchefiuasf

***

F-L-O-R-E-N-C-E.

Florence. *Why do you cry?*

Florence, why do you lie?

Florence, who are you?

Florence.

FAIRYTALE

Adriann Ricketts

My mother:
does not breathe air.
She breathes the desecration of those around her.

My mother:
would rather drink in the sweet sound of solitude
than bask in the eternity of togetherness.

My mother:
cares little for jewels or coins with dead kings' faces.
She hoards her independence.

My mother:
does not read the false words of security and comfort.
She tells only of the truthfulness of the flame.

My mother:
is a dragon.

And that is what she has raised.

THINGS I'D LIKE TO SAY TO THE PERSON THAT KEEPS LEAVING TOOTHPASTE IN OUR SINK

Jordan Abbruzzese

During a college spring break, my mother decided to drive to Florence and stay with Crystal, a family friend. I went with her, eager for something to do. Upon arriving, we all began excitedly chatting, animated and reunited. Crystal eventually asked me various questions about my gluten intolerance, knowing that I have Celiac Disease. Her niece had recently been determined to have a gluten intolerance as well, and was also severely stressed mentally. The conversation concluded with Crystal telling me that her niece had also been diagnosed with severe schizophrenia, which the doctors were connecting to her gluten intolerance. I was taken aback, my brain grinding, my heart hitting my chest. As soon as I had internet access, I searched as in depth as I could on relationships between gluten intolerance and different types of mental stress. Various reports and studies that I read had connected being gluten intolerant to schizophrenia. I don't understand the rationale of this, but apparently, that's science.

***

A list of things that I am extremely terrified of:

1. toothpaste
2. toothpaste
3. toothpaste
4. loud noises
5. spiders
6. being held at gunpoint without being able to move or save myself
7. gum
8. a close family member or friend dying unexpectedly
9. the dark
10. toothpaste

***

A series of conversations between my peers and myself:

Random Person One: So, do you not brush your teeth?

Me: Of course I do.

Random Person One: But how, if you don't like toothpaste?

Me: There are specific rules. The squirted toothpaste can only be pea-sized, and has to land directly on the top of my toothbrush bristles. I do not like for there to be any misplaced remnants on the sides of the brush. None of the toothpaste can be around the top, the sides, or the cap of the toothpaste tube or else it'll crust. When brushing, I have a distinct pattern (back left top of molars, back right top of molars, back left bottom of upper molars, back right bottom of upper molars, back left upper sides then around to the front then back right upper sides, repeat on bottom starting at the back right, insides of teeth starting at the top bottom jaw, brush tongue). When I spit out the foam, I have to splash water over it completely until it is out of the sink and then fully rinse my toothbrush, checking consistently to make sure that no toothpaste or spit has been left behind. When finished, I never wipe my mouth on my towel because it will leave an eternal, minty residue. I end with washing my hands, just to make sure that they don't smell like toothpaste.

Random Person One: Oh … (look of concern).

Random Person Two: So, do you not brush your teeth?

Me: Of course I do.

Random Person Two: But how, if you don't like toothpaste?

Me: Very carefully.

Random Person Three: So, do you not brush your teeth?

Me: What am I, disgusting?

***

Sometimes, I pray for my sanity. I pray for my head to be quiet, for the cease of insistent buzzing and pushing that only talks in silence. The five strands of inner voices at once that warn or scold me while I am sitting in class, walking on the sidewalk, or trying to sleep. I tell God that my conscience is fucked; only slightly wincing at the fact that I just said "fucked" in a prayer. I am talking to God, right? Like, he invented "fuck," so it seems fine. I pray for help breathing without realizing that I'm breathing, dressing without feeling the fabric on my skin or the weight of my hair on my head. I plead for aid to end the suffocating, to stop the feeling of someone's three longest fingers pushing down on the base of my throat where my neck connects to my chest, as my ears slowly fill with pressure, pushing inwards toward my tensed jaw.

Sometimes, not even God wants to deal with you.

***

I have a really hard time sitting in movie theaters. I like to get to the movie early so I can go all the way to the back row. In pit styled theaters, I can pull this off as "wanting to have a better view." I casually lie to my fellow movie-goers while practically sprinting to the farthest seat possible from the screen. When my boyfriend goes with me, he knows it's because I am afraid of getting shot by someone behind me. It has always been an irrational fear of mine. I do not like not knowing what is around me in the dark. I have made myself sit towards the front of the theater, just to prove that I can do it. But my body hardening and chilling while imagining the hypothetical potential danger happening in the rows behind me over the duration of two hours is just not worth the ten dollars I pay for my ticket.

If I am in the back row, I only have to worry about the person changing the reel in the projector. I give this employee the benefit of my doubt, and all of my trust to:

A. Keep the movie going and

B. Not harm me.

I feel that it is a safe bet, unless this employee had a bad morning at home or suddenly develops sociopathic tendencies during *The Hunger Games*. My mother has always told me that I was being silly, like the time I told her that I was afraid of my bathtub falling through the floor while I was in it.

"Well, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to take you to the hospital? Do you want me to call someone? You just can't worry about things like that."

***

When I was in high school, my friends would put their gum-wrappers in my backpack because they thought it was humorous. I would be reaching for a pencil, and notice a silver bit of foil that I did not remember putting in my bag. Tenderly, I would pick up the wrapper with my pointer finger and thumb nails, and then upon identifying it, would begin to cry and hysterically throw the wrapper away from me. I could not bring myself to actually pick up the trash and throw it away because I knew that my fingertips would smell exceedingly minty, even after washing them. I would run my fingernails along the base of my nostrils, sensing the mild smell from just picking the wrapper out of my bag. Dissatisfied, I would sit on my hand for the rest of class, squirming in my desk, hoping that the smell did not rub off on my nose.

When I was younger, my mom would often ask me to dig out her checkbook or cell phone from her purse while she was driving or waiting in a

drive-thru line. I would squint my eyes and bite the inside part of my cheek, knowing that her bag and all of its contents were contaminated by the stench of her faithful Trident that would inevitably have been thrown into a side pocket. The same anxiety would seize me whenever I would give her a hug while she was chewing gum. I would tighten my mouth, curling my lips under my teeth, and hold my breath while leaning in for the hug, not breathing again until I was a couple of feet away from her at least.

My boyfriend used to sometimes try to touch me with toothpaste, because he thought it was funny. He eventually stopped a couple of years ago when I had a mild panic attack after he took gum out of his mouth in front of me and tried to touch me with it. He thinks the fear is quirky, endearing even, but takes drastic measures to make sure that nothing triggers my terror.

(Clarification: It's not that I do not like minty things. I eat candy canes. I eat mint chocolate chip ice cream. And I always take full advantage of the free mints at the Chinese Garden Buffet).

***

In an effort to ease my mind, I spend some nights awake in the soft glow of my laptop screen. I type quietly so as not to wake my roommate, looking for any sort of online test that I can find. I type "Anxiety Test," "Manic Depression Test," "Bi-Polar Disorder Test," and "Schizophrenia Test" repeatedly into the search engine. I have taken almost all of the ones that are offered, sometimes disappointed because you have to pay for your results. I will never pay for them, but I take these tests anyway, often the same tests over and over again seeing how I have changed. Last time this test said that I was severely depressed, but now I am just moderate. Perhaps I am getting better.

I have thought about seeing a therapist, or a counselor. I am also afraid that telling a stranger that I *sometimes* consider not going to class because I am worried about a school shooting or I am *sometimes* not able to go to the grocery store even when I do not have any food because it makes me "nervous" will land me in a straightjacket. Or, perhaps after an extended analysis, the psychologist will tell me that I am absolutely normal. That it is all in my head and I just need to "relax." That my sleepless nights and unprovoked tears are because of nothing, just school work or general exhaustion. Knowing that I am completely fine is almost worse than knowing that I could be certifiably insane.

***

I have told my mother that I might be on the path to serious mental chaos. She told me to "stop saying things like that" and changed the conversation to whether or not I liked the wallpaper in the living room or if I thought she should change it. Her alarmed expression and hint of recognition at my self-proclaimed diagnosis does not go unnoticed. She knows she raised a

daughter that went through a series of ticks and compulsory habits.

As a small child I would rub my palms and fingers together while whispering to my toys. I remember it being trance-like, as though my animal figurines were really communicating to themselves through me. Throughout elementary and middle school I would blink an excessive amount when stressed, in such an exaggerated way that my brow wrinkled. My friends would point it out and I would laugh, embarrassed. I have always been nervous, a hypochondriac, even. Identifying myself as a hypochondriac counts as a symptom for hypochondria, right?

My mother hides my problems behind her crème and maroon *fleur de lis*-ed walls, and it hurts. It trivializes, and cloaks me in guilt. I have a loving family and a privileged life, so why do I feel so unsettled and sad? I should focus more on spending time with my family that has given me so much because something could happen to them at any moment. They could die. Fear number eight.

***

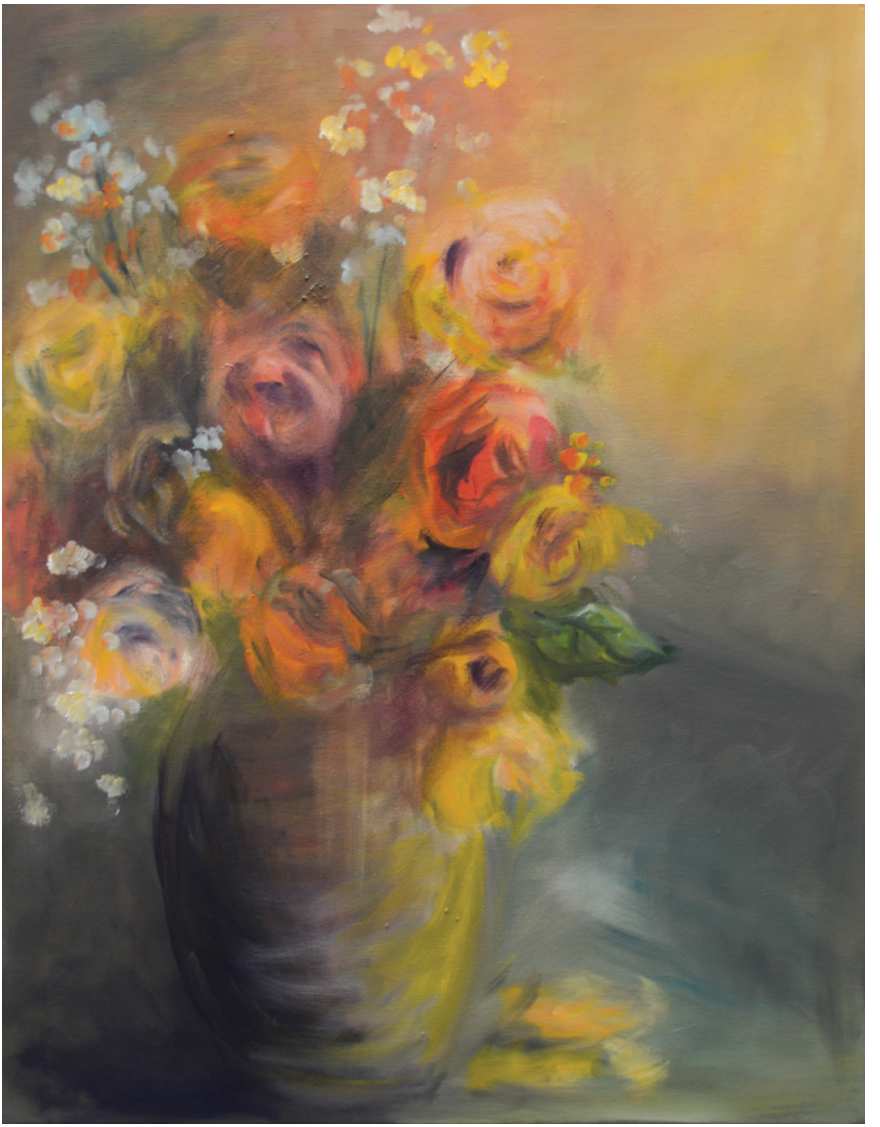
What can you do when your thoughts control you? You can evaporate the words and send them elsewhere. I sometimes create the image of an alienated planet of thoughts forgotten or wished away in my head. It sort of resembles Saturn, and is inhabited by *Space Jam*-esque cartoon aliens. I put my bad thoughts and fears there, isolating them, destroying them. It's a mechanism that I made up myself. But what happens when these thoughts are developed and smarter than you? They can probably find transportation back to where they came from. And they do.

***

By the way, Marissa. I know it was you. I will close my eyes and clean it up with a bleach wipe, just this once.

FLOWERS

Jennifer Hall



ANN ARBOR CEMETERY

Chelsea Craine

Branches clutch at his burgundy cardigan of clouds as the sky turns away
And locks the door behind him.
Folds of skin dangle from the arms of trees
Reaching
For the picture frame of faces
She can no longer recognize or name,
A box of tissues,
The bust of an Egyptian princess she once knew
When her skin still burned gold on the waters of northern Michigan.
Beneath the bramble of half-forgotten stories sunk past the horizon,
Two small eyes of purple open into blossom
As the grace of skunk begins to rise.

THE YOUNG PEAR TREE

Jess Campbell

Now I breathe.
Now I listen while the mother belly speaks.
Ripe and glowing with sweetness.
Now I feel the songs against my skin.
This one close, song about mourning.
Now I reach like children do.
Now I harden my fingers,
No longer weak and plump with fortune.
Now I wait for floating feelers.
Now I coil against beating tide.
Months of stagnant, deadened brown.
Now I fatten, heavy with sleep.
Pale and sticky.
Now I lay about with commodity.
Now I close my eyes.
Air full of sweetness.
Air heavy with birth.

THE ONLY THING WORSE THAN LEAVING

Jordan Nelson

The only thing worse than leaving is coming back again and finding everything is the same except that you can't be a part of it anymore because you aren't the same and you can never be a part of it again because you will never be the same and eventually it will change and you won't even want to come back anymore because you aren't the same and it isn't the same and then you will take a look around and realize that you wasted the best years you had and now for eight hours a day you're stuck in a small room at a computer screen with some guy at another computer screen who always has a cold and likes to touch your things and stands close when he talks and you can smell his lunch on his breath but you don't say anything because he is what passes as a friend now which is what happens when you spend all day cooped up in a poorly lit room with one other person in between your time at home which is spent eating breakfast or dinner and watching the morning or evening news after waking up or before going to sleep all alone in a small apartment in some big city that you can barely afford to live in and sometimes you look out your bedroom window and think about the people you knew living their lives and falling in love and getting married and having kids and getting divorced and growing old and retiring and finally dying and you wonder what makes them so special and why you can't have those things and then you pull the blinds because it's best not to think too much so you take a hot shower to relax and drink some cheap alcohol that tastes worse than you feel but that gets less noticeable every sip and with every sip you start thinking more this time about that bottle of sleeping pills in the medicine cabinet and how nice they would taste with your drink and how much better everything would be if you could just sleep forever but you never get drunk enough to actually do it and then you feel worse because it's just one more thing you didn't have the courage to do like showing up at that audition or punching back when they beat you up or telling her you loved her when she may have actually said I love you back.

THE SHEPHERDESS

Fadumo Abdulle

She was in the presence of eyes,
Multiple eyes that hung from the walls
Like works of art.
I looked into one of them and
Saw the hollowness that was in her.
She quietly worshipped
The ideal female; a creature
In robes of clothes that
Hung from her body like a curtain
In a royal room's grand windows.
Behind her was a shepherdess,
Gently guarding her from all sides
And behind them, a foot or
Two away was a
Large dog whose barking
Tore through the frames.
If I had left a minute or
So earlier, I wouldn't have seen
That the dog was only whimpering
And the shepherdess was in fact
The one barking.

QUIET VILLAGE

Erica Costilla

ON PERFECTIONISM

Katherine Gregor

"I used to think I wrote because there was something I wanted to say. Then I thought, 'I will continue to write because I have not yet said what I wanted to say'; but I know now I continue to write because I have not yet heard what I have been listening to."

—Mary Ruefle, "On Secrets"

I'm trying.

Just that, the words alone, sounds like an excuse to me. Desperate. Nearly unbelievable.

Pick up any collection of theoretical works on the essay and in at least one, probably more, you will be able to read that the word essay comes from an old French word meaning 'to try.' That, it would seem, is the only requirement: effort. Exertion. A push.

Yet suppose I were to exert nothing. Only enough to actually put words on the page. Suppose I were simply mapping my mind, casting it in amber—a completely natural process. A goal to try seems a very low bar, yet here I am trying to subtly crawl beneath it: try and *let go*.

***

It's harder than it sounds.

I am part of the standardized test generation whose every success and setback was relentlessly chronicled by computer-graded answer sheets and form letter themes. Our college-educated futures were planned from birth and either furthered or imperiled by everything we did. For us, the opposite of *try* has always been *fail*, and so we try, all day every day, constantly serving the final score.

So what if we were to stop?

***

If it can't be perfect, I don't want to do it.

If it can't be perfect, I don't want to do it.

If it can't be perfect, I don't want to

If it can't be perfect, I don't want

If it can't be perfect, I don't

If it can't be perfect, I

If it can't be perfect

it can't be perfect

it can't be

can't be

***

When I first sat down to write an essay on the essay, I had to make an outline, something I don't ordinarily do for essays. For fiction, sure, but nonfiction—which after much consideration I think I would define as simply *arranged thoughts*—had always fallen easily from my fingers, set up ahead of time as a shape in the brain and in need only of expansion. It would be, I planned, a sprawling eighteen-page monstrosity exploring persona, truth, and identity, and encompassing God, Marxism, ecofeminism, the education system, the industrial revolution, bluegrass music, my mother, my great-grandfather, the Hallmark Channel, Emerson, Thoreau, Flora Tristan, and the beauty and futility of language itself. I got six pages in and couldn't go any further. I wasn't saying what I wanted to say. I was trying as hard as I could; nothing was happening.

If it isn't dazzling, am I wasting my time?

***

Two years ago.

What is this about? My mother asked. Would you have liked it better if I'd never praised you? If I'd never told you that you were intelligent?

No. It wasn't praise or high expectations, it was *you're so talented, there is absolutely no reason you should be failing.*

I'm trying.

If you were trying, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

I'll try harder.

That never happened, my mother said. When did anyone ever say that to you?

I don't know, I said. If that didn't happen, then where did this come from?

Drawings lay in shreds around my feet. I had torn them up screaming *if it's not perfect, I don't want them to see it.*

***

The essays I have been most proud of and had the most positive response from others towards have been those I approached with a significantly lighter touch—no concerns about audience or serious ambitions; only an intensity, a yearning in my chest, a pure essence, a distillation, of feeling. Maybe I am the problem. I equate "trying" with "struggling." Unless I approach an essay like the string of a violin (fine-tune, don't saw, never tighten it too much), I feel trapped by it, and I run away from it. It is less any formal rule that suffocates me and more the pressure to always be really Saying Something. Making an attempt as a scientist or a natural philosopher might, with weights and measures and years of research surrounding my esteemed hypothesis.

When I write I am less of a philosopher and more of a magpie, collecting things that catch my attention and trying to arrange them into a structure I can live in. I have spent much of my life believing this to be thievery; parasitic behavior—Not Trying. No matter how much a magpie arranges and positions its finds, someone will say it is only looking busy.

Unless I'm saying something entirely new, what's the use? Although one could argue it's hard not to say something entirely new—nobody's thoughts, references, snatches of experience, have formed quite the collage that mine have before. This permafrost figure, edited for clarity, stays behind, like a dendritic figure in glass that's been struck by lightning: permanent evidence of my humanity.

***

I am imagining conversations with birds only because Emily Dickinson did, but let me depart blatantly from nonfiction, if not from truth: a magpie turned to me and said, "It's not my fault that I was born a magpie and not Gottfried fucking Leibniz."

***

T Clutch Fleishmann, in his wonderfully named essay "Ill-Fit the World," describes Claudia Rankine's essayistic work *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as "many accumulating realities, all with their polyvalence, the little invisible lines going in all directions." This description thrills me. Let me rejoice in the essay-as-snow-

bank, the essay-as-bird's-nest, fragile enough to be dispersed by the wind, tightly woven enough to hold the newly born and dreaming.

***

Emerson, self-described transparent eyeball that he was, was the first essayist I ever encountered and the first I ever loved. I felt every sentence like soaring strings in my heart. The contents, of course, contributed to this, but it was the arrangement of the words themselves that was striking up my internal orchestra. These most traditional of essays introduced me to a fact of myself: I care as much if not more about how a piece of writing feels than about what it's saying.

***

The arduous essay, the painstaking essay, certainly does have its place. Maybe one day I will write that all-encompassing philosophical monster. The hope remains that, one day, I will achieve heart-swelling dazzle, Transcendentalist perfection. But if I cannot write when I cannot be perfect, then as of now, I cannot write—and I strongly suspect that if I cannot write, I cannot be at all.

I carve nothing in stone but myself. Each truth I lay down I take back twenty times. I am barely writing, I am more deciding. I am trying

trying

trying

to forgive myself.

TWILIGHT

Lillian Laura

Suppose the creek would hum loud enough
Our voices would lose themselves.
The slow steady drip of last night's rain
Rolls down the bark as you listen
To the tremble of baby blue
Bells sway in the wake of the breeze.

Suppose one day your flesh, my flesh will
Blend into the soil,
The sun dissolving into the dark night sky as
Roots hungrily look for ground to soak into
Just as a lonely body desires a lover.

Suppose the husky smell of flowering
Promise and adventure would never weaken.
Imagine birds steadily whispering sweet nothings.
Oh, how I long to feel your warm breath in my ear.
Kiss my neck a little longer,
Don't you feel how easily hands bend in together?

Why do we act so fearful of the welcoming temptation of the night?

Suppose the water in the creek running over stones
Caused a ripple in the current, a wrinkle in
Nature's fleshy skin.
The air here is never stagnant, full of yearning.
Full of desire, the forest always moves.

AUTHOR BIOS

Jordan Abbruzzese is a senior Creative Writing major and Music minor. She loves hiking, science fiction, hedgehogs, and ice cream.

Fadumo Abdulle is a junior Creative Writing major at Otterbein University. She's originally from Somalia but has lived here for the past ten years. Her favorite poem is "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and she has the poem "Jabberwocky" memorized. She would say that it is her second favorite poem though she doesn't really have a top ten favorite poems list. There a lot of poems that she equally likes so they would probably place on the same number on the list if she did have a list. Oh, and she likes to travel though she hasn't done much traveling yet. One day.

Josh Brandon is currently 21 years old and grew up in the rural town (often times referred to as a village due to its size) of Fayetteville, OH. He is a junior at Otterbein and studies Creative Writing and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies. Apart from tutoring students in the Writing Center, serving as an executive member for FreeZone! and facilitating presentations on Queer identities, he enjoys playing video games, eating Skyline chili, and making puns no one finds funny. This is his second year serving as Managing Co-Editor of *Quiz & Quill* along with Jess Campbell, and he often regards it as one of the greatest learning experiences of his college career.

Jess Campbell is a Senior Creative Writing Major at Otterbein University. She is Managing Co-Editor of two different student-run literary magazines on campus. Her most reliable source of happiness and stability comes from playing video games.

Kate M Carey writes about individuals and how their emotions drive them to strange, yet wonderful, actions. She works at a small comprehensive university in the Midwest. She is married, has one child, and dreams of living on the beach!

Sarah Carnes is a freshman Creative Writing and Psychology double major at Otterbein University. She is the current Secretary and Poetry Editor for *Quiz & Quill*. Poetry and helping people are her passions. She has been lucky to have a few poems and other short pieces published, as well as to have a short play produced. She hopes to continue growing amongst the writing community and to spread words, as many as she can, because words matter.

Erica Costilla is an Art and Psychology major in her fourth year at Otterbein University. Hailing from San Antonio, Texas, she still has no idea why she likes Westerville so much.

Chelsea Craine is a Creative Writing and Music double major at Otterbein University. She loves playing with her six sisters and falling in Alum Creek (potentially at the same time).

Lydia Crannell is a first year Creative Writing and Music double major with an Audio Production minor. She is a member of two literary journals and the campus 'zine, and plays the cello in the Otterbein String Orchestra. She hopes to have a future in screenwriting or music editing after teaching English in South Korea. And no, she still does not have an answer to the question, "What's your favorite book?"

Amelia Gramling is a junior Creative Writing and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies double major. She comes from Bowling Green, Kentucky, but she grew up on the road. When she writes she sees herself writing to inhabit home.

Katherine Gregor is a twenty-two-year-old obsessive type who writes words and draws pictures. Occasionally, she does both at the same time.

Jennifer Hall currently is a junior Art major with concentrations in painting and visual communication. She is originally from a small Northeast Ohio town and has had internships with Brandt-Roberts Galleries as a gallery assistant and Chromaflo Technologies where she focused on Marketing Communication and Color Science. Her artwork focuses on the over-looked aspects of life and objects that are subject to impermanence. When creating a new piece she works from intuition, letting her instincts lead the way. Though she makes full use of her sketchbook, she rarely sketches out an image on the canvas before painting, as doing so creates an unnecessary boundary. She is constantly processing ideas and images not to answer questions, but to present them. To her, a visual mystery that results from observation is one of the defining factors in a great piece of art. More of her work can be found at www.observecreative.com.

Gretchen Heisler is a senior Creative Writing major. She is a member of the ALD/PES Honor Society, the *Aegis* editorial board, and the *Quiz & Quill* editorial board. She is currently (figuratively) dying as she works on her Honors Thesis.

Daniel Kushnir is called Daniel and he enjoys writing, movies, long walks on the beach, and 150-word autobiographies.

Lillian Mills is junior at Otterbein University studying Creative Writing and Arts Administration. She is co-founder of Otterbein's first collaborative arts space, Fusion Studio, and a staff member of Quiz & Quill.

Jordan Nelson is a senior from Ostrander, Ohio with a Psychology major with a minor in Creative Writing.

Claudia Owusu is a senior high school student enrolled at Otterbein in her senior year. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, but she is originally from Ghana, West Africa. Her love of writing began in the summer of 2007 when her school librarian sent her home with a stack of books. She really loves bicycles, the sky, and people-watching.

Adriann Ricketts has known she wanted to be a writer ever since she debuted with "The Magical, Talking Unicorn" in first grade. It was met with instant critical acclaim and was even sent to the county fair. It remains her most popular work to date.

Claire Winslow is 20 years old, a junior, and a Literature Studies and Creative Writing double major with a minor in Religion. Having grown up in Oxford, Ohio, Claire now lives in the Gender and GLBTQ Resource House, works as a tutor in the Writing Center, and is an officer for Sigma Tau Delta. In addition to writing essays, Claire enjoys Harry Potter trivia, baking bread in the middle of the night, making lists, and naming her plants after *Hamlet* characters.

WRITING AND ARTWORK BY:

JORDAN ABBRUZZESE
FADUMO ABDULLE
JOSH BRANDON
JESS CAMPBELL
KATE M CAREY
SARAH CARNES
ERICA COSTILLA
CHELSEA CRAINE
LYDIA CRANNELL
AMELIA CHRISTMAS GRAMLING
KATHERINE GREGOR
JENNIFER HALL
GRETCHEN HEISLER
DANIEL KUSHNIR
LILLIAN MILLS
JORDAN NELSON
CLAUDIA OWUSU
ADRIANN RICKETTS
CLAIRE WINSLOW

ON THE COVER

LUMOS BY ERICA COSTILLA