

I am my own sculptor: I am shaping myself from
within with living, wet, malleable materials.

-Carlos Fuentes, 1989

Preface this year has been a great challenge, but out of challenge comes great reward. As an artist, I had wept at Preface's past desecration of artworks through distortion and low resolution. In this year's issue, I hope that we have improved the quality of art, though much work remains to be done. The quality of submissions, both art and writing, was extraordinarily high this year, and it was painful to have been forced to cut well over half the submissions we received.

Selectivity, however, breeds quality, and I feel that this year's issue comprises the highest quality works from Goucher students of all walks of life. These works, whether conceived in the heart, gut, or brain, are inherently unique to the inner selves of their creators, prompting "Viscera" as the title for this year's issue.

Each of these works have also passed through the hands and minds of the inspired and dedicated Preface staff, who, more than in any other year, have played the pivotal role in the construction of the publication.

True to its name, I hope our manuscript will indeed serve as a "preface" to the lives of others, acting as a springboard for the works of other poets and artists in the Goucher community, and providing an artistic interpretation of the experiences we share.

Erika Hoffeld
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Sheila Green

Cambium

My hair is made of memory
Long and straight and strong and fine
Like years running down my back.
It measures my life
In thin brown lines
That weave together
Indistinct
You're there somewhere
With your body curled
'Round my back
Almost close enough to touch.
One hand lost in my hair
The other clamped on my lips
To keep my mouth shut.
And I hear you breathing in my hair
Like it were oxygen
Or something you needed to survive.
And we'd spend
The night
Like that.
Not touching
Your breath making my hair wet.
I'd move my lips against your hand
A silent kiss
A question
And you'd lift your head
Shhh, you'd say, don't move.

I can still hear you behind me in
The night.
The sound of your breath
And your phantom heartbeat,

Almost close enough to touch.

My hair is longer now
And heavy enough to
Give me headaches.
Unbound it tickles the
Tops of my thighs,
A place your breath never found.

When you left
I wanted to cut it all off,
Shave my head
And live a life with out you.

But I couldn't.
My hair is my memory,
Long and straight and strong and fine
And I wrap it around me
Like a cape
To hide in.

Kate Bechak

The longest way from A to B

The crest, swirl, and turn remain
as long as the lawn ornaments are polished
and the school speed limit is
always flashing. As long
as we leave the light on for the dog
and overtip the smudgy fingered paperboys
our streets will stay romantic and frivolous,
the only nouveau for officeworkers.
I like my sewers with kittens in them and I like
all the lampposts synchronized with
burglars and other night owls.
Pulling out of the driveway's a recreational sport
on my street we all get plaques.

I've always wanted to be deaf and track mud through
the house. I wouldn't hear the screams that
we bought with the carpet.
Maybe if we all played a little more basketball,
we could keep the metronome running
thump thump thump nonstop and drown out
the cold six o'clock siren. My neighbors
don't fear the apocalypse, they say there's
no better way to spend the last twenty seconds of life
then coasting a summit with the turn signal on.

Angela Regas

First Love

In August, the air grew tight around our skins
as summer drew its last days back into itself,
pulling away from the coming chill. I would see
the seasons change for the first time that year.

And as summer drew its last days back
the heat spent itself madly, wildly, flaring
as the seasons changed for the first time, that year,
and leaves began to crumple in my hands.

Still the heat spent itself madly, wildly, flaring
around our brown aching bodies. We were dying.
And leaves began to crumple in my hands.
I threw them into the sun, watched the gold fall back

around our brown aching bodies. We were dying,
spending ourselves madly, wildly, like matches
I threw into the sun, watched the gold fall back
burning,

spending itself madly, wildly, like matches
afraid of the coming chill. I would see
you die that year, burning,
as the August air tightened around us.



Corinna Yost

Audrey Babkirk

Apology

my children
will speak the language of river water,
see the shadows of the wind,
measure their lives in leaf falls,
dream in the colors of stars,
find the answers in the rain,
be the Thoreau I never was,
my most beautiful apology
for all that I am not.

Alexander Jost

when the television blares out
families full of happiness/
I see my white dad smiling
and think,
"hypocrite"

my skin's white too

I've yet to meet someone enlightened,
fulfilled/
I was wondering,
could you sell me something I
 need
for once;
no, no, like
 need
to rebuild a self again/

my skin's white too

emotions don't even make me cry anymore (some
one shout out 'testosterone')

and believe me.
 if I could color in my culture,
loosen up my birthright,
take the next right
straight out
the middle-class
 (it's sight)
I'd hop out of
this sitcom role I've been casted
to play, no pay

I'm not a white man, but I play one
on a tv turned on
all day, every day,

the seventeen year sitcom

what have we to lose anymore,
just the cost of a nation:
 one nation, under corporate owners
with liberty and justice
becoming as foreign
as love

my skin'
s white too.

Alexander Jost

hook me up with a cigarette, let
me settle my high
colors like costum masks

girls cradling beerlike babies
busted faces
how we spend our weekends,
stumbling

tonight my eyes are beautiful
blue.

Tonight, round like the moon raised over baltimore
(the rich section) where kids run like lamborghinis
I look inward when boys fight and they yell, we're almost men now

Elizabeth Barbush



the county unfair.

There used to be a woman named Ethel. She knelt in a garden, sunflowers stalking up around her, hands gloved with poppy-flower print cotton gloves from the K-Mart. When she moved, little clods of dirt fell from her knobby knees. The old woman picked up a trowel and started to attack the weeds around her snapdragons.

Ethel's hands worked absentmindedly among the flowers, because her rheumy blue eyes were trained on the girl next door. She was a teenager, out playing with her puppy. Making a hell of a lot of noise. Someone should tell her that she's disturbing the peace. Someone should tell her, that damn dog left a mess all over Ethel's tomato patch. Ethel didn't say a word, though. She was too busy working among the weeds, keeping the snapdragons free and healthy. The neighbor lady came out on the porch, called girl and dog inside for lunch.

Ethel looked at her own porch. Nobody was calling there. It didn't matter. There were gladiolus bulbs to coax up, and portulacas to clip back. And her geraniums, her glorious red geraniums, the perfect shade of crimson against their healthy green leaves. The geraniums were her pride and joy. She sang to them, poured in plant food. Ethel even carried the flowerpot up to her bedroom with her every night, to keep them safe against curious raccoons.

It seemed like a lot of trouble to take for a geranium plant. But, since Charlie had the nerve to leave her a widow last fall, there was little else to occupy Ethel's time. We must say, though, she was not a woman without dreams. The county fair was on its way, with beautiful bright ribbons and cash prizes for the finest local gardening.

Ethel remained firmly convinced: geraniums were her destiny. She would win the blue ribbon. She would show the woman next door, with her fancy rosebushes and dahlias. Ethel would show the world that a geranium could win it all. She'd wear the ribbon to church, like a royal brooch. And everyone would see that she was a winner. We would know, and say nice things as we walked by her pew.

August said goodbye, hot and bright and mossy. We went to pic-

nic, and the days started to turn, just a little bit. It was good firefly weather, but not kind to geraniums. So Ethel brought her flower inside. just to make sure that it didn't dry out. She even put it in the best window, above the kitchen sink. A week before the fair, she bought a new terra-cotta pot and spent hours painting perfect polka dots onto it, getting everything just right. The geranium stretched its roots into the new pot, turning its bright red head toward the sun. I know that Ethel smiled whenever she saw it.

She brought her child to the county fair with extreme anticipation. There were other entrants entering Horticultural Hall, carrying the fruits of their labor and time. Our uncles had their pumpkins there. But the prettiest plant of all belonged to Ethel. She toddled toward the entrance, fast as her varicosed legs would carry her. She wanted to be first in line. Ethel loved being first in line, because it meant that you were the best. And her geraniums deserved to be the best.

The day was hers. She was sure of it. Look at that half-dead flower posing as a geranium. What was that guy thinking? And check out the gladiolus blooms over there. Not even half as lovely as the ones Ethel had at home. She should have entered them, too! Same story with the tomatoes. Look at all the pathetic people. Weekend gardeners, no doubt. Too busy during the week to take proper care of plants. She would destroy them all. She was going to show all of us that Ethel was the champion of the universe. Look at that shriveled cactus! Look at that plate of rotten peaches! They were all losers.

We were eating cotton candy with sticky mouths, but we saw it all. The weatherman had said that very morning, it was too hot out for pets, small children, and the elderly. But I don't think Ethel owned a television set. Her left shoe came loose before she reached the door. Faulty orthopedic sole, maybe. And Ethel fell, her geranium right behind her. The polka-dotted pot shattered. The flower's sturdy root ball was broken, ruined. Flowers die when they fall.

Several people hurried to Ethel's aid. We wanted to, but we were afraid to crowd her. Those who did reach her tried to ask if she was all right. They tried to get her to her feet. But Ethel would not rise. She remained on the ground, in the gravel, her eyes fixed on the broken flowers. A kid tramped on the dying geranium in his rush to help Ethel. Strangers tugged at her arms, called ambulances with their cellular

phones. They all meant well, we could see it in their panicked eyes. But you and I knew that Ethel was already gone.

We talked about it later, by the sheepfolds. I know you were upset, because you let me finish your funnel cake. But let me tell you what I like to think. I like to think that Charlie met her at their front door, his arms full of geraniums. And she wears a blue ribbon on her breast, every day, not just Sundays.

Ethel, the champion of the universe.

Megary Sigler

Night Vision

In the shadowless beds of the white garden
where the green glares like a clean neon,
beneath the bleached burn of a teacup moon,
ivy petals lick the naked bone of my ankles.

And I watch her:
peach and porcelain in petticoats,
bend toward the tangle of white roses.

Black hair pinned in thick elegant coils,
she feels me watching.

This is my great-grandmother's garden.

It has loosed itself from some primal memory
like a brown-and-white photograph
fallen from between the honeyed pages
of a leather-bound book

Showing me acres of patchwork quilted,
fat pink babies suckled,
and derby-hatted husbands
brutal as butchers
or gentle as milk,

and pain,
hard as a whale-bone corset,
tightening
tightening,
crushing the lungs.

She turns
and regards me,
the moon hanging between us,

the only part of us
that will remain.

Elizabeth Barbush



Jivelle Callendar

Broken

I never met anyone like him
he is broken
Lost, deep in thought
in shadows of a nonforgotten past
that haunt his days and nights
incessantly;
Like the howls of the sea
In a stormy bay
Unable to accept any signs of devotion
or any kind of emotion
He sees the world as a blank slate
and life as a neverending stretch of road
He is broken.

Cassandra Lizza

Hypocrites

If you were lost, how many would
Help you find your way home
And how many would leave you to wander
Without a clue.

Without sight, without hearing,
Or perhaps without another sense,
How many would take advantage
And how many would not
Think of the temptations of
Gestures, signs, comments, cracks...
In whose loyalty would you believe?

Disfigurement, disability, or even disease
How many could look you in the eye
How many would greet you with words but not eyes
Just who would titter and laugh
And talk behind your back
Who would stand at your side wholeheartedly
Who would be a friend?

If you were ripped through the twin whirlpools
Of pressure and temptation,
Who would you trust to be your anchor
If you emerged in some changed fashion
Who would have the courage
To say that we've grown
To say that we're different
To say that things will never be
As they were before;
And who will fight you to the death
Of your so-called friendship
To change you back.

Who is kind and just
And all of those other polite superlatives
Because that is how they truly are in their hearts
And who is the one of impure motives,
Selfish and self-centered,
Who is only waiting for someone
More Important
To come along?

Judith Sagal



Kate Bechak

The Cigarette Princesses

Caroline Marcus got me hooked on menthols.
She always threw her butts in a coffee can
before leaving, shotgun with the boyfriend.
And her sister and I
didn't mind being scavengers,
sucking relit accordion stubs
behind the garage:
We had found tradition.
I could feel the pink lipstick prints
rubbing off, spreading through my lip's contact.
Trying to get the most out of the collection,
I learned to smoke furiously
through filters and fingers.
We greeted health class, all the small white lectures,
with empty yawns and vigorously rolled eyes.
"Fight the man," my friend would say, "fight the man."
Tragedy struck with Caroline's New Year's resolution.
We were left searching the neighborhood streets,
where no amount of mud, oil, or roadkill, could keep us
from a good smoke.

Victor Markland

Invitation to the Dance

Hark! scions of stepmother chance.
I've heard 'tis said somewhere in France
"The sand that's through your fingers bled
Will form the stone that marks your head."

I

A blazing peak that's ne're corrupt
Called to him to follow up.
Thinking he was nobly bred
He followed reason where it led.

There to see above the clouds
Perspectives that aren't glimpsed by crowds.
Surely it's a fitting life
To take abstraction for one's wife.

And so he read by day and night,
"The more to make his thinking right"
He meditated on the mean,
"So that his conscience should be clean"

He knew the cut of Dante's Pants.
He wrote The Mental Life of Plants.
While contemplating beetle swarms,
He found the missing Venus' arms!

Though joyless, it was tearless here
Rarefied in atmosphere.
Just when he thought he knew it all
The Mistress Fate paid him a call.

II

She came to him by campus post
(and hit him where it hurt the most.)
An invitation to the Dance.
(A viper hidden in the plants.)

The chance (indeed and it was slight)
That someone on this special night
Should hope to find him in attendance
Upset all his comprehension.

"Miss"tery she seized his thought
Swiftly he deluded "Naught
other than kind disposition
herein makes a proposition."

"One wherin it seems I must
experience requoited Lust"
Armed thus with the best of plans
He went...but sadly...**did not dance**.

A Rose had through his window leapt
But quickly faded while he slept.
To dream he had at least a chance
If only he had chose...**to dance**

III

But no more invitations came.
Everyone forgot his name.
To him the other fellows said
Quite frequently "I thought you dead"

Then one day surely dead he was.
They said that hollowness the cause
That took him, though we might protest
To where the hallowed soul can rest.

Dorothy Brooke and Bergerac
Now have the sense, this sleeper lacked
Waltzing they with joyous mirth
Smoothly pack his blanket earth

No longer all and all in vain
No longer from fulfillment twain
Listen close for their advice
(It will not be repeated twice.)

There is no other earthly crime
Severe as Grace not given time.
No invitation comes by chance.
So when you are invited...**DANCE!**

Mara Dratfield

Much Ado About Nothing

When I die
in this dance
of burning-vapor
red flamingo's
swirling around
like Ophelia-long hair
this void after earthquake
will be reduced
to a thin chasm
because the depth that you reach into will be simplicity
and inches deep,
no miles
will you find in once unfrozen bodies lying before you.

I swear I will be colder than the snow that did not freeze you.

My bed
will be the glacier
that you talk about
returning to
and I
will be your pillow
of ice.
But this summer's trek
will not have an all male cast
with a boy as Hero,
I will be your willful lady
led into despair by false witnesses.

When you go to wake me
after our marriage feast
and my funeral pier is lit,
you will find no aching virgin
to take home with you in the night.

Beyond that cherry tree will be ashes.

Andrej Krasnansky



Audrey Babkirk

untitled

my life
is a series of unfinished stories.
a varied archipelago
of aborted ideas,
each killed
by a fickle brain
and my tendency
to gorge myself on foreplay,
plunge into the research,
construct blueprints,
fuse quirks and features into characters,
dream within the folds
of unmade book jackets
waiting for my opus.

i have never finished anything.
but I will finish you.

when they sat across from me
in those purgatorial plastic chairs,
i could already hear
fingers pounding at the keyboard
of my next novel,
running
from your unromantic sickness.

and I know your life
will soon be
like a well used book,
pages soft and frayed,
cover worn to nothing,
old glue in the spine
in danger of coming apart.

i will fill your margins.

never knowing whether
you will be
a brief essay or
a Russian novel,
but always knowing how it will end.

i will stay
to the last page
and sit with you
in that blank space,
after the words have stopped.

because unlike anything
i can ever write,
you are a good read.
your company
makes me always feel
the fizz of inspiration,
and when I am in your favor,
my imaginary Pulitzers
lie dusty and forgotten.

Jessica Bowers

Apology

I remember hearing something in one of Van Gogh's letters. I have to say "hearing" instead of "reading," because I never did get around to looking at them myself. My bohemian friend called me one night, urging me to buy the book, complaining about my lack of interest, finally agreeing to read me "the best part" over the phone. She even made me put my tea down. I supposed that it was the only time in my life when someone would have read the letters of Van Gogh to me over a telephone wire. So, I surrendered to the concept, vaguely listening as my friend rambled on. Even in my jaded condition, I had to admit that Van Gogh had plenty of beautiful phrases to describe his own paintings.

I told my friend so. I even picked a favorite phrase out of the passage she read at me, mainly because I knew that it would please her. Van Gogh was describing his painting of a cafe, some famous one I still can't remember ever seeing. "A place where one can ruin oneself," he said. It was a nice phrase. I've always loved the word "ruin," and when you couple that word with the tragedy of Van Gogh's descent into insanity, it gains extra weight. My friend got audibly excited when I told her these thoughts, but I wasn't overly impressed. Just pretending to be. Still pretending, I hung up the phone and put the phrase away, turning instead to income tax forms and other mature, artless responsibilities.

But when Colin called me, the phrase fell back into my mind.

It was morning, a dull one, drab with newspapers and aspirin and black coffee. I remember feeling that I should have been doing something wildly important. Every morning I have off has that sense of urgent anticipation. Anticipate something, anything, and do it urgently. Wake up. Get going. Now now now. You'll regret it later if you don't.

I was sitting on my sofa, clipping coupons and watching Regis and Kathie Lee. I hate Regis. I can't stand Kathie Lee. But I was too lazy to get the remote and do something about it. I'd just found a dollar off coupon for extra strength ibuprofen when the phone gave a startled ring, snapping me out of my discount detergent reverie. I handed a large sigh to nobody in particular and shuffled my stocking feet into the kitchen.

"Hello?"

I didn't really sound like I meant it. Then again, I never do. Sound like it, I mean.

"Do you know who this is?"

The voice was soft, sweet, smoking. He paused to take a drag of whatever. I could hear his breath against the receiver.

"Well?"

"Colin?" I tried to sound surprised. The name came out sounding shattered. He chuckled to himself, exhaled. Inadvertently reminded me of two hundred-odd willingly sleepless nights, not to mention the way he used to sigh against my pillow.

"Yeah." He paused, waiting. I felt obligated.

"Are you calling from the hospital, or..?"

"I'm calling because I'm not calling from the hospital."

"What?"

"I'm out now, Jude. I'm okay."

He took another long inhalation. I hated him for it. Because, even then, years after our mutual decision to break up, he still had the power to make my thighs weaken with a simple breath over a telephone. By saying my name. Saying he was okay. I had spent two years of my life trying to make sure he was okay, and that kind of codependency doesn't go away with a few wild New Year's Eve parties.

"I want to see you, Jude. Is that all right?"

What, that you want to see me? Or that you will see me?

"Yeah, yeah, I'm free. You could come over, or-"

He exhaled his disapproval.

"-or we could meet somewhere. Lunch. At the cafe. Sound good?"

He said he might eat a little. That's when I figured that he probably wasn't smoking pot, opium, or any of his other fascinations. Colin always ate like a cow when he was high. When he wasn't...well, I guess his lack of appetite accounted for his arms being so skinny. But when he was stoned, sometimes he'd make up beautiful things about what angels eat on their lunch breaks. He'd always call me an angel, his wingless angel walking. Ask me about where I was hiding my lunchbox.

Somehow, I never cared about the smoking. But when he started to trip with his friends on the weekends, it was harder to play the creatively forgiving girlfriend. He used to call me, screaming nonsense

about Vikings, aliens, whatever popped into his chemically drained mind. It would be days before I could respect him again, days of anonymous flowers and pleading phone messages. My friends hated me for swallowing his excuses, but his technique worked well.

A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, but you're still sick, and when the sugar fades out, everything tastes like chemicals.

I wound my purple scarf around my neck and thought of Van Gogh. A cafe. A place where one can ruin oneself. I hoped that I'd find Colin in more favorable conditions. He was beautiful when he wasn't drugged up, an artistic soul clothed in the body of the classic "elegant consumptive." My friends laughed at this description. "He's a druggie." they reminded me. "He's a burned-out druggie, and you read too much Jane Austen."

I loved him. I loved him like an extension of myself. I love my brain, my toes, my intuition; I love my Colin. For that, I would have forgiven him anything. I would tell him anything. I would stage an intervention to tell him the ultimate truth, to tell him that he was ruining himself.

I would lose him.

He was waiting for me at a table on the cafe's patio. It was too cold for patios, but I knew that he'd chosen solitude over comfort. Colin was like that.

"Jude. You look amazing."

My "thank you" was sober. He leaned back in his chair, remaining unconsciously gorgeous. I was remembering the way he used to touch the back of my neck, drawing every nerve along with his fingertips. But I tried to look like I was remembering how to do calculus. And I ordered the soup du jour.

"So." I began, unsure. "You're out."

"Yeah."

"How long?"

"Two weeks. I wanted to find you, Jude. I thought we should talk."

"We should."

It was easy and familiar to agree with him. Let's go see Phantom. Okay. I'll have the crème brulee. Make that a double. I love Andy Warhol. Me too.

He lit a cigarette and made sure of himself. The coffee came and went.

"Two weeks." he repeated, with a satisfied sigh. "And clean for a year and a half."

I fiddled with a sugar packet, avoiding his eyes.

"I have you to thank for that, Jude."

"Do you?"

I couldn't figure out why I was whispering, why my shoulders were slumping, why I felt like a nervous college girl again. Then my eyes hit Colin's. Colin. My everything. Well, everything until I hit my second year of grad school, and he hit serious alcohol problems. He still had beautiful, thick blue eyes. I still remembered how to glue myself to them. Damn him.

"I thought about you a lot while I was in there." he said. "They make you do a lot of thinking."

"I can imagine."

What else was I supposed to say? Nothing at all?

"At first I blamed you for putting me in there. The *intervention* and all." He said it as though it was a dirty word, and it was an odd tone coming from Colin, Colin of the "fucking hell" and the "pricky bastards." I tried not to show him anything.

"I thought that I made the decision to do rehab because of you. For you. But they make you do a lot of thinking. They're really good people. And in the end, I think I did it for myself. I thought you ought to know that."

He took another long pull at his cigarette. He held it like one of his opium spliffs. It was disconcerting, distracting, too familiar.

"That's great, Colin. I'm glad."

He seemed reassured.

"Yeah. So, I wanted to let you know that I'm sorry."

I'm an anally specific person. I like to know exactly how much I'm saving on ibuprofen. And I like to know exactly what people are apologizing to me for. I told him as much, minus the comment about ibuprofen. I wasn't sure if mentioning pills around Colin was such a good idea.

He exhaled at me, and I reluctantly remembered the time we went to the top of the Empire State, the night so freezing that we could

see our breathing, mingle it, synchronize it. He was high at the time, and convinced that smoke was coming out of his mouth.

"I wanted to apologize for who I was."

"Come again?"

"It's this thing, okay? At the hospital. It wasn't just about the substances, getting rid of the influence. It's about spiritual detox, too. My therapist said that I should reconcile with people. People I cared about before everything went down."

He let the words hang in the air, added some smoke to them.

"And I still care about you, Jude."

My eyes watered. They always do around cigarettes. Maybe I'm sensitive.

"I'm sorry. They're good people. And I'm good now, too. I'm the best version of myself. The first thing they do with you, they drag all the issues out and make you confront them, confront who you've become under all the chemicals. Then the therapists...they rebuild you from the ground up."

It really bothered me, the way he used second person to talk about drug rehab. At the time, I couldn't figure out why. The coffee came and went again. I was glad to have a moment to think.

"And this worked for you?"

Colin leaned back in his plastic chair, pleased with himself.

"Oh, on so many levels, Jude! It's amazing. I mean, I can actually live with myself. I actually like Colin, now. I wake up in the morning and thank God that I'm me, you know? So I wanted to apologize for who I was. He was an asshole, he hurt you, he almost hurt me. They helped me put him away, for good."

From second person to first person and then on to third. I focused on the spot of coffee lingering in my spoon bowl, bit my lower lip. Maybe I was reading too much into him. I have that bad habit.

"I'm proud of you, then. I'm glad things worked out."

"You don't understand, Jude. The person I was. They helped me kill him. And it's a good thing, they're good people. That's why I wanted to see you. The Colin you knew kept me from loving you the right way."

He ground his cigarette into the ashtray. Tobacco spilled out of it, the paper was torn. And his hand reached for mine, his eyes drawing me in like an electromagnet.

"I can live with myself again. But I can't live without you."

My fingers felt numb under his. I guess he could tell.

"Colin, I-"

"Shhh. I want you to give me another chance. I wasn't well when we were together. I was letting him control me."

"Who?"

"The bad parts of myself. I wasn't good enough for you. But I'm better now, and I thought I owed it to both of us to come back. Because I am back. They fixed me, Jude. Just like you wanted. I got into that hospital, and they put everything back where it belongs, you know?"

I told him I didn't. His eyes darkened at me. Then they softened.

"I'm telling you, angel. I'm better than ever. Repaired. A new man, okay?"

He spoke like a child whining for a favorite toy. Or a junkie whining for a fix.

I pulled my hand out of his and stood up to put on my coat.

"Colin."

His name stuck on my tongue, bitter. I used to love a man named Colin, a man with these silent blue eyes and this quiet intensity.

"Colin, I don't love you anymore."

It was the first time I'd admitted it to anyone. Anyone. My friends. Myself. Colin. He recoiled from his coffee, wounded in some way.

"Well," he whispered up at me. "Well, I thought you might say that."

I sighed, relieved. The balance of the conversation restored itself.

"Good. That's good. You've come a long way, Colin. I really admire that."

"Do you?"

"I respect it a lot." I admitted, putting a five dollar bill on the table and shouldering my purse.

"I figured you would."

"What?"

"Everyone respects it. Everyone respects me. It's okay. I'm used to it. And I'm sure you'll find some nice guy to shack up with. It'll be great."

His tone was acid.

"Excuse me?"

He waved me away from the table with a derisive hand.

"Yeah. I'm too good for you anyway. 'Why love anyone who doesn't accept you,' you know? Yeah. I had you figured all wrong, is all. You just don't know what a good thing is when you have it. You're one of those miserable spinster types. Yeah. I don't even know why I asked you out. I'm too good for you."

I sharply informed him that he hadn't asked me out. This was not a date. This was lunch, a lunch that hadn't even made it past the coffee.

He folded his arms and laughed.

"Colin, I'm going."

"Go, then. Go to hell, bitch."

I went back to my apartment.

Van Gogh was wrong about his cafe. It had nothing to do with setting, and everything to do with character. There is a place to ruin oneself, though. Somewhere behind the drugs, past the chemical addictions and into the mental ones, the stains that don't come clean so easily.

I huddled home in the weather, remembering the smell of Colin, the colors of Van Gogh. Coffee. Cigarettes. The way the marijuana stench never washed out of my gray velvet coat, the way I gave up trying to erase it.

Colin ruining himself at a downtown cafe.

And a girl ruining herself in her college dorm room, wishing for a way out of love.

Corinna Yost



Jaspreet Chowdhary

"Who wants to share a memory?"

The question echoed through the church
One by one family rose, but none of your students.
Finally, although I was trembling I stood up and began "Mrs. Rosier..."
the pews creaked as people turned
then the church was silent—waiting for me to continue
My voice shook like a bell hesitantly ringing.
The fragile stitches of your place in my memory ripped open.
I was scared people would laugh.
But I had to tell everyone
how I would miss you, how I would always keep you in my heart.
The wound was exposed; my pain and longing uncovered.
Tears dripped down my cheeks; as I bled,
I heard your voice:
"Don't weep for me; you can do it"
So I hastily wiped my eyes and finished my story.
My blood had begun clotting—
a scab would form to protect me while I healed.
When I sat down the sun shone through the stain glass windows—
Thank you for smiling at me.

Sheila Green

Drawing in, Drawing out

I want your hands,
Bitten fingernails and all.
The hands that understand line.
That can pull a line from the air
And create an illusion
Of a phantom
Of a ghost
Hands that unravel my face
Like a sweater
Pulling that
One
Thread that will reduce me
To a pile of yarn.
Hands that highlight
Every imperfection
Almost making me beautiful.
Always making me more real.

I want your hands.
Warm palms where the future lies.
Every crevice is
A place I want to know.
I will learn about you from your hands
Following every broken line,
Like rivers flowing into each other,
Until I understand.
Then we can start together.
And it will be easy.
Like drawing.

Janine Levin

The Hospice Sculpture Garden

Ambiguous granite carvings,
and on the tallest, someone's
offering: three stones, smooth as loaves,
and a sheaf of combed grass, its gray-green
turning to wheat.

Soft in their beds, the desperate wait,
watching the sky.
Without intervention, it goes on,
the dandelion's white cosmos
given to the grass.

Kara Byrne

Sculptor's Creation

His hands belong to a sculptor when they caress
my marbled curves.
He molds me into the perfection that he envisions of his model
but is too modest
to admit
his gift creates the aesthetic value.
His quartz blue eyes study the composition;
the cast shadows, proportions, line, texture
and shapes his imagination into an image of
femininity which only he can capture.
His strong palm holds my head at an eighty degree angle
as chestnut curls dare to tease and entangle his
beautiful hands.
The rounded shoulder holds
slender limbs reaching out to
soft hands kissed so many times.
Five months of shaping and polishing,
until the wine glass breasts flow flawlessly
with the belly,
rounded muscles surfacing
above a cupable lower curve.
Chisel and hand as one he works diligently
to bore out a small and sensuous cove to
lead the eye to voluptuous hips.
With a swift move the putty knife glides down
into two columns.
He breathes deeply and pre?cedes to retrace his
sweep with careful grooves and curves
and slowly glosses with a milky smooth surface
that laps over the Achilles and between
tiny toes with soft beds.
I try not to meld into his grasp too soon,

try to avoid the temptation.
Until the final work is complete
I can not move from the pedestal on
which I have been positioned.
I can already hear the critics and patrons
standing closely
but not daring to touch,
commenting
in a hushed monotone,
"She's beautiful."

Brian Manning

A Photo Aspiring for Deliverance

Frozen forever and yearning
To ascend,
He repeatedly strives, in failing,
To touch his heaven.
The one hand reaching
Leaves the other asking in frustration:
Why; or maybe it's pleading
For an answer.

A majestic scene contemptibly wanders
Overhead- the blue and soft white entangled-
Making his stiff form an estranged
Guest to this vast, unfolding wonder.
Gazing upwards his narrow chin conceals,
as it juts outwards, his facial features.
But the position of his body reveals
The silhouette of a stone airplane

Which may
not be ready
For flight yet.

A Midget Speaking

Fletcher Holmes



Kara Byrne

Brandon, in afternoon light

“Set the alarm,” I say
at 5:15 p.m.,
our grogginess wants night,
but we will just sleep until dinner.
As you roll over to set your clock radio,
I turn from my spooned position facing the wall
and shiver slightly underneath the heavy comforters.
The light from the sun almost set,
but not quite gone,
filters just a little
through the small window
and onto your back.
Soft hues of grays and pure whites
paint a picture of shadows playing
on the muscles in your shoulder,
and I smile.
“I wish I could take a photograph,” I say,
“in black and white,
or maybe paint a portrait,”
but the light is too fast
to capture such perfection.
Because I can’t paint
with my film or oils,
the beauty and serenity of 5:15
skimming your body,
I must paint the fleeting casts
with
my simple words.

Jaspreet Chowdhary

Invisible Support

As my parents 25th anniversary approaches,
I think back to the *milni* ceremony
where two families fuse.

I return to the picture, pretend
I am the photographer; imagine your love,
propelling me forward.
The powerful embrace of two fathers
trasferred to their children.

The smile you share with Nana Ji
pierces my heart. His eyes
mirror your kindness and quiet determination.

The see my reflection in your glasses
in memories. I lost you before
I knew what I had. Your spirit came to me
through Nana Ji, making me a bowl of empathy,
rounded with desire to do good, filled with a warm and compassionate
mixture.

Now, as an adult, I
ache for the feel of hands
in the small of my back--pushing.

The void is filled partially
by the man who calls
and asks "How is my darling daughter?"

Jennifer Parde

Purrs (& Purpose)

She enters
With nobility and poise
And the room is her domain.
With one cursory glance
She sizes up the social atmosphere
and targets her prey.
There is no resistance to her scheme.
She coolly ambles your way
And presses her body against your own,
Brushing your leg, your arm, your chest,
And finally curling in your lap.
Your body envelops hers as
you touch her tenderly, repeatedly,
Sliding your hand down her back.
I wonder:
If my face was swallowed by hair,
My words reduced to rumbles and cries,
My walk restrained to all fours,
Would you greet me with the same embrace?

Jonathan Colson

The Weight of Water

I am lost at home-
Surrounded by familiar faces,
Voices heard while I breathed under
The weight of water in my mother's womb.

Walls, aged with watermarks,
Close in and drown me.

The house, filled with musty basement water,
Dwells on my chest.
I heave for air,
Trying to elude the weight in each familiar room,
Waiting for the day when I can surface,
To exist.

Lucas Hausler



Sheila Green

Alchemy

I want to stay.
'Cause I know it is a false dawn,
Short and shallow like the breathing
Of a drowning man,
And it will be dark again
Before it is light.

I want to stay,
Here,
Tracing lazy constellations
On the backs of your hands
Cassiopeia,
Orion,
Cygnus, the swan.
I am
Making sense out of nothing,
Forming patterns;
Like your breath
When you sleep.
Deep, soothing,
Far away.
I reach out to hold you through
Deneb,
Vega,
Altair.
Then suddenly you're as close as tomorrow
And it's time for me to go.

Kara Byrne

First and St. Stephen's

Suffocatingly silent, the stuffiness of the church
cushions my body as I slump into the seat,
staring at the candle hung how-did-they-light-it so high,
trying to separate from the overcast mourning.
While the chestnut box in the center of the aisle
attempts to distract me
red, hard leather books are opened to monotones
intended to comfort
with visions of
the glowing paradise beyond.
Looking to the creased face
of a man I don't know,
exploring the sorrowful eyes,
I try to uncover the comfort
so many claim to find,
but a ceramic face cracked by years
and yellowed, dog-eared pages
only evoke more questions of eternity and reality
while my thoughts are interrupted
by the sound of tolling bells...

Heather Dungan

Waiting

The days march along, one by one, like ants—
each one so similar to the others yet different; uniquely alike.
And all day I dream, like the little boy with the sarcastic tiger,
of dragons and dinosaurs and soaring spaceships and slinking spaghetti,
but escape exists only until the cord snaps back
and I am once again rising out of my imagination up to the bridge of
reality.

The rope that could hold this mare has not been woven,
but they do their best with cold iron bars
that are actually made out of stereometric isomers and ontologies of life.
Impatiently I am waiting for a day that may never come
when the tyrannosaur outside the window is real
and a magician tells me "Step down, Lady, you are free."

Angela Regas

Broken Sestina / DO-IT-YOURSELF DIVORCE CLASS
(*newspaper advertisement, The Baltimore City Paper*)

Only because I haven't cleaned my desk in weeks,
really, it's nice to have a newspaper to rest
my mug on, when I warm up tea at night. I just
don't have any reason to remove it. (*shrug*)

And

I can't stop wondering how many tables
haven't been cleaned, how many kitchens can't let go-

I can't get them out of my head, I can't let go.
I've been drinking tea twice a night, each night, for weeks!
And every night I spill my tea on the tables
of a hundred different kitchens. Tables that rest
on my shoulders when I sleep. You have wooden hands,
love. Quiet and smooth.

The ad reads, "...this class is just

for couples who have no property disputes..." Just
a basic, no-frills-divorce. A get-up-and-go!
And I... I wonder if I even possess hands
anymore, the heater won't work, broken for weeks.
(*The most important words-*) But I can't complain, the rest
of life goes on. Gets up and goes: waiting tables

or keeping the books. And the girls waiting tables
have cold hands, too, and (*are the ones we never-*) just
keep working. I can make some more tea, I can rest.
(*the ones we never say*) And I think I might go
away to my grandmother's, to stay a few weeks
in her kitchen, learn to cook again with my hands,

to hold warm dough with cinnamon coating my hands,
my hair, the way I did, with you on the table.
We were covered in dough, and the kitchen spent weeks
before I could clean. It seemed such a waste! We'd just
bake again.

But now I have betrayed my sex, I should go-
I shouldn't think of baking, kitchens, or the rest

of these "womanly" things, times have changed, and the rest
of life is open to me, to warm up my hands
and give me the words to say. But my words won't go,
no matter what I should say, my words like tables
that hold me up when I sleep. And really it's just
your hands beneath me, warm, holding me up for weeks

until I clear the table, my desk, after weeks
of silence. My hands are the words I don't say. Just
sleep, love. Rest, love.

Go to sleep.

Audrey Babkirk

self-portrait

cheetah dreams of fat gazelles.
cheetah, long and desert-coloured,
is unmatched at what she does.
blind beasts turn in infinite seconds,
and she smacks them into oblivion
with her paddy paw,
before the fire of comprehension
can snap across their brains.
cheetah hides her belly paunch,
plays in secret with her tail.
the marathon critters are not for her,
she burns hot, but too fast,
and the sun burns warm enough to lay in.
cheetah dreams of the last gazelle,
the mound of trembling meat so high
that she will never have to run again.

Heather Baron

She Doesn't Dance Anymore

“She doesn't dance anymore,”
He cries,
Pulling on his gnarled joints.
Her once lively golden curls
Seem dead and tired,
And as she walks they whisper
Of a better time long ago.
Her skin once glowed,
Stealing from the sun
Its precious brilliant rays.
But now her face is ashen,
Wrinkles mapping out years of unmentioned sorrows,
And where once makeup was thickly spread,
Only nature's harshness remains.
Her eyes are sad and pleading,
And as she walks they fall to the floor,
Imitating some tragic, ghostlike trance.
And as she lays down to rest,
She is as silent as an empty clockless room,
When at one time a silver voice
Bubbled from her throat,
As water from a spring.
And he cries,
But of her lost beauty he never speaks.
Simply because
She doesn't dance anymore
He cries,
Pulling on his gnarled joints.

Heather Baron

A Shattered Mirror

Timeless ribbons of thought
Form puddles beside her ear,
While careless drops of blood
Dance on the edges of elegant silk.
The frail, ghostlike fingers of a woman
Grasp the largest shard of a shattered mirror.
From somewhere deep inside the quaking looking glass,
A cry rings out
As a young girl stares back in horror.
This one added to her collection of pills and plastic bags,
The mirror that was her prison finally shattered,
And still she is not free.

Erika Hoffeld



Dan Mitro



Kristy Raffensberger

Olives

Olives have always disgusted me.
They sit in jars like little eyeballs
staring out while they drown in their own juice.
That horrid red pimento pupil
tries to hide inside the muted green shell.
Then, suddenly, it squirts out, like a slippery
eel, squirming around my mouth,
and slides ahead of my tongue, laughing,
until my teeth can finally capture it.
The bitter juice, which makes my mouth tense
and my throat gag, seems to linger for days,
spoilng whatever else I eat or drink.
Yet, every time I see some olives, I try one
and think, *maybe I will like it this time.*

Jonny Gamber and Brian Manning

Nuts and Cherries

In the beginning there was a lonesome Squirrel.
On the grounds that he wouldn't deceive her,
God descended from the tall treetops
And bestowed upon him beautiful Beaver.

GOD loved them very much,
And their every need HE would fulfill.
They could've stayed that way 4-ever,
If not for the abuse of their will.

They didn't make each other happy,
Because they were always finding fights
That made them hate each other,
And not observe one-another's rights.

Squirrel told Beaver he didn't like her,
With no "ifs" "ands" or "but(t)s".
This made Beaver extremely sad,
So she stole and hid his nuts.

You had all you'd ever want,
And before you played you won.
Now you've fucked it all up-
Just look at what you've done.

So the Squirrel stole Beaver's cherry
(Thus showing-off his smarts).
They had become really mean;
They had killed GOD in their hearts.

In revenge Beaver found Squirrel's stick
And chewed it to itty-bitty tiny bits.

Beaver had grown tired of feuding,
And thought GOD should settle these fits.

So they set-out to the Tree of Knowledge
To talk to the almighty OWL-
Each pretending to have pure intentions,
Although their souls were truly foul.

They strained to see the tipi-top
Because the tree was so very tall.
They could not make-out the mighty OWL,
And so didn't know if HE was there at all...

You had all you'd ever want,
But you needed to know who's the better one.
You're really fucked up in the head-
Just look at what you've done.

Silly Squirrel wanted OWL's attention,
So he screamed as loud as he could.
He thought that this would be enough;
He thought that this was good.

Then boastful Beaver opened-up
And proved that Squirrel was wrong.
She tried to reach omnipotent OWL
Though her beautiful Beaver song.

Not to be outdone-
Squirrel took off his socks,
And offered up to OWL
His shiny river rocks.

Then Beaver did something
That she was sure wouldn't fail:
She turned around and took a bite,
And offered OWL her tail.

You could have had everything,
But now you will have none.
Now you're both all fucked up-
Just look at what you've done.

Scared Squirrel had the answer:
OWLs love they should resist.
HE was only in their imaginations-
OWL doesn't even really exist.

Bright Beaver had the answer:
No OWL meant they were free!
So they picked-up all they could find,
And threw it at the tree.

Anyone can find the answer,
If they look in their head.
Squirrel and Beaver found the answer,
When a broken branch squished them dead.

And so Squirrel and Beaver
Were punished for their wicked ways.
And on the broken branch a sign said:
"Out to creation. Be back in 7 days."

So now you're dead,
But GOD still loves you a ton.
And although you fucked HIM over,
It's *your* fault with what you've become

Brian Manning

Tribute to a Fallen Warrior

While carefully traversing a sidewalk
Laden with the battle of rush hour,
I stepped upon a fallen warrior
(one of the types you'd find in Dundalk).

A fallen, worn, and wasting warrior
Who appeared to be from the Trojan tribe.
He was horribly hunched- resting upon his side.
Still upon his armor were the dried stains of war.

He was vulgarity to my sight, and yet to condemn
Went against my curiosity: What strange land had he seen?
And with whom had this deteriorating warrior been?
But then reality kicked in- he's just a condom.



Kira Hammond

Fletcher Holmes



Beef?

Jaspreet Chowdhary

Confessions of a Resident Assistant

What the fuck?
Seems to be my motto,
I tell my mother over the phone.
She asks me to question the impact being an RA
has taken on my perception, "oh hell"
I mutter as I distract myself by watching squirrels mate.

Outside my window, they remind me of another thing I lack: a good
mate.
After dealing with people who talk, but say nothing what I wouldn't give
for a good fuck.
Instant gratification: a bit of heaven in the middle of hell.
Then maybe "wham bam thank you man" could be my motto.
A smug smile and goofy giggle would be my best assets as an RA.
"I'm out enjoying the high of orgasmic ecstasy" would play on my phone.

which would be the shape of a lion. Imagine! A phone
that would roar, sending a scent to attract a good mate.
"I learn from the squirrels" would replace regulator as my RA
nickname. Speakers would blare "motherfucker say what. Shut your
bitch ass up
before I come and fuck
it up." answering the question what's your motto?
Or I could quote from the Lion King "nothing what's the motto with
you"—go to hell!

Late at night, I think I must have chosen the path which says "this way
to hell."
I slip into a state of self pity, but get yanked out of it by a ringing phone.
My supervisor once gave me an hour long dissertation about his life
motto.
Friends turn my life into fragments like sock without mates

If I'm so loved why do I always manage to feel fucked?
Being a masochist helps make me a great RA.

Feeling like shit, getting called a bitch are the fringe benefits of being an
RA.

Mary tells me it's like being dropped headfirst into hell
where the only way to relieve stress is to scream "Fuck, fuck me hard,
Jesus fuck"

No one answers as if your call is being received by a phone
off the hook, dangling as if waiting for a mate
to say "making you happy will be my motto."

"I will refuse to make you feel stupid—Inspiration is my motivating
motto.

As counseling, mounds of paperwork turn your last name into RA
And support from your supervisor raises question of worth I will become
your soulmate."

Together we will build a foundation of love with the plaque "all whiners
go to hell"

There will be no guilt for not answering the phone.
A smile will not be accompanied by an inner voice "shut up you dumb
fuck."

No phone call fills the void or brings satisfaction expected from being an
RA

I seek mates, but get reluctant comrades whose mottos
make me feel as though I am in a burning hell where we all sing "what
the fuck."

Getting up the Nerve

I hate lines. Whoever thought of that car commercial that says, "Stay between the lines, the lines are your friends," ought to be given a good swift kick in the head. Okay, so maybe that kind of line isn't the same type of line that I'm in, but nevertheless I hate lines. This one seems to be getting longer by the minute.

Isn't that cute, a care package with candy bars in it. Freshman. That's definitely got to be a freshman. Oh, yeah, chocolate is so good these days, Godiva and all that shit. Once I ate a raspberry cordial, and I was hooked. Every time I set foot in that blasted mall I've got to blow a couple dollars for one. Doesn't that sound stupid--\$30 a pound? You'd think they ought to be putting some really good liqueur in that stuff to make it so expensive. My best friend, Ethan, told me it was better than sex. Orgasmic he called it. Poor me, I have yet to experience anything near orgasmic, so I'm to assume chocolate is better than sex.

Not that that's a bad thing anyhow.

My ma has this theory going. She said that if there was extraterrestrial life, they came here for one reason and one reason alone: chocolate. This has got to be the only planet in the galaxy that has the stuff in such wonderfully refined varieties, available around every corner in any civilized area. There are all these bozos out there that say they were abducted and molested by aliens and their machinations. Blast it! They were just trying to prove that sex wasn't better than chocolate.

Ethan, now he had a sweet tooth. Loved chocolate more than he did his girlfriend. He was a nice guy, and it's really tough to say that about any man these days. He would drag me off grocery shopping and get the ingredients to make a chocolate cake for Courtney. We went grocery shopping a lot. I loved it because it was the only time we were alone together. We'd run around the whole store and stop when we found something funny. Like the time we found an herbal laxative tea called Smooth Move. What else could they name it? We laughed about that until we found the nonfat condensed milk. What's the point if it's nonfat? Might as well use water. It was so much fun I didn't even mind

paying the bill.

The first time he borrowed someone's car to go uptown to get groceries. Pity he didn't know the city. He came back to me and said that in Home Depot it's really hard to get milk, bread, or eggs, although there was a wonderful selection of power tools, saws, and lumber. Ethan's from Nome where there isn't that much to work with. But I understand that a place like Home Depot might, just might, sound like a place for groceries. I got to admit that I really had to try not to laugh when he came back frustrated, tired, and empty handed. He pointed at me and said, "Next time, I'm taking you with me grocery shopping."

Now this stunt I pulled, sounds like something he'd pull off and not even care about afterwards, consequences being something that he always seemed to escape anyhow. I hate that, the way he always got away with everything, when someone else is left holding the bag. He quit school mid-semester and took up painting. After I came to pick him up one day, one of his teachers was smoking outside, and we introduced ourselves and the whole bit, and somewhere in the conversation, she said that he was good. Coming from Madame What's-her-name, that was a good sign. Ethan only stayed in that program for a month before quitting. So typical of him. He just doesn't care most of the time. Being the inarticulate fool that I am, I let that stupid letter leave my hands....

What on earth comes with the length of the form that she's filling out up there? Either she's standing up there writing her will before mailing it to her cousin in Iceland via metered international mail, or she's trying to figure out how far she can send her package using rubles. God, I hate lines. I just wish this one would move faster.

I've got that sinking feeling again, the same one that I get when it's five minutes before an exam and I feel like the next hour of my life will be hell and probably purgatory after the exam results come back.

I could do something constructive in the time I'm waiting in line, but I don't have much to work with. One of my friends in high school used to collect things. I can't imagine how she never got caught. She was fond of those barrels that you see on the road. What do you call them? There's got to be a name for those stupid orange and white barrels with reflectors on top. Construction barrels?

I couldn't believe it when she showed me a picture of the nifty designs she made with them in her backyard, pyramids and huge smiley faces that she had to photograph from the roof of her house. I never collected anything that daring. The closest thing I had was my little day-book with quotes and quips that I would have used with that cheerleader in my homeroom that said I shopped at K-mart. The quotes were right in front of all those things that I would have said to the guys if they ever noticed to me.

I could really use one of those stupid barrels to on. My feet hurt. Maybe I shouldn't carry as many books.

I don't think it's all my books, just that \$108.98 book that I had to buy because it was a new edition the prof. wanted us to have. It's so ridiculous. I shouldn't have to be taking out small mortgages in order to buy books, not at the undergrad level, at least. It could be worse. It could have been a used complimentary copy of the book, sort of like the writing manual they sold me last year for \$12.95. I'm still ticked off about that. I wonder what the publishers would say to that.

Unh-unh. Nooo, you're not going to do what I think you're going to do, are you? Blast it! I'm not going to let this happen, not now.

"Pardon me. I believe that I was here first."

"Hmm?"

"Could you please get back in line?"

"I am in line."

"The line is that way, see? About three people behind me..."

Thank God she gave in. Ten more minutes in this line and I'll cry. Maybe I'll cry anyhow. What's going on up there? He's writing a check for a thirty-two cent stamp. God, I take back all the thanks I just gave you and I want you to know that I think you have a sick sense of humor. They ought to rename this post office after the Department of Motor Vehicles. Even though there are no motor vehicles involved, the lines are just as long.

Oh, good, I'm next!

Oh, no, what if they won't give it back? Then what am I going to do? What are the rules with mail anyhow? Well, maybe the mailman up there is nicer than the regular guy. Arthur would never help me out, since I think they intentionally hired him because his good point was that he hated students. If I wrote the return address on it, they might

get it back to me. What if I didn't?

Then my life is over, at least the one where I can go on respecting myself in the mornings. Ethan doesn't want the letter, I don't want him to have the letter. So we're in agreement, right? I should not have sent the letter because if he sets his eyes on it, he'll hate me, I'll hate me, and he'll never speak to me again.

Jeez, what the hell is that? I'm doing it again. This burns worse than kick-ass kung pao. I know I shouldn't bite my nails, so I bought this stupid fire-cinnamon-flavored nail polish so I'd stop. I'm nervous, this is understandable, and the nail polish is unforgiving. Just what I needed, it's not as if I wasn't sweating already.

E-mail. Maybe I should have resorted to e-mail...at least that has an unsend button.

Finally!

"May I help you?"

"Yes, I just mailed a letter and I need it back."

"What's your name?"

"Karen Mauer."

"I'll go look for it."

Pleasepleasepleaseplease let it have a return address on it! What's taking so long? I feel like such a spineless jellyfish. I do something spontaneous for once in my life, and I can't go through with it. How could I have been so brash? If he knows how I feel about him, it won't change anything except he'll write less than he does now. That's pretty harsh, considering he hasn't written me yet. This is so pathetic, I feel like I'm in high school again, mooning over Michael Karmanicki, who still hasn't the faintest idea of who I am.

"Did you put a return address on it?"

"-Wha?"

"Return address, did you put your return address on it?"

I knew it. My luck couldn't be that good.

"I don't remember, but if you'd show me the envelopes I could pick mine out."

Uh-oh, I know that look. He just looked right through me.

"Next."

"Wait, you don't understand, I need that letter back."

"I can't interfere with the delivery of the mail. That's a federal

offense. How would I know it's yours? I wouldn't. So I can't. -Next?"

"But...I-"

"-Next."

"Please?"

"NEXT!"

So that's it. I'm screwed. What do I do now? Wait until he gets it? Pray it gets lost in transit? I could call him. But then I'll have to tell him...everything. Shit. Do I have a choice? No.

What is the area code for Alaska, anyhow? Where did I leave his number? I scribbled it on a yellow sheet of paper and put it...ahhh.

Eww, here it is. I'm going to regret this.

One ring, please don't be there.

Two rings, breathe, just breathe.

Three, I might be off the hook.

Damn it. Almost.

"Hi. May I please speak to Ethan?"

"Hold on a minute, I'll go get him."

What do I say? What am I going to say? There's gong to be a letter in your mail? That's cheesy. I miss you? Stupid stupid stupid. Don't read the letter postmarked from the school? That won't work because then he'll ask what's in it, I won't tell him, and then he'll open it anyway. Is there any possibility that I can get around saying that I really care about him? I could hang up. But he'll still get the letter.

Forget caring about him, I love him and now it's time to tell him.

"Hello?" he answered.

Jessica Dolber

INSOMNIA

You ask what is wrong,
what images reside
inside the recesses of my mind,
taking over, taking hold
as the restless Demon smothers tranquility,
squelching its tangibility,
until its final flicker fades
like youth snuffed out
by a single breath,
erasing years gone by,
with each dying flame.

You think I ponder enigmatic questions,
with a never ending carousel of answers,
the thoughts and images spinning and turning
in time to my relentless restlessness,
and maybe you're right.

But you never stop to ponder
the simplicity of such complexities,
and how easy it would be to ward off the
Chaos
Terror
and Confusion
that permeate my mind
with the malicious laughter
of a victor who sees surrender.

And your mind will not accept
that at the core of life's unanswered mysteries,
amid the turbulent seas
of philosophic questions

of God,
religion,
life
and death,
of
misunderstood relationships,
of love
and abhorrence

Lies the simple fact
that I just want to be held.

Johnny Gamber

To My Nefarious Creator

No one answers me.
Crying and pleading and wondering and thrashing around on the floor
like a cockroach on its back and masturbating and sweating and
gasping for breath and cursing you, God, the only one who fails
to forsake me for something else

I stop.
I linger to catch my breath and to slow my racing heart
Covered in sweat and tears and semen and sin.

Sometimes I want to see her cry
To see her realize just who it is that I am that she takes for granted
The kind and compliant philosophy major
Who always finds a few thorns in his hirsute legs
And who is always displayed with his arms spread eagle
Like a butterfly in a collection--
Held captive forever and taken at the apex of beauty.

Instead I enjoy a brief hiatus from my life
And some heavy petting
With someone who is too terrified to touch me.
And I suspect that we human beings are only capable of a terminable
amount of love
Usually conditional and conditioned by hypengyophobia.
And I perceive that the object of my adoration
If human
Will forever toss me aside for other less devout concerns.
I fear that I will never manage to reap quite as much
As I somehow manage to sow.
God, give me a reason to believe otherwise.

I get up off the toilet and look into the mirror
And the necklaces around the battlefield of me are entangled:
The celtic unity knot from my lover tries to strangle the papal cross--
The symbol of a commitment that I never made--
It writhes around its foe
Like my lover's limbs around my body when it screams
Oh my God
But to little avail.
You are too proud to let her have me
Too stubborn to let me be free
I don't want to wear your robes
Your cotton shackles of poverty, obedience,
--and chastity;
I don't want to be a priest
But call me if I have to.

Too late--
She is leaving me for the altar of her academic god
A million miles away
I have been what I can be
And done what I can do for her already.
What do you think I could do for you?
Too late--
You already scared her away
With your crazy idea about me as a childless father.

And you.
I hope you're happy
To stand by and watch me lose the only thing I ever wanted
And almost had.
But none of this was ever about what I want.

I strip to an old pair of jean shorts
And rock myself to calm myself
Debating with myself whether or not I hear the phone ringing with
Your call--

And if
And how long until
I will answer it.

From Your Subjugated Puppet

Joseph Kranek

Her Vestige Warmth

As she had lain alone across my bed
And had delightfully conversed with me,
Each little word my passion fed,
So that, when I entered my sheets,
Though long before she had left me alone
The vestige warmth of her seraphic frame
Recalled that face my eyes have so well known,
Until onto my bed beside she came,
Her lengthwise lain, her face aglow to mine;
She slipped beneath these sheets with me ablaze,
And slipped her clothes and wrapped me like a vine,
And loved like goddess whose meek slave obeys.



Corinna Yost

Heather Dungan

To Spite the Sandman

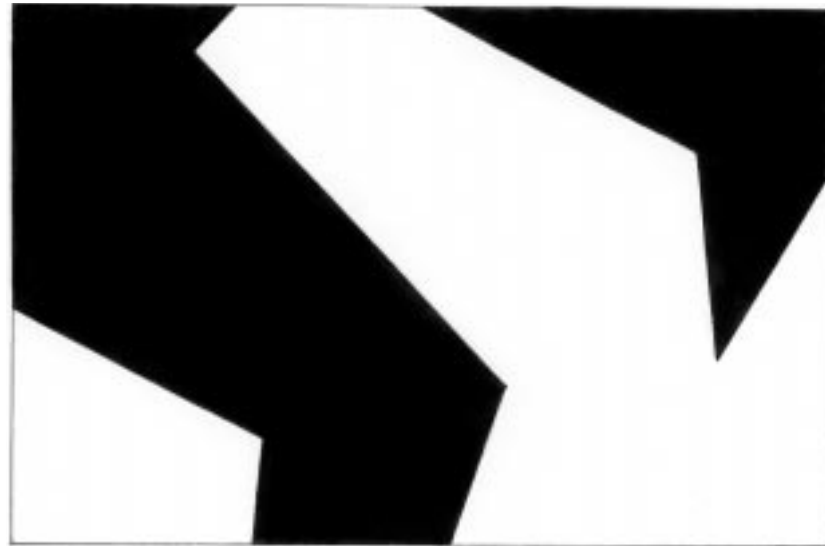
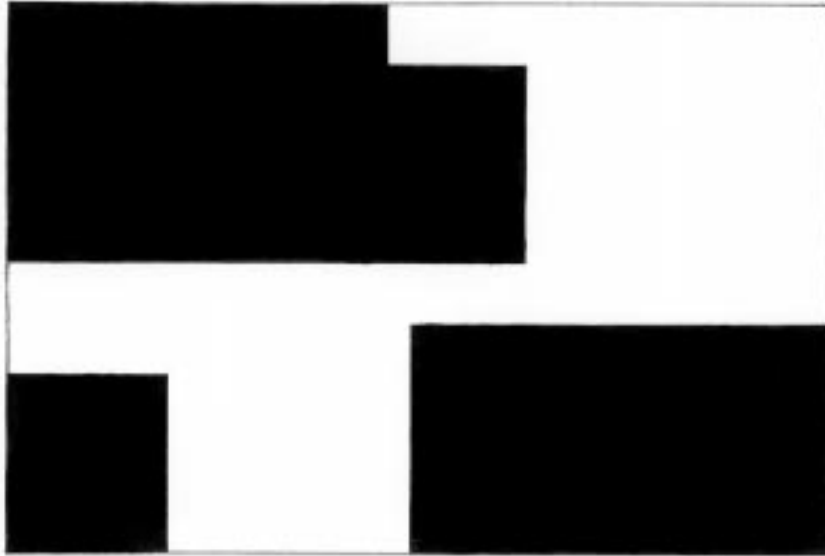
Sleep comes easy for some,
They just lie down and drift away.
I think I've never drifted.
Even cozy in bed, by mind tends to stay
focused on insurmountable problems
and other worries from the insignificant day.
The only way for me to find sleep
is to trick it into finding me.
I relax and breathe deep, willing for rest,
while behind my eyelids I see
a different scenario, made up each night,
play for my joy until sleep comes out of spite.

Jonathan Colson

Rats in my Shadow

I try to remember my father's hands
As my own scrape against the bark of a leafless tree,
Flittering midst the dampness of October indifference
I see the lines that ran along his fingers,
Engraved with toil and illness,
Cracked and dry with anger.
I strain to envision them,
But I can't see them whole,
I only revive texture, feel, movement-
I rub my hands together like he used to do,
Hoping to capture the image,
Then I waver in my concentration
As I notice how some leaves are running rampant,
Like rats in my shadow.

Susannah Nagle



Jonathan Colson

The Silence of the Falling Snow

"Come into the snow," I whisper,
In the silence that only comes with falling snow.
You walk to me slowly, cigarette in hand,
Smoke curling into slender serpents,
Twisting against the gelid air,
Then disappearing.

Your hazel eyes come closer,
You gently press your lips to mine
The warmth, the moistness of your mouth,
A slow penetration.
When you take your mouth away,
The winter returns
Leaving my wet lips ice.

Your bury your head in my neck,
Your hair, full of snow,
Falling like cold water,
Your breath a fog beneath my chin,
Your smell, your velvet skin,
A blanket, gossamer and perfect,
If only for a moment.

Soon you pull away,
Letting your cigarette fall to the ground,
Flame sizzling,
I whisper through the silence,

"Come inside with me."
The heat is a relief to our bodies,
Your legs wrap around my own,
Serpents twisting life from their prey.

The cigarette smoke clings to your hand,
Performing that love, that gentle murder.
When the quiet killing is over,
When you have gone,
I will be hollow, wanting more,
Listening to the silence of the falling snow.

Megary Sigler

Los Dientes en La Noche

As night clenches its jaw
around the cringing stars,
I have seen her squat at the feet of her *montañas*,
her brown skin bone-white against their darkness,

and lift the sable brush,
shaking with age,
between the crooked bones of her *manos*.

Los Dientes de nuestras abuelas.

The dry river beds
mapping her face
are deepened in the droughted moonlight
as she squats in the brittle sand
painting black upon black,
layer upon layer,
squinting onyx eyes at the unmoved
mountains.

Los Dientes de la Terra.

And far from the teeth in the Earth
the *joven* build their houses
facing the blinding city.

Megary Sigler

Pinecone and Peppers
(Studies for Relief)

How loving and reverent
we become

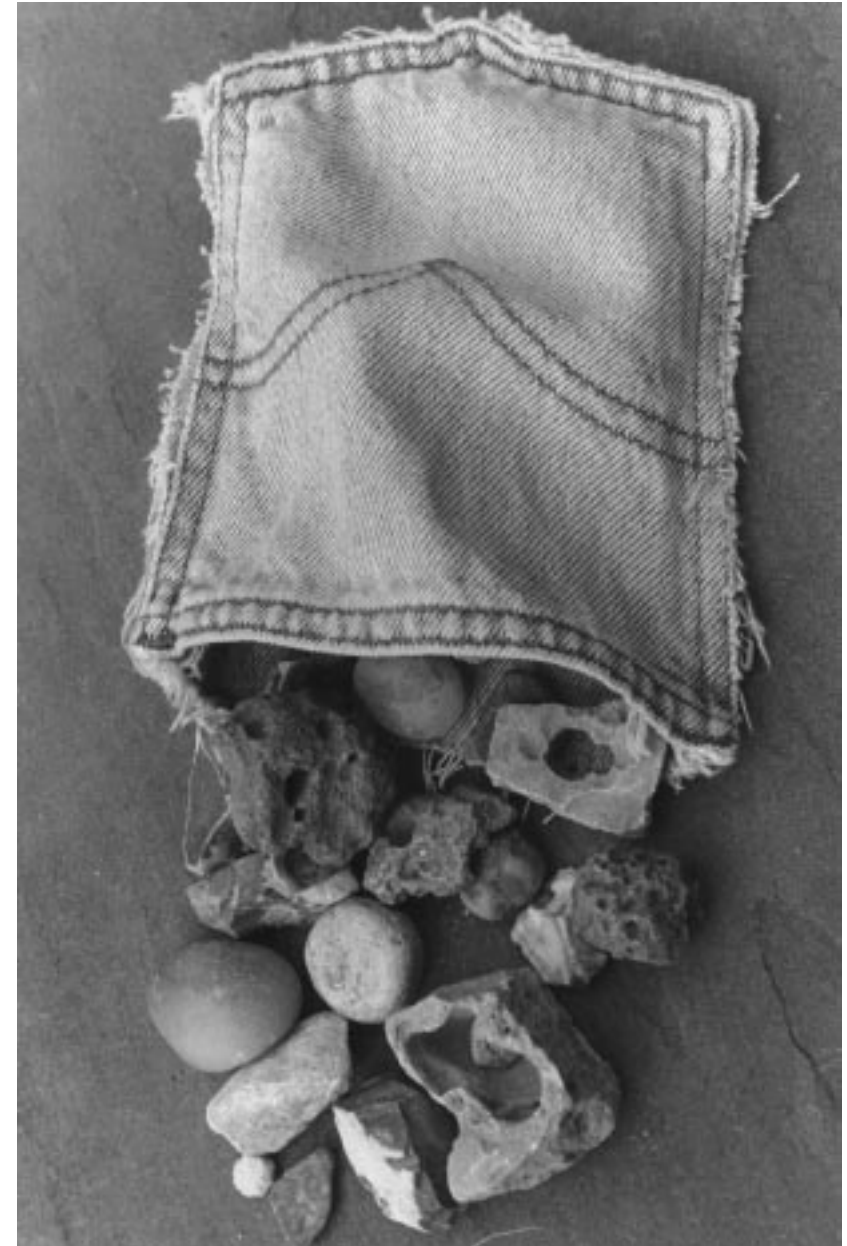
when we look, hold, caress,
inhale
an object.
We let these things pass through
our lips,
break under our feet,
pass in and out of our vision
unseen
every day.

But to see it with intimacy,
to touch it, draw it,

to speak carefully
of its smallest details

is to love it and dearly,
to touch it like a lover
or a mother.

Joshua Bernstein



Three Scenes From a Photograph

The giant hand gripped two small figures in its massive palm. One was a boy, the other a girl, and it was impossible to tell if they were human or if they were merely dolls. I examined the photograph more closely and wondered what this surreal image was supposed to represent in my own life. I stole a glance around the classroom. There were heads bent studiously over papers and fists clenched tightly around pens as the rest of the photography 100 class revealed "the first thing that came to mind when they looked at the image in the picture." I stretched in my seat, craning my head in a futile attempt to see what the girl next to me was writing. She had scrawled something about her father's hands. That was all I could see. Well, she obviously had something to write--a frame of reference from some significant event in her past. I had nothing. The photograph didn't remind me of anything from my own life.

I don't remember what my father's hands looked like. I have no idea how long his fingers were, or what shapes formed from the rivers of veins flowing to his wrist. I can't recall if erecting new buildings along the highways left dirt caked under his nails, and I don't know how long his lifeline was, or if he even had one. But sometimes I brush against the weeping willow tree out front, or let Michael run his hands over my bare skin and I think--no, I know--I can feel the gentle warmth of my father's palms soothing my hair or rubbing my back after one of their fights. I remember lying in bed at midnight, letting my tears splash over his fingers as he silently told me everything was going to be okay. His screaming, her cursing was nothing for me to worry about. I was supposed to be worrying about getting the best swing at recess and about learning to add and write. He didn't know that I had better things to add than meaningless numbers on a workbook page. I was adding up all the times she yelled at him to "Go to Hell" and all the times those giant hands slammed against the kitchen table, sending newspapers flying and left-over dessert plates crashing to the floor, along with the innocence I never regained. I added up the marks and dents where the walls had

been permanently scarred by his anger. I felt his soft palms trace circles on my sweaty back and wondered how the same hands could be so gentle and also capable of physically destroying an entire house. And so I was ashamed to look at them. I shut my eyes tight if they came too close and felt guilty about savoring their gentleness against my skin. And then sometime before my seventh birthday, the guilt ended because they stopped coming. I didn't know it then, but May 9, 1986 was the last time I would ever feel my father's skin against my own. It was the last time he would ever touch me. He disappeared and of course, his hands went with him.

Ellyn Myers had long, black hair that cascaded over my desk, engulfing each new word that I tried to concentrate on writing. I would listen to the smooth flow of pens against desks and fantasize about running my hands over Ellyn's neck and shoulders with the same graceful ease. I made black pen marks on my paper and tried to decide how closely the shade matched her hair. It was the first time I discovered that there's this 'thing' that resides in your chest. It lies dormant until your eyes fall on this one person that brings it to life and makes it jump around inside of you, stealing your air and making your voice ten octaves higher when you try to speak. I have never been more astonished at the sound of my own voice than when Ellyn Myers swung around in her seat and asked me if I had an extra pen. I wasn't prepared. I was used to staring at the back of her head, examining its shape, the way it sat proudly on top of her neck, possessing all the knowledge I ever needed to know. I was used to stroking her hair with my eyes and examining the contrast of its darkness with the porcelain whiteness of her skin. It was like a perfect black and white still that you can't believe actually represents anything close to reality. And yet there she was, her deep, green eyes actually looking at me, burning my pores into monstrous craters that monopolized my face. And she wanted to use something that my hands had touched. My pen. Her hands would be in the same place, her fingers gripping the same spots. Something inside of me was greatly out of whack. Everything that used to be in my chest had plummeted to my stomach and some foreign object was pounding in my ears.

"A pen?" I cringed at the unfamiliar cartoon voice that escaped my lips.

"Yeah-do you have an extra one? Mine ran out of ink"

Her voice was melodic; every word was the right pitch, every syllable flowed into the next.

I knew I didn't have another pen; I had borrowed this one. But I couldn't tell her that. "Here. Take mine."

"Don't you need it?"

"No."

"No?"

"I-I'm done."

"Oh-" She scrunched her eyebrows and cocked her head. "Okay. Thanks."

"You're welcome."

She was still eyeing me. She didn't want to turn around. She was hypnotized by the intensity of my gaze.

"Well-um-can I have it?"

"Have what?" I would have reached into the sky, pulled down the sun and handed it to her if she'd asked.

"The pen. You said you were done with it."

"Oh...OH!" I realized my grip on the pen had tightened and my knuckles were whitening with each wonderful, agonizing moment. The pounding in my ears shot to my temples. "I'm sorry. Here." My hand jutted toward her at an inhuman angle and the point of the pen jabbed her in the shoulder. "Oh-oh God, I'm so sorry. Are you okay? Is there anything I can do?" I wanted to cry. Either that or crawl under my desk and wait for it to collapse on top of me and crush the embarrassment from my tormented body.

"I'm okay. Really, I'm fine." She took the fallen pen from the floor, turned around in her seat, letting her hair fall over my desk again. I sat there. I sat there for the rest of the class, wondering what would happen if I just reached out and touched her hair-very lightly. She might not even notice, and then I could stop wondering. But I couldn't. I'd already confused her and stabbed her. I couldn't touch her. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't even write my damn paper because I didn't have a pen. It was the only paper I've ever failed.

I stared vacantly at the black and white magazine photograph in front of me. This wasn't what I had thought a 100 level photography

college class would be like. I had imagined learning the basics of picture taking--then going out with a camera and actually taking some shots. I had never imagined that the entire class would have to look at the same photograph and write the first thing that came to mind. That was creative writing, not photography, and my mind was as blank as it had been a half hour earlier. Nobody's hands had ever struck me as special in any way, and the only thing I've ever been completely captivated and enraptured by is photography itself. That was what the picture reminded me of--the fact that I had wanted to be the world's greatest photographer since the time I opened my first Fischer-Price camera under the Christmas tree fourteen years ago. I'd walked around the house with that camera snapping the bright orange button at everything I saw. I tried lying under the dining room table so I could get shots from the dog's view and I tried climbing on chairs so I could get shots of the same things from my father's view. I ignored the pre-set pictures of zoo animals and playing children that were already implanted in the camera and imagined the toy was actually registering the shots that I took myself.

I got my first real camera for my seventh birthday and spent all of my birthday money on film. I took pictures of everything I could, and actually sat at the kitchen table watching the clock's hands creep forward after my father brought my film to the hour developing center around the corner.

So, I guess that's it. Makes sense that a photograph would remind you of photography.

Brian Manning

A Soul within the Mechanics

Did you hear? God
Is an assembly line:
Creating many things,
But specializing in
Making mechanical men.

Can't you see? You're
A manufactured facsimile
Following procedures as
Programmed; going from A
To B in a monotonous routine.

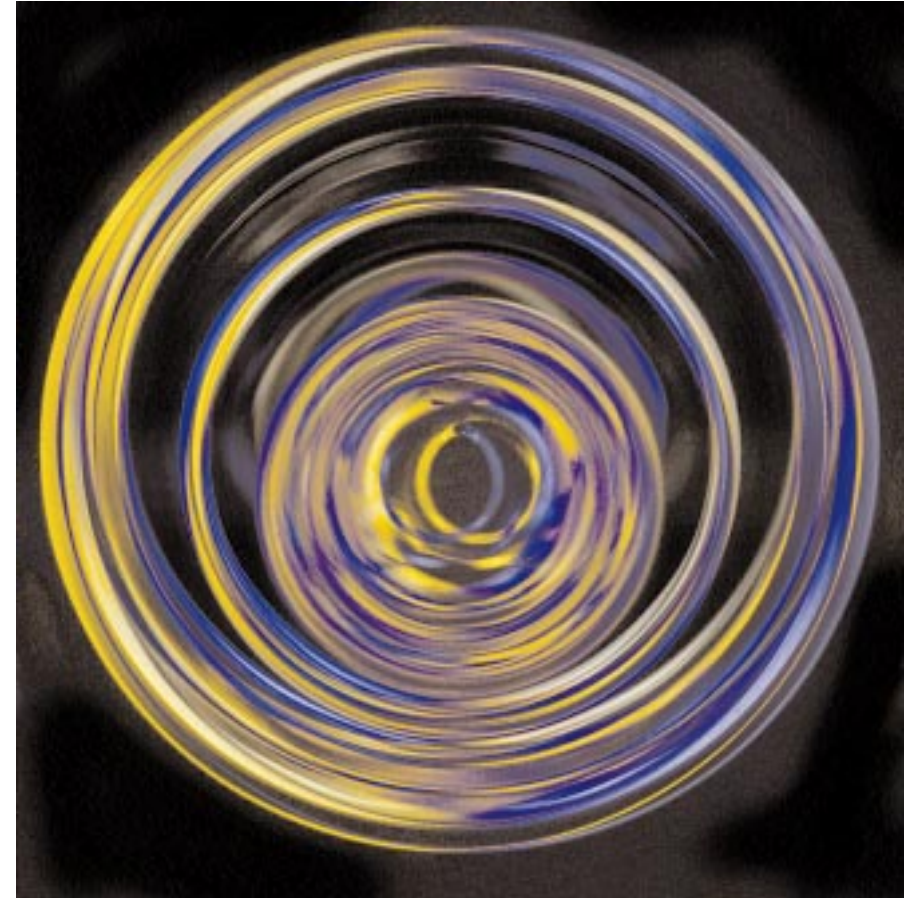
You're a field of blooming
Flowers- separately unique,
But homogeneous- and all ending
In the same way of decay;
Just as programmed,

So please do not question existence.
Your purpose is to function,
Nothing more. Do refrigerators
Question "why"? (They'd be
Disappointed in the answer)

March on, refrigerator-babies,
For there is a soul within
My mechanics. A selected few,
Those in my world, have them
Too. Memories and experience

Intoxicate our lives.
As for you: Walk by me
As programmed. Honk at me.
You're machinery. Like flowers-
Merely backdrop to my portrait of me.

Dan Mitro



Elizabeth Barbush



Angela Regas

For Protection Against Faeries: a List

Bread

Running water

Clothes turned inside out

The insides of faeries
are made of the same smooth, weightless silk
as the outsides. Peach and lavender.
The insides of people are dusty
with misplaced love affairs
and undigested anger.
Quirks that collect over the years,
seeping out through our pores
and coating the insides of our clothes.

The Bible

Iron

Daisy chains

A crucifix or cross

Faeries do not have souls. Their bodies are hollow
where the soul might otherwise reside. The intimate places.
Their hands, their eyes, the soft pulse
at the bottom of their throats,
are all hollow.

It is not a fear of God that keeps the faerie away,
but a fear of human faith.

Faith strong enough to fill them
until they are crushed by their own weight.

Stones with holes

A twig of broom

Ancient churchyard mold

Flax on the floor

Once, seven swans became seven men
as their sister pulled seven shirts of raw flax
over their feathers. The flax caught
in their skins, pulling away their down and faerie spells.
Flax will pierce through the delights
and illusions that dust the tracks of faeries
and shine in the eyes of sleepwalkers. Flax will pierce
through the smiles and gestures that cover the paths
of the people these manners protect.

Shoes placed with toes pointing away from the bed

A sock under the bed

A knife under the pillow

Also good for protection against robbers, murderers
and in-laws.

St. Johns Wort

Bells

Rowan and red thread

Sometimes mothers will send their children out
with red ribbons tied around their chests.
The ribbons bind the children's ribs
close to their hearts, for the hearts of children
are wild, and prone to wander.
Will-o-the-wisps are the flying hearts of children
that escaped these cages of ribbon and bone.
They float along the edge of your eyes,
Hoping to tempt your heart away
so they may steal your body and live again.

Salt

Holy prayers

Horseshoes

Jennifer Parde

Painting a Sunday Dawn

She wondered if the night was still white
under its layers of bruised blue-black skin.
Her hands picked at stars as though chicken pox scars,
aching for raw light to seep out from in.

She bought a new easel, the tint of fresh cream,
so that black could be rainbow and skin could be dream
--then painted a sunrise with passion-fruit hue
and prayed acid air not corrode it to blue.

Janine Levin

Private Thoughts on Public Paper

My ego is starving.
Overfed, but underweight.
A compliment is a candy,
that fattens up my brain.

All I want is a box
of chocolate approval, and
a fat cat ego to pet.

To vomit sorrow and low self-esteem
like draining my stomach of
insults shoved down my throat.
My indecision works full time.
Thoughts take turn at the microphone.
it's what makes life so hard, and hypocrisy
so easy.

it's true. i want more often, than i need.
wanting to help and helping, are two different
things.

i preach, but do nothing.
i convict, and i commit.
i lie, and lie about it.

it's true.

this is me.
a stick figure drawing.
a semen pencil on a canvas egg,
and the artist is blind.
this is me, imperfection
at its best. neither gold nor twine,
neither donation or crime.
i simply am.

it's true.

Mei-Ling Johnson

What do you see in your coffee cup?

the leftover remains of your conversation?
a few drops of rich brown Java
staining the bottom as they dry
do you see the longing for another cup?
Among the
coffee grounds,
undissolved sugar,
and the mocha syrup sticking to the bottom
what do you see?
-A wish
a thought
a word you should have spoken
but didn't
a regret
a hope?
Or is it only your reflection
staring back at you
from your beverage?

Charlotte Hays-Gatton



Christopher Phillips

Untitled #49

I'd like to make you my North Star
shining bright and clear
over the land, and
run away
only to be guided
by your reflection
in my eye

Jessica Dolber

OCD

Each graphite tip points toward Heaven
where disarray is bliss
and a sweater draped like a listless child
doesn't paralyze the mind,
into a night of tormented unrest,
of twisting and thrashing
as a hand brushes the contaminated wall of death
and she rises, staggers
to wash the diseased filth,
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times.
Five times. (abcde) Five times. (abcde) Five times. (abcde)

ABCDE for the Easter eggs
with perfectly painted pin stripes
like vertical blinds
over a sparse oak dresser
with clamped drawers, safely shut
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times.
Five times. (fghij) Five times. (fghij) Five times. (fghij)

FGHIJ for jail cell of a mind
trapping images,
locking thoughts
cycling them
on the carousel from Hell
there the haunting music never stops
around and around
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times...
Five times... (klmno) Five times... (klmno) Five times... (klmno)

KLMNO for Organic Chemistry
with its perfectly balanced formulas

and perfectly highlighted pages,
each word analyzed and scrutinized
to keep Death from finding everyone she ever loved
every letter must be read
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times...
Five times (pqrst) Five times (pqrst) Five times (pqrst)

PQRST for tears of terror
and exhaustion
as they gaze upon
the rows
and stacks
and columns,
the pillars of mental cohesion
and destruction,
the strength of her weakness
that she counts
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times...
Five times (uvwxy) Five times (uvwxy) Five times (uvwxy)

UVWXY for yearning
to feel normal
amid the chaos of normalcy,
worse with each new mingling color
of each new threatening sunrise
that comes again and again..
One, Two, Three, Four, Five times...
Five times... Five times... Five times...

with no foreseeable end

Mei-Ling Johnson

Mediocrity

A hellish fun house mirror
Stares back and accuses me
Of my deepest fear
Of succumbing to the one thing
The thing that I have sworn against
Mediocrity

We all fall from mother's wombs
The same way
Fragile, wet, naked.

But somewhere between birth and death
Fate chooses,
Or perhaps we choose
To be different
Sought after
Valuable.

Cursed to see the genius all around me
To cling desperately to their coattails
Of all the rising stars beside me
Around me
Then lose my grasp as they soar above me
I have debased myself in this act
Why can I see it
Touch it
And never hold it for myself?

Janine Levin

Binary

on and off
ones and zeros
yes or no
true or false
like my computer
you ask if I believe in God

my answer can not be understood
by our binary culture
but rather through the examination
of a single blade of grass

so durable under my feet
yet fragile in my hand
so perfectly random
within such narrow parameters

how is this possible?
I am neither guilty nor innocent
right or wrong
happy or sad
republican or democrat

I am simply wondering why
you are trying to nail
truth and beauty down to a "t"
as if that would help

Jonathan Colson

Winter

The winter is falling
quickly and quietly,
with a terrifying fierceness
that would kill your banana trees-
like a hatchet;
if they were here.

Black ice
and slow currents
seep into my veins,
like syrup down the maple bark
that survives the gelid brutality;

but your orange groves
would cease to bloom-
helpless and confused,
caving into December's demands,
if they were here.

Emma Ruthloff



Cover Art: DaVinci, Leonardo. *Dissection of the Principle Organs of a Woman*. 47 x 32.8 cm. Pen and ink and wash over black chalk. c.1510