

# TRILLIUM



2008

# TRILLIUM 2008



THOMAS GLASER

## TRILLIUM 2008

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# DEDICATION

This issue of *Trillium* is dedicated to the devoted staff of the Literature department, which has always worked hard to foster a writing community at Ramapo College. A specific thank you is in order for Professor Kathleen Shannon, who took on *Trillium* when it was in need. And, to Professor James Hoch, for bringing words to our campus and encouraging creativity.



BRIAN REILLY

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THOMAS GLASER

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# UNWRITTEN II

CANDACE BARNES

A new year, a new pen,  
 A new pad of paper  
 Before me. I pause.  
 The blank sheet of paper  
 Is fertile; is pregnant  
 With possibility.  
 What shall I write?  
 An epic poem perhaps.  
 Perhaps a villanelle.  
 Or shall I launch myself  
 Into a brand new form:  
 Terza rima or a pantoum?  
 Why must it be a poem?  
 A play – now that's the thing!  
 A drama in three acts;  
 A tragedy or a farce.  
 No. A novel suits I think.  
 A mystery ... or a romance.  
 The story of my life  
 Is begging to be told.  
 Short story or an essay  
 On the rights of man.  
 A travelogue, or a memoir;  
 A personal narrative;  
 Maybe a children's book:  
 A fantasy of fairies  
 Of ogres and pirates bold.  
 Still I sit with pen in hand,  
 A fever burns inside me.  
 Blank paper fraught with choices.  
 Pristine white,

It invites me to write  
 A word ...  
 A thought ...  
 A phrase.  
 A biography of some great man  
 Or a history of the Yucatan.  
 Or of prophecies of old.  
 A book of stories of ancient lands;  
 Perhaps a detective novel.  
 A tale of terror; or a diet book.  
 I am dazed, paralyzed.  
 I cannot write a word  
 An hour has passed  
 And still the paper virgin lies.  
 Nothing comes, or too much.  
 I cannot put just anything down.  
 It must be astounding.  
 This is the beginning  
 Of a new year,  
 With a new pad, and a new pen.  
 The work must be equally new.  
 The first word must be just right.  
 Not just any word will do.  
 I think I'll have a cup of tea  
 And see if something comes to me.  
 For now the paper I'll put away.  
 The pen return to my desk.  
 The pressure is too great.  
 I cannot write a word.  
 And so my great work remains  
 Unwritten.

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EMMALYN RAYNOR



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# POSTPARTUM

COREY WILLIAMS

A mother sits in the hospital room  
thinking that she cannot bear it:  
another child, dying—  
eyes staring back at her  
like vacant mirrors, longing  
to touch what took her nine months  
to make. Breasts heavy with  
milk no lips will taste.  
She knows what must be done:  
Call friends and family—  
whisper that another has slipped  
through her fingers and she is  
back at the beginning—  
Nothing could be done, the doctor says,  
The child couldn't be saved.  
But where will he be when she gathers  
the receiving blankets, bottles, and bibs  
and carefully packs them away?

# RAFAEL HOUSE

## MICHELLE PRECOUR

In Rafael House we shared  
our privacy guarded  
by Orthodox Christians.  
I don't remember church,  
maybe we didn't need to be practicing  
Christians to find shelter there.  
They gave me a singing teddy bear  
at our welcoming—  
it didn't sing.  
It was rough, the late eighties,  
the AIDS scare hit...  
home, if we had one.  
Mom and Dad. The only son  
saved by a year.  
I think the Christians prayed  
for him. I was too young  
to pray. I didn't have faith, want faith.  
I wanted a dining room,

one table, no benches—  
a father, not a man who infected our lives  
with heroin and prison—  
a mother with a high T-cell count  
who only took vitamins, not a buffet  
of what doctors said would  
cure her ... if it didn't kill her  
first. The un-singing teddy bear was lost.  
Dad,  
I never thought you a father.  
My wedding at Rafael House if it still  
stands...  
Mom,  
I'd like you to make it there.  
Ask God  
for a miracle;  
we've never spoken.



JALAL ZAHR

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ROB GAMER

# BIRTH

## ANNA LATOURETTE

In a bedroom—  
the color of guilt and silence  
heat grew, and began to creep  
around the edge of the bed.

It was as if Summer pulled gravity  
from the center of the earth—  
laid it like a thick, magnetic fever  
over wilting air.

She was tied, weightless, to the TV—  
its light soaked into her eyes and  
the damp pores of her skin—disturbed  
her with a desire for vacancy.

She took one, then two. They  
were bitter in her mouth—  
round, white stepping stones,  
easing her down a chasm.

Then took three, and four,  
wondering how blind and deaf  
she could become—in the limpness,  
how close to fetal she was.

She had not known that below  
the floor of sleep, there was this:  
Down inside herself, sinking,  
embryonic—dark sweat and stillness.

Flowered bathroom rug—  
thrown against the toilet, she could  
only hear the sound of  
her body's rejection.

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# BAPTISMAL IN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

COREY WILLIAMS

I sat in front of the television screen maneuvering the gorilla as best as I could. Jump. Grab the bananas. Kill the Kremlings.

"Finish getting ready for church. Now!"

The high-pitched screams from my grandmother made this difficult, but for any serious gamer, particularly a ten-year-old, nothing gets in the way of entertainment, not even Sunday-morning sermon. All I needed to do was make it to the next save point and I would turn it off. However, as quickly as I made my resolution, my grandmother made her way up the stairs and to my bedroom door.

"Turn it off. Now! And finish getting ready."

"I don't want to go to church. Can't I just stay home?"

"You must not understand English. Turn the game off and put your dress pants on while I iron your shirt."

By this point, I was aggravated. Does this woman know how serious this is?

"C'mon... please?"

"No." And just as quickly as she said no, I saw her arm reach over my head and turn off the Super Nintendo. Did she really just do that? I wasn't particularly surprised that she turned it off as I was that she actually knew how to turn it off.

"Now, like I said, finish getting ready."

I was pissed. Not only did I have to beat those levels all over again, but I also had to sit through one of those long, drawn-out sermons that I'd probably heard already. Damn.

"By the way, I'm keeping this from you. You don't like to listen."

So, like any self-respecting videogamer, I took the blow in stride and finished getting ready to go to church.

---

What the pastor said that morning, I'm not quite sure. All I did that morning was constantly check my Mickey Mouse watch hoping that services would soon come to an end and I would be one step closer to getting away from there. My legs were restless. My desire to indulge in banana-lovin' debauchery was insatiable. It was like I was going through withdrawal, and it had only been two hours. After a slight pause, the pastor began to speak.

"And if there's anyone here this morning who feels they are ready to have a better relationship

with the Lord," Pastor Taylor said, "let them come forward now and accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ."

That's when it happened. The idea. If I had been animated, the all-too-familiar light bulb would have floated above my head. If I walk down that aisle, I can get back my Super Nintendo easily. I stood up, and without thinking it out any further, walked towards the pastor. The notes of the organ floated through the air as I made my way down the aisle. I can't believe I'm doing this.

If I ever did anything deserving of being banished to the deepest levels of hell, this was definitely it. Had I really chosen potential fire and brimstone for the familiar delights of a fun-loving, chest-pounding bananaphile named Donkey Kong? I guess I shouldn't forget to say hello to Judas when I get there.

I stood there in front of the congregation as a new man. Although nothing had really changed, I somehow felt different. It wasn't that I felt like I was some kind of blasphemous traitor, but standing there in front of all those people gave me a new perspective. In my heart, I knew that this was something I wanted to do, but I needed some kind of catalyst. Finding God, getting back on my grandmother's good side, and having my Super Nintendo back—seriously, what more could you ask for? Miraculously, I had achieved all three just by choosing to stand up and walk.

The pastor welcomed us and the deacons came and shook all of the hands of those who had decided to bring Christ into their lives that morning. The organ continued to play in the background as the pastor said the final words of his sermon.

I did it. It's finally over.

I was happy to finally arrive back at home. I walked inside and immediately headed upstairs to change out of my clothes. I was just finished putting on more comfortable clothes when my grandmother walked into my room.

"Ya know, I'm proud of you."

"Thanks."

"I'm going to start making dinner." She headed towards her room to change out of her church clothes and loudly shuffled through one of her dresser drawers and returned to my room.

"Here. You deserve it." In her hands was my prized Super Nintendo. Score. And just like that, I had gotten what I wanted.

I eventually ended up beating the game. I saved Donkey Kong's banana horde and beat the evil reptilian Kremloins. I was baptized a week or two later and officially had become a member of the church. I even got a box of tithing envelopes with my name on it and a new leather Bible. Who knew that joining the church had its perks? I grew out of Donkey Kong, and three years later found myself not even going to church any more. I still look back at what I did with some level of shame. Exit youthful innocence, enter eternal damnation. Fucking gorilla.

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# SPAGHETTI

F. M. STRINGER

I would lie in leaf piles  
until my mother called me,  
dirty from an afternoon  
    of tossing footballs to myself  
    and dodging imaginary defenders  
        just a step too slow to catch me.

I was a ten-year-old Steve Young  
    and Jerry Rice—  
        at the same time.

Inside I would scrape the grit  
from underneath my fingernails,  
    comb my hair,  
        wash my face—  
Ten years old,  
    short and pale and overweight.

So when my father asked me  
    what I wanted to be  
        I told him a lawyer, an author  
            the [fucking] President.

He powdered his meatball with parmesan,  
my mother sipped at her wine  
    and I twirled noodles around my plate.



DAN SAVINO



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# OUR HOUSE ON LAKE PROVIDENCE

JESSICA DUTSCHMANN

I.

After the morning vodka melts through us  
and we sit on the couch stagnant,

television on but  
everything's blurry.

I remember when our sight  
was crisp and clean

when we ran here  
and I carried you over this house's  
threshold

when there were flowers—



TRACY LANZILOTTI

II.

before we lost ourselves  
before the house  
and the money

and the money  
disappearing  
into bottles and bags  
and endless electronic nothings

before your face was carved  
by amphetamine and whiskey before  
I tore down the kitchen curtains  
before I slapped you  
before we ran to this place

before they were looking for us  
before this horrible shaking  
there was life here before we chased it away

IV.

Kids ride by: hair greased  
to their heads in this sticky  
September. They don't stare,  
we do. Maybe by October  
we'll go outside again.

III.

We are messes of purple and yellow,  
moles above ground  
bleached white under no sun.

We shudder when cars drive by the house  
and close the drapes.

Our eyes catch water when they can.

We grab at wisps of life when we see them:

The crows on the lawn  
eat the seeds the flowers dropped,  
and your belly swells with nothing  
because you are so full of medicine.

V.

We fuck with the desperation  
of a house

that leaks rotten water  
onto the patio and staircase  
kicking over dressers  
breaking old photographs  
but nothing ever changes.

I tell you that I love you  
but can't care if you believe it.

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# MARRIAGE (SOME YEARS LATER)

COREY WILLIAMS

There is nothing I hate  
More than the sight of you—

The way the food takes  
haven in the corners of

your mouth, while I sit  
across from you indulging

myself in the obligatory  
morning newspaper.

Blithely, you lift the  
spoon to your mouth,

look me square in the eye,  
hesitate, and helplessly,

I stare back. Watching  
as you chew—teeth gnashing,

grunting as if some wild  
boar had snuck beneath

the kitchen table. You run  
the back of your hand against

your lips, rise, and kiss me  
good-bye. And that silence—

that silence alone, is what  
has kept me here all these years.



TRACY LANZILOTTI

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# POEM ABOUT STILLNESS

MORIAH COHEN

I'm not sure why warmth equates  
safety, warmth of the body lying  
in bed, covered and sweaty.  
I suppose it dates to infancy,  
swaddled in the blanket  
my grandmother crocheted. No, further  
back, swimming in utero,  
sheltered by a mother who prayed  
and ate and made love. I'm not sure,  
but this morning, I sat on the porch  
watching cars race in December  
haste, finished my coffee and climbed back  
into bed, where you lay still.  
You gave me the body-warmed spot.  
I nestled into your chest.  
Your shell radiated sweat and love  
under hours of blankets.  
I became the child, crawling  
into bed with her parents  
after the quake of a nightmare, and had  
to stop myself from imposing  
meaning on the moment and on you,  
from wishing an instant to be  
ever long in December haste;  
Nothing can be more than one  
moment in a body-warmed spot.

# FIFTH BIRTHDAY

RENEE THOMAS

She looks for you  
In the smile reflecting back at her  
You're her own flesh and blood  
And yet she cannot picture your face

It's torn from the pages of memories  
Only a few holding you in their ink  
But she hasn't let go yet  
She still waits beside the phone  
On every single birthday  
Hoping for a call from the one man  
That left her behind

She sat on that curb, for hours  
Smile fading with each passing minute  
Cutting her fragile heart  
As tires screeched passed her  
Yet they were not yours

You were her birthday magician that year  
And your disappearing act worked  
She never once questioned it  
And could never remember  
The words to the reappearing spell

So inside this sixteen-year-old  
Lives a child on a curb  
Reaching at the mirror  
Dissecting herself, for a small piece of you  
That hides beneath, the unlocked past  
Of a man, who left on her fifth birthday.

Congratulations, Daddy.  
You've made every year special  
Because without you  
She has the memory of a father  
That she can't even remember.

For JL

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ROB GAMER

# POOR FOLKS' CHRISTMAS

MICHELLE PRECOUR

Dirt poor, drifting states  
to find a home – November  
dimmed your eyes.  
Alone on snow days  
we wrote Christmas lists:  
bikes,  
dolls,  
extravagances  
of eight-year-old life.

Nights of spaghetti dinners –  
we didn't understand  
why. You sacrificed,  
then woke us at five  
to watch us stumble  
into a kitchen littered  
with gifts you couldn't afford.  
I believed in Santa  
longer than any child should.



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# TETHERBALL

F. M. STRINGER

Just a yellow ball on a length of cord  
metal pole, concrete, and a dozen origami

hands—before acne,  
valentines and roller skates.

Before we learned that when  
our parents told us we could be anything  
they were lying.

Before wasted afternoons  
thinking about sun and stars—  
how we never see them right. Just

a yellow ball, length of cord—  
arc and eclipse.



ROB GAMER

# MISSING SYLLABLE

BRIAN SCHAAB

I realize I'm lucky to be in love  
with poetry in a college cafeteria  
as I drink my coffee, which seems  
to be a rule for poetry readers,  
and watch others, tight-mouthed  
and over-tired, beg their eyes to remember  
what's printed in their textbooks, though I can't  
imagine reciting the table of elements  
during a too long train ride. I'm also finding  
that drinking wine, or just  
writing about wine, is a rule for poets—  
a strong trend at the very least.  
Going to Paris helps too. I don't think  
I'll do much of either of those,  
which concerns me, makes me think  
I'm doing it half-assed and wrong,  
but I smile because this morning  
during winter's first snow I pictured  
Frost and a horse, and searched for  
a syllable just out of reach,  
instead of a car buried under hydrogen  
and oxygen in solid form to be shoveled.

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# IT'S ONLY A GAME OF WAR

THOMAS GLASER

Your mind is numb,  
and your will is weak,  
Thoughts fill your head  
that you dare not speak.

Everything seems strange,  
but nothing is right.  
Your eyes are so blind  
you can't see the light.

So you listen to leaders  
who lie and deceive,  
And think that you're right  
in what you believe.

You think there is honor  
and pride in a war,  
You think it's a game  
and just nothing more.

They say you won't lose.  
They promise you'll win.  
They assure that your  
actions aren't any sin.

So they throw you a gun,  
and tell you to kill,  
They order your actions  
and rob your own will.

So you pray to your god,  
to help kill your foe.  
Though there is something  
you just do not know.

While you were praying,  
at the foot of your bed,  
Your foe asked your god to  
strike you down dead.



ROB GAMER

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# THE ART OF SELF DESTRUCTION

COREY WILLIAMS

Self destruction begins  
with doubt, no doubt—

Let it build to pressures  
that form diamonds:

Let it build, build  
until the terrors begin  
to lurk beneath the skin—

The bruises act as mementos,  
valiant medals of martyrdom.

Let it build, build,  
taut enough to snap bone  
or break a man.

Let it build, build  
until dreams become distant memories,  
desires of a life unlived.

Doubt is a sweet marauder—  
he steals and steals away

leaving you with just enough  
to wish that he had taken it all—

Self destruction begins  
with doubt, no doubt  
but ends abruptly

with certainty.



ROB GAMER

# LIGHT

ANNA LATOURETTE

In late afternoon of my mother's wedding,  
I lean against the church wall outside,  
its bricks red and warm in the unfolding light.

Currents of wine rise through me,  
as day loosens over bark and leaves, and  
spills onto planes of grass and mountains.  
The light is audible, I can hear its exhales,  
and the murmur of its congregating shadows.

The light is expanding and voluminous,  
I can feel it open, and I climb inside of it.

It spoke to me of ending.

Leaning against the wall at the back of the church,  
I smoked a cigarette as the afternoon  
surrendered into evening. My mother  
was a bride, and younger than me.

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# ANON, A NUN, UNKNOWN

RICK MARCIANO

I stayed up all night to watch the sun rise  
 Read a few books  
 Reflected  
 Bided my time  
 Ebbd off to sleep with the tide  
 Before the pink streaks of dawn were to scratch through the black and shine  
 And I thought of you for a while  
 The way your body curves like some  
 Sweeping switchback out on the Pacific coast  
 Your movements flowing like white-breasted wave-girls  
 Dashing themselves on the rocks in the cove  
 Forever returning themselves to the mist and salt air  
 And I thought of your red lips  
 That burned like a forest fire  
 In the Mojave heat  
 Only to be made worse by my sighs of desperation and drought.  
 So I picked up a pack of Lucky Strikes  
 And felt it to be a nice night to  
 Take in some stale air  
 And tar and feather my lungs out of spite  
 And I thought of you and your eyes  
 That once shined as bright as shattered glass  
 In a ball field—  
 Collecting dust  
 The eyes that once burned as bright as magnesium  
 And the lips that burned as red  
 As the end of my cigarette.

To say I've got it all planned—I don't  
 To say I've got to get out and go, go, go—I won't  
 I find myself wearing the dramatist's masks, the only way I know how to cope.  
 So here's to you  
 O blasphemy in disguise  
 Let me buy a couple bottles  
 Let me muster up some liquid courage and pride  
 To let you stay with me  
 And watch the sunrise  
 Proliferate sable skies.



ROB GAMER

# INSOMNIA

## ZEBA BLAY

I just can't go to sleep  
There's far too much to do  
Like staring at the TV screen,  
Computer screen,  
Blue-white glow  
Of the late-night shows  
Just, thinking about life  
Or rather, other people's lives  
Set to soundtracks of songs I've never heard before.  
Pen to paper  
Make a note:  
"Must download soon"  
Four, five, one.  
Twenty hours till bedtime

Time?  
Look up what time it is in London  
They're all awake now, right?  
They seem to be OK.  
What is time, anyway?  
Google it. Become enlightened. With  
Lots of caffeine  
Lots of daydreaming  
Vaguely noticing how loudly the room-  
mate snores  
Focusing on everything else  
But getting the hell to bed.



## TRILLIUM 2008

# UNIVERSE

HEATHER KRISTIAN

we used to play on old  
railroad tracks—the ones no

longer in use—for lack of  
better play things

no budget for store-bought  
dolls or factory-made trucks—

corn husks tied with shoe  
laces, bark and old nails we

pried up from rotting tracks  
we made our selves



JALAL ZAHR

## MR. JEFFERSON, MEET MY NOSE (MONTICELLO WOULD BE JEALOUS)

COREY WILLIAMS

If you ever want an awkward situation, leave it up to an adolescent. While most my age were busy scribbling love notes in the back of class, or enjoying the newly found pleasures of their bodies, I was wallowing neck deep in my insecurities. Middle school for me was particularly painful. It wasn't because I was some big social pariah, but every day is hunting season. Every day you stood blindfolded, waiting for the shots to be fired, hoping that the torrents of verbal bullets would miss and your reputation still survived. Good luck. When it comes to victimizing others, any reason is a good enough reason. Did you see Jillian's hair? She's a hot mess! I heard they found Brenda in the boy's bathroom doing what she does best. Miguel...yeah, he's a little.... Did you see the way he holds his violin? Somehow, I managed to avoid most of the drama. I was just awkward as all hell. I guess it didn't help that my grandmother had a penchant for dressing me in cheap sweatsuits that she bought at the local athletic store. I didn't have any say in the matter. It feels good to know those days are over.

It was lunch time. The bell had ushered in the masses of school children. I sat down and began to enjoy my lunch. I searched through my pockets for some change to use the vending machine. Only a nickel. I don't know what drove me to do it, maybe the raging hormones had hijacked my brain momentarily, or maybe the fact that my awkwardness had hit an all-time high. Sitting there in the cafeteria, with nothing better to do and something to prove, I reached for the nickel and shoved it in my nose. I looked over to my friend Kwasi and showed him. He didn't seem very impressed. Should he? Any idiot can stick a fucking nickel in his nose. In hopes of salvaging the situation, I showed a few others at my table. Hokuto was too busy playing Game Boy to care, and everyone else seemed not to care either. So, out of frustration and utter lack of the approval I was so desperately seeking, I attempted to remove the nickel.

The first few tries were unsuccessful. With each attempt, I found the nickel going further back into my nose. What had I done? My fingers were too big to remove the coin. And, as suspected, none of my friends were willing to attempt to remove it with their fingers. Out of fear, I ran over to Mrs. Cheatham who was standing by the cafeteria door.

"Umm...I have a problem."

"Yes dear, what's wrong?" Apparently she didn't see the 0.57 grams of pure nickel lodged in my nose.

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"There is a nickel in my nose... and I can't get it out." She grabbed my arm and before I could even utter another word, I was being led to the nurse's office.

Mrs. Cheatham opened the door of the nurse's office and told me to take a seat while they contacted my grandmother. I dreaded the call, but I knew it was for the best. The thin sheet of white paper crackled as I nervously moved about.

"Try not to tilt your head back. We don't want the nickel going any further back. It's possible for you to breathe it in," said the nurse. "Another thing—try breathing through your mouth."

"You know, Corey, I know someone who died like that," Mrs. Cheatham started, "except it wasn't a nickel, it was a marble. Or was it a penny? Hmm..." I looked at her with a mix of shock and disbelief. What she had told me definitely didn't help the situation in my mind. To die because I stuck a nickel in my nose? What a shitty way to go—seriously. Here I am, in the seventh grade, and I won't even make it to high school. No white picket fences. No colostomy bags. No dying in my bed surrounded by the ones I love at the ripe age of ninety. I really screwed this one up.

The nurse walked over to the metal cabinet where all the student's medical information was held. She quickly looked through for my folder and looked for the emergency contact sheet. She looked up at me, picked up the phone, and dialed.

"Yes, is this Mrs. Williams?" She paused momentarily for a response. "Well, I have your grandson Corey here and he seems to have a nickel stuck in his nose. It's possible to remove it, but I don't want to take any chances. I think it would be a good idea for him to go to the emergency room to seek some medical attention."

It would be only a few moments later when the call ended. "She's coming to take you to the hospital," the nurse said. Somehow I felt disappointed. If I was going to die, I at least wanted an ambulance. Is that asking too much? Not that I am one for the dramatics (yes I am, who am I kidding?) but I felt I at least deserved a good exit from this entire debacle. Exit stage right.

I sat there staring at the nurse and Mrs. Cheatham. Mrs. Cheatham, the school's disciplinarian, was sitting to my right, towards the door. I couldn't help but to stare at her. Her round body and her infamous red dress (which some said looked more like a deflated hot air balloon) made me more aware of how uncomfortably small the room was for a nurse's office. It was starting to look more like a glorified janitor's closet. I just wanted this whole ordeal to be over with. I thought every breath would be my last. I started to imagine what it would feel like if the nickel somehow made its way into my lung—or wherever it would go. I imagined holding down one nostril, taking a deep breath, and blowing it out my nose onto the floor of the nurse's office, but there was no way I could muster the courage to do that.

It seemed like I was waiting forever when my grandmother finally arrived. She came into the nurse's office and gave me a look that let me know that she was disappointed in me.

One of those "You ought to know better than to embarrass me like that. I raised you better than this!" kind of looks. I gathered my book bag, which Mrs. Cheatham was nice enough to have brought to the nurse's office, and we made our way out of the school. I wanted her to say something—anything. By this point, words were meaningless.

We walked into the emergency room. My grandmother walked up to the lady behind the desk and I took a seat. My grandmother gave the lady all the necessary information—insurance, the nature of my visit, and all that other medical crap that just seems to waste time. I looked around the emergency room wondering what had brought the other people here. A heart attack? Maybe a broken leg? Guaranteed it wasn't because they were fool enough to stick some random coin up their nose. Just the fact that I was even in the emergency room for this made me feel as though I was one of those accident-prone idiots who can't even make it across the street without doing harm to myself.

"You know I have to pay thirty-five dollars, right?" my grandmother said, as she was taking the seat next to me.

"Really?"

"What did you think, that the emergency room was free? There is a fee."

"Oh."

"Oh's right. Thirty-five dollars because you decided to put a nickel in your nose. How does that make you feel?"

"Stupid."

"That's right—stupid."

We waited over an hour before the nurse called me in. I sat down in some weird chair—one that seemed better suited to end someone's life rather than save it. The nurse, a rather young lady with shoulder-length braids, put on latex gloves and opened this pouch with recently sterilized medical instruments.

"Tilt your head up a little bit." She picked up a clamp that looked very similar to a pair of pliers. "Try not to move while I do this, okay?"

She held the back of my head to make sure that I wouldn't make any sudden movements. In less than ten seconds, the whole nightmare was over.

"That's it? That was quick!" shouted my grandmother. I think she was just happy that it wasn't going to cost her any more money. I don't blame her really.

I made my way out of the hospital a changed man. No more coins shoved in odd places, but that was just the beginning of my adolescent awkwardness. Most of those moments are hidden somewhere in my mind—with no intentions of ever being revealed. But let's just say that wasn't the last time something awkward made its way into my body and I needed medical attention.

# TRILLIUM 2008



JEFFREY GLUCK

# FALL

TOM MALLOY

Indian summer  
brought them out again,  
a low croak  
from the wall  
in the back of the yard  
reached where I was weeding—

Apples littered the lawn,  
browning till they sagged  
into a mound  
pulp-rot and sour smelling  
webbed hands  
lurched from the scattered  
fruit. Cold blooded—

they came for the flies  
slow and close to death.  
Yellow jackets' frenetic dash.  
Advancing green and steady,  
the toad's plod unbroken,

yearning  
like a somnambulist  
with an uncertain  
course, making its way  
into the dark.

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# FOR JASON

KAREN HAYES

I loved your face  
When you fell from the bridge  
With nothing  
To catch you  
Except some river or another.  
Oh, and the bungee cord.  
Falling.  
For you  
And your recklessness.  
Under the trees in summer  
We were endless.  
They wrote your name  
In cocaine  
On your Birthday.  
Are you surprised?  
I'm not impressed.  
I loved your face  
When you fell  
Except for the morning  
When we found you  
Four feet from the floor.

# WATER

JESSICA DUTSCHMANN

In the tall refrigerator  
in grandmother's home  
there was always a small vial  
of holy water.

It sat on the shelf I could not reach—  
penicillin, raw meat, beer.

She would press the cool liquid  
to her eyes, her forehead  
make the sign of the cross and claim  
its mysteries onto herself,

not knowing I was behind her, watching  
to see if something happened.

Nothing happened; but I imagined  
on a small scale: cells  
renewing themselves, nails  
growing harder, hair shinier,

eyes brighter. She turned to me,  
looked, and asked if I wanted some.

I refused—  
I did not want to know  
fact from fiction.



JEFFREY GLUCK



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# THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF CHIAROSCURO

KRISTINA CHIAPPETTA

I wish I were an artist  
just so I could mimic  
the sharp lines of your face—  
cheekbones, with soft charcoal,  
smudging blue-black shadows  
into their intimate hollows, blending

so the color stains the ridges  
of my fingertips. It's almost as good  
as having you to touch,  
but charcoal is a poor substitute  
for your skin.



CHRISTOPHER HILL

# STOLEN SLUMBER

AARON 'JÜRGAN' QUEEN

This bed I lie upon that pledges me nightly sleep,  
Deficient in restful comfort of healthy body and mind;  
It offers most others respite, but calm I seldom find.  
With whose mighty sickle might I slay these useless sheep?  
In my think box, their massacred pelts bring only a brief weep;  
For this they brought upon their own wooly heads, thoughtless, and unkind.  
Fun, frolic and friends they are to most, to me behind  
Their countenance exist only their morbid lies with promises cheap.

In the dead of night, these white and billowy beasts become tarnished with Hellish soot,  
The failure of their function falls into the diseased recesses of my lightless attic.  
With bleak, black baa'ing, and melancholy moans, they sink underfoot,  
Each inch of descent darkens hope at possible flight, while the heretic  
That cut them down frowns with unfathomable fatigue from staying put;  
In that restless night's slumber, I walk the witching hour with a Devil's walking stick.

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# CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE

MORIAH COHEN

My face against two-days-unshaven-stubble  
reminds me of when two-days-unshaven-stubble

was a trophy. Fifteen, emaciated without  
a taste of life, we sat at The Trattoria,

eye-to-eye—Newports and coffee, daring the other  
to look. He called me beautiful. I was awkward,

only beginning to know my own curves,  
the feeling of two-days-unshaven-stubble

against my back. You call me beautiful,  
though my curves free, ripened like fruit. You look

at me. I understand what at fifteen I  
could not: the beauty of a woman, the life

she is meant to take inside, create and sculpt  
is not that of her lover, the young man fumbling

into her for answers, but of that which he plants,  
unknowingly unmeaningfully inside her.



JALAL ZAHR

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# POINT PLEASANT

TED MCLOOF

IT'S THE HOTTEST summer on record, the reports keep saying, but Penny doesn't need the radio to tell her that. She's sitting on her porch looking at the tourists tan on the beach, occasionally watching the freckles pepper her arm. She's always loved summer, because it's the only season when she seems to be happy. Fall contains her birthday, which she hates. Winter contains Christmas, which she hates even more. And spring makes everyone else happy, which only emphasizes, to her, how unhappy she perpetually is. But summer is bright; summer smells like suntan lotion and Captain Zing's Buffalo Wings. She lives in Point Pleasant, and summer is the time when she lives in a town that other people want to visit.

Her mother will be home in an hour and she still hasn't cleaned the house. The house, like the others on the block and elsewhere, is small, with a door that never closes in the sunny months, and a faux-grass rug on the porch, and peeling paint. There are Solo cups littered around and a seashell ashtray full of cigarettes that Penny is adding to at the moment. She has been turned into a housemaid and babysitter, nothing more, she thinks. She watches some shirtless teenagers in Ray-Bans and puka shells walk towards the beach with surf boards as though they are in Hawaii or some other exotic place. She rolls her eyes and blows out a puff of smoke in their direction, as they kick some broken glass from a beer bottle towards the rusting fence next to them.

She gets up and begins collecting the empty Solo cups from the party her brother had last night. She wipes the sweat from her forehead and pulls her shirt, clinging to her stomach, off, cleaning the house in her bra and shorts.

She hears a car horn honk outside and she knows who it is. She peeks her head out the screen door and sees Shawn in the driveway, in his Volkswagen Jetta, poking his head out the sunroof.

"Come on," he says. "It's fucking hot."

She promised him that she'd go to his house when he was done at work, but she isn't in the mood. She hasn't been for weeks.

"I can't," she says. "I'm cleaning the house for my mom. I have to finish."

"I can come in and help, if you want. It'll go faster, and we can go to my place for the

rest of the night. It's cooler there."

She doesn't wait a beat before throwing up her arms and saying, "Could you wait a fucking half an hour? Christ."

He turns off his car and walks up the stairs to help her. She knew he would, and she's aggravated by how predictable he is. She walks back inside without holding the door for him, and he begins to stack the cups and throw them into the garbage bag that hangs consistently from the banister.

She picks up the empty beer bottles in the kitchen, checking for the floaters. She does this without thought, out of habit, routine, constancy, like men in an assembly line building Fords.

She picks up the half-empty bottle of vodka, takes a quick swig, and puts it in the freezer. She stands with the freezer door open for a minute, cooling herself, as she thinks about how the name "Point Pleasant" is trying way too hard. She closes the door to find Shawn leaning in the doorway, watching her.

"I can get you guys one. You know I don't mind." Shawn sells air conditioners and other necessary home appliances at the Sears in Long Beach Island. He's recently been promoted to store manager, and they went out to dinner.

"She'd never take it," Penny tells him of her mother, but the statement couldn't be less true. Penny doesn't want an air conditioner from Shawn, a permanent object delivered from an impermanence in her life. She walks over to him and puts her arms around him, digging her hands into the back pockets of his khakis. He kisses the top of her forehead where her hairline begins, and she smells the sweat coming off of his chest. "How you wear this outfit every day in this heat is a mystery to me."

"I have to," he says, "for my job." He takes one of her cigarettes and finds the Pine-Sol from under the sink. He knows she likes spotless floors. He's handsome, tall, and slightly muscular in the way she knows girls are supposed to like. But there's something, something, something about his earnestness that irks her. She doesn't want to be asked what's wrong, which Shawn has learned to his cost, and she doesn't want help cleaning things. It's her only pragmatic function in the house and she wants to do it alone.

"Go watch some TV," she says, taking the mop from him. "It's five. Saved by the Bell is on. I'll be done by the time it's over." He shrugs and walks toward the family room, looking vaguely hurt at her insistence that he isn't needed. As she pours the Pine-Sol into a bucket and listens to that initial, familiar school bell screech out from the television speakers, she wonders whether her next boyfriend will even know who Zack Morris is. She hopes not. She's been seeing guys who know who Zack Morris is since she began seeing guys, and she's sick of it.

"Surfin' Safari" is booming out of Shawn's car stereo as they drive to his house. The windows are down, and Penny smells the air, fresh, beachy, sand occasionally brushing

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against her palms as she makes air waves with her arm.

"I think I might be getting a raise," Shawn says, and she hears him but doesn't respond. Her eyes are closed and she wants to listen to the Beach Boys. He turns down the song.

"Hun?" he says. She turns to him. "I might be getting a raise."

"That's great," she says, and she's let down by how unconvincing her interest is. She tries to make up for it, like always, with stock questions. "Have you been impressing them?"

"I think that's part of it. But once you're there for a certain amount of time, they sort of have to give you more money to keep you. They want me, at least."

They want him! Penny thinks. Such pride in his voice! This is where he wants to be. This is the job he's proud of, and making moves for: a hardware store in a town that only exists, in any significant way,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the year. She feels so sorry for him she wants to gag, but manages not to. "That's terrific," she says.

"You know, if it's a big enough raise, we could move in together. I could take care of you like I can't now."

She smiles at him and kisses his shoulder, leaving a barely visible lipstick mark on his blue Sears polo shirt. "Maybe," she says, and turns the song back up.

She can feel the slight irritation of a sunburn on the back of her neck; she was lying on the beach reading *Crime and Punishment* all day and wishing she knew the people in the book, people with situations and problems that mattered somewhere. She wished, to a smaller but realer degree, that she even knew someone who had read it. She knows there is something else. She knows life won't always be like this.

They pass Drew's old house, and she thinks of the time she used to spend in that basement, listening to them jam to old Steve Miller hits and not thinking about her life. She remembers singing along to the line "I've gotta go out and make my way/ I might get rich, you know I might get busted." She remembers how much she loved it, and sees the same old cars in his driveway—Mike's grey Sierra, Finch's black Thunderbird—and knows that they're probably still doing the same thing right now, without her. She refuses to go anymore; listening to the music back then seemed to have momentum, a direction, a place to go, with a career of playing for money and for the love of it. She knew they'd never be famous, she knew it in a way that they didn't, but she could easily picture them playing weddings and anniversary dinners on the weekends, and the fact that they haven't even accomplished this miniscule goal depresses her. The practicing lost its point, somewhere, and with it her only vision of the future.

Shawn pulls over to get gas and she begins to get out to buy cigarettes. He pulls the last one from her pack, lights it, and says, "You really should quit, you know," with a smile. She hates him for it. She wants to be with someone who doesn't tell her to quit or with someone who means it if he does. She wants someone who knows better.

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JOHN ATTI



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Shawn lives in the top part of a two-family house, with glass sliding doors in every room. They're all open when they get there, and Shawn starts to close them so that he can turn on the AC.

"Don't," she says, putting her hand on his arm. "I want to smell the air for a while."

"It's too hot," he says. "We'll go for a walk later. You can smell it then."

She sits on his couch and turns on his TV as he makes them dinner. She finds the Disney Channel and watches *The Suite Life of Zach and Cody*. She wants something she can ignore.

While dinner is cooking, he comes in and sits next to her, his arm resting behind her on the sofa. She lies down with her head in his lap, watching Zach or maybe Cody get a pie thrown in his face. She laughs, not at the show but at how this joke is still used, eighty years after Vaudeville died. A commercial comes on and Penny changes the channel. Someone is interviewing Maureen McCormick about *Celebrity Fit Club* on E!, and she's saying that it's one of the best shows she's ever done.

"You know," Shawn says to no one in particular, "if you've only done two shows in your life, and you call one 'one of the best shows I've ever done', that's not really saying much."

Penny begins giggling and is grateful that, though his greatest passion is television, at least he puts it to practical use in making her laugh. He gets off on making her laugh and doesn't try to hide it. He puts his hand on her hip under her shirt, and rubs her bare skin. She turns back to the TV and tries to ignore it, watching *Hannah Montana*, until she feels his erection growing behind her head. She turns her face up and sees him giving her that look, that hungry look that used to win her, the look that won her in the first place when they first met on the boardwalk six months ago. He starts to move his hand into her shorts and she shifts herself, adjusting, making herself more accessible. Her entire life has consisted of shifting to make herself more accessible to men, she thinks. She leans forward and kisses him as he continues to move his fingers slowly up and down, up and down, massaging wet folds, until he stops to take his shirt off.

"How long until the buzzer goes off?" she whispers, in between breaths.

"We've got enough time," he says, and she doesn't care if it's the truth. Sex is the only thing she still fully enjoys about their relationship, because she can lose herself in it, and she doesn't need to think, and for the time that it's happening, she can imagine that she truly does love this person. Not Shawn, but this person, this other body she's intertwined with. She trusts her own judgment enough to convince herself that she wouldn't allow this intimacy with someone she didn't care about.

They lie naked on the couch until the buzzer goes off, sweating even with the blast of central air in Shawn's apartment. She runs her fingers over the tattoo on his left arm, the thick black barbed wire that grows from his shoulder to his wrist. When he gets up to turn the oven off, their skin is stuck together and it makes her sick, especially when he kisses her, her lips

cold, her nose cold, the blood drained from her face as it always is afterwards. She slides her shorts back on and watches TV shirtless until he's set the table.

"Here you go," he says. "Breaded chicken cutlets, *a la Me*."

He used to want to be a chef, he once told her. He planned to go to culinary school when he was younger, but he gave up or lost interest, she's never been told which. She hates his cooking, hates how good it is, because every bite tastes like failure and wasted time.

"Huh?" he says to her, after she takes her first mouthful.

"It's great," she says, and forces a smile.

At eleven o'clock, they take a walk as promised, holding hands and walking aimlessly, the neon lights glowing on their faces. They reach the boardwalk as it's closing down, but Shawn used to work here and he knows a guy, he says, and they're let in as long as they promise to be out by midnight. They pass a group of teenage girls, one with braces, one with a bathing suit bottom and a sweatshirt, one with ass-length bleach-blonde hair, holding giant prize SpongeBob Squarepantses and cotton candy. This is a fucking carnival, Penny thinks. They'll be going back home after this, but this is where I live.

She thinks about what she was like at that age, skinny as a stick and nonplussed by the boys in her grade. She remembers Jennah, her best friend, whom she used to stroll the boardwalk with, looking for trouble. She remembers when funnel cake was the perfect and only way to cap off a summer day. She remembers when summer was only one of the seasons she liked.

"What are you thinking about?" asks Shawn.

She squeezes his hand a few times like a pulse, and then looks at his face, tan from the locale with pale blue eyes, and says, "I want to be free."

He puts his arm around her shoulder and turns her towards the beach. They walk down to the sand, and he points towards the ocean, vast and dark and seemingly bottomless. "Look at that. How does that make you feel?"

She is irritated by it. Small, is the answer, not free. She doesn't want him to try and be poetic. She wants him to know that she's trapped right now, with him, and that there wasn't any other way for her to say it. And she's most irritated because she knows why he's brought her down here.

He lays out the towel that he's brought with him, in a spot where they've decided that no one will bother them. "Are you okay?" he asks, in that rhetorical way that boys do at times like these.

"I'm fine," she says, evenly.

When they've finished, he rolls off of her, and she tells him, "You know I can't stay over tonight. I've got to watch my sister in the morning."

"You should bring her by the store," he says. "I could show you guys some of the

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units we have in."

"Yeah, Shawn," she says, "I'm sure that'll be a barrel of laughs for a thirteen-year-old. I'm sure she wants nothing more than to spend her summer off at Sears." But she says it with venom, as if to say, No one should want to spend their summer at Sears. No one should want to spend any part of their life at a Sears. He hears it, too, and what makes her feel worst is how sorry she isn't.

She doesn't want to be a musician, although several years ago she took her brother's old guitar and began to learn the chords. She has always wanted to inspire music, rather than play it. This is partly what being in Drew's basement had been all about. She was grateful to Cameron Crowe for delivering Band-Aids to the public, and that she shared her hero's name; seeing *Almost Famous* for the first time in high school, she thought, This is my destiny. She was the mother hen of the lot back then; she kept everyone in line and had a special place with them. She likes to think that there is an empty spot without her there, something unfillable, something that must seem off now when they get together to play.

She thinks about this as her sister watches *The Fairly Oddparents* in the living room, eating Apple Jacks. Her mother is almost ready for work, and comes in the kitchen with curlers in her hair.

"What are you doing today?" she asks, as though the answer might actually be unknown.

"I was going to take Jane to the beach. She likes the waves, and it's windy out."

"Don't stay out too long," her mother says, distractedly, as she buttons her blouse.

"Your neck is all red, and I don't want her getting sunburned, too. Bring the lotion."

A housemaid and a babysitter, she thinks. Nothing more. As her mother kisses Jane's forehead on the way out the door, Penny thinks about what it must be like, as a mother, to get to the point where you've given up on your child. What must it be like, she thinks, when you've decided that your daughter will not be the things you hoped she'd be, when you have to start looking at her as an instrument of use, rather than a daughter? When she was Jane's age, Penny was still as unformed as a lump of clay, and could have been made into anything with the proper molding. Now she's been built, and she's asked to watch after the *Last Remaining Hope*, because her mother has decided that this is her only discernable function.

"You got your stuff?" she asks Jane after she rinses her bowl out in the sink.

"Hold on," she says. "I have to grab my bag."

Jane disappears into her room, and Penny can hear her moving things around in there, in that room that used to be hers. When Penny had the room, it was wallpapered with posters and every Rolling Stone cover she could find. She used to go to sleep watching the Beatles cross the street, she used to space out with Kurt Cobain's sad black-and-white eyes staring back at her. Now the room has a poster of Tony Hawk on one wall, and a surfboard leaning against the other. Penny once had a sort of quiet, deep regret that Jane wouldn't be



TRACY LANZILOTTI

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following in her footsteps, but now it pleases her, in a way, to see what a jock she's turning out to be.

Jane emerges from her room with an Adidas bag and a towel with a weird Eastern design on it. "Ready?" she says.

"Did you pack the suntan lotion? Mom's gonna kill me if you get burned today."

"I got it, I got it," Jane says on her way out the front door, grabbing a deck chair.

Watching Jane fight the waves, Penny recognizes her other favorite thing about summer. Jane looks comical, a string bean speck in the endlessness of the water. She fights the waves with Ahabian determination, slapping them loudly as they pass through her and struggling to stand with each one. Penny does her best to suppress a smile and turns back to Dostoyevsky. She replaces the difficult names so that she doesn't have to stop every few seconds: Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov is Jim, Avdotya Romanovna is Laura, and Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov is Penny. She doesn't mean to be melodramatic or overemphatic about her problems. It isn't that. She has simply always found it easier to place herself at the center of the novel, or the film, or whatever it is, that has her attention. This is how she got through English in high school as well as she did; she can recall Mrs. Allred telling her that she was extremely bright and belonged in the honors section had she done her homework more often.

She looks up to check on Jane and can't find her in the ocean, can't pick her out of the bodies that litter the point where the water meets the sand. She spots her, eventually, on the side, talking to a boy with a surfboard. She's laughing and rubbing the sand with her big toe, and hits him playfully before she comes running back to the blanket, her hair wet and separated into strands.

"That was fast," Penny says. "You just went in ten minutes ago."

"Ten minutes in the water is a long time."

"Usually you're out there for an hour hitting those waves."

Jane tilts her head and bangs a few times on her left ear to get the water out. "I'm getting a little old for that."

"Who's your boyfriend?"

"Huh?" she asks, looking back to see if he's still there. "Oh, I don't know. Just some boy. Brian, I think." She fakes nonchalance like a thirteen-year-old.

"How old is he?"

"Fifteen I think."

Jane dries off and lies back on her chair, sliding the straps of her bathing suit over her shoulders and closing her eyes. Penny squints, confused, at this girl who until recently did not know, in any significant way, what tan lines were.

That night on the phone Penny paints her nails as Shawn talks to her. "It reached 102

degrees today," he says.

"No way."

"It did. They said on the radio. People were coming in all day and talking about how hot it was. Some of them were just coming in to cool off."

"Nobody goes to a hardware store to cool off. That's what pools and the ocean are for."

"I'm telling you," he says, and then, deliberately quieter, "I'm just telling you what I heard. You guys really should get a unit in your house, it'll be cheap and I can install it myself...."

She cringes at the word "unit." Units are living spaces that realtors give tours of, units are measurements of time that physicists study. They're not units, she thinks. They're air conditioners. Who the fuck do you think you are? She hears her mother walk into the house and checks the clock; it's eleven, so Penny assumes she went out drinking at the tiki bar down the street. She listens as her mother's keys hit the table and then fall to the floor, as the refrigerator door opens and closes, and as the opening guitar line from "Roxanne" creeps its way, muffled, out from behind Jane's door.

"Penny?"

She shakes it off and continues painting her nails. "What?"

"I said are you babysitting tomorrow?"

"I don't think so. I think she has basketball camp," she says, and immediately regrets it.

"So come over then. I can't remember the last time you slept here."

Friday, she thinks. She turns on the TV and keeps it on mute; Jon Stewart is pulling his tie and making a face next to a graphic of Alberto Gonzalez that says "Hearing Problems." "Can I take a shower first?"

"Shower here. You'll just end up getting sweaty anyway." She lets the conversation halt for a beat until he says, "Yeah, fine. I don't care. I'll see ya in a half an hour."

She hangs up the phone as he's saying "Bye, babe," and she finishes her thumb. She can still hear The Police, barely audible, now telling perverted teachers not to stand so close to them. She looks at The Doors poster on the wall and thinks of Drew, who gave it to her, the only birthday present she ever received in high school that wasn't alcoholic, or Menthol flavored. Jim Morrison's gaze is intense, and she wonders what it must be like to have that intensity, to be so serious, to never let anything simply pass by, especially not life. She thinks of this and then rolls off of her bed, slips on her sandals, and walks down the stairs to Shawn's house, as if to say, Sorry, world. I give up.

The next few weeks are the same, of course: she stays over Shawn's some nights, and some nights she doesn't; she decides to paint her nails black and white, like piano keys; she gives up on *Crime and Punishment* 300 pages in, as she usually does; she cleans the house. One

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thing changes, slightly: she still goes to the beach with Jane, but now Jane is spending the time there with this Brian person. There never seems to be a specific date, or meeting time. They just seek each other out and swim together. Penny has begun to watch them, glancing above her sunglasses every two minutes or so. Jane is laughing much more often than she normally would, or ever has, and Penny wonders if she learned this trick from her older sister. Last week Jane's bikini strap slipped, in what could only be a planned accident, off of her shoulder, and he fixed it for her.

Penny begins to think about what Jane's dating life will be like, when she gets one. Penny had been one of those who developed breasts much earlier than the other girls; she had a leg up on everyone by the time she was thirteen. She had already had braces on and off by then, she had already pierced her ears (her mother made a deal with her—pierced ears for good grades—so she aced her classes for one marking period and then continued not paying attention). She had her first boyfriend by seventh grade, and had had sex with Drew, her first, at fourteen.

It was in his basement after band practice. Everyone had gone home and they were smoking cigarettes, trying to think of things to do. He asked her why she was going out with Kyle, her boyfriend at the time, and she told him, although she can't remember the answer now. And then she asked him who he'd been with, and then it went from truth to dares, from dares to alcohol, from alcohol to flashing, to fooling around, to sex. It seems ridiculous and cheap when she thinks about it now, or if she ever said it out loud to anyone, but it was exciting then. It hurt, yes, but it was a bigger rush than Bacardi or weed ever gave her. Why, she often wonders now, was that more romantic than moonlit, adult sex on a beach with her boyfriend of six months? Jane runs back from the water, her hair stringy, her bathing suit folding up on top of the first signs of breasts.

"Hey," she says distractedly, "I'm gonna go for a walk on the boardwalk with Ryan."

"I thought his name was Brian," Penny says.

"Ryan. I'll be back in a little bit."

"You said his name was Brian," she says, but the comment falls flat: Jane is already running back to Brianryan's towel.

That night, in Shawn's bed, Penny has an awful dream that makes her skin crawl. She is in the middle of the ocean, so far out that she can barely make out the people on the beach. Shawn is with her, wrapped in her, moving up and down. She is buoyed by him; sex in the middle of the ocean is surprisingly possible. Her mouth, her nose, her eyes are being continually splashed with water, but she doesn't care, so intense is their lovemaking. And next to them, the whole time, is a girl whom she recognizes as a teenager, but doesn't know her beyond that. Something is familiar about her; she looks a little like Penny at age fourteen, except she has cat eyes that are pea-soup green. She has the same beauty mark as Jane near her chin, but it's on the wrong side, and she's paler than Jane, and her expression is foreign to



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anything Jane has ever worn. She doesn't move, she isn't playing, or even talking. She simply stares the whole time with a blank, frighteningly stoic face. But Penny doesn't stop what she's doing. She doesn't attempt to call out to her or shield her eyes. She just lets Shawn go wild, water blurring her vision as she begins to cry, and can't understand why this girl is watching her. Shawn begins to hurt her thighs as he quickens his pace, and her stomach turns and cramps, but she wants him to keep going, she wants it to hurt more. Just as she is about to climax, she wakes up.

She jolts forward so violently that she is shocked Shawn doesn't budge. She is sweating, shaking. The pillows are all over the floor, except for Shawn's own. She runs into the bathroom and begins to cry, silently. Eventually she stops and looks at herself in the mirror. Dark circles are beginning to appear below her eyes. Her breasts aren't sagging, but they're lower than they used to be. Her eyes are bloodshot. She needs sleep.

She walks back out to the bedroom and picks up two pillows. She puts one behind her head, one between her legs. Shawn rolls over and spoons her.

"Everything alright?" he whispers, half-asleep.

She doesn't answer. She runs her hand over his and begins to stroke it, closing her eyes.

The following Tuesday, a month after they first saw Brianryan on the beach, he comes to the house. Penny was supposed to go out with Shawn tonight, but her mother wants her to keep an eye on Jane while she has a boy over. Babysitting has never been so easy. She doesn't even need *The Fairly Oddparents* to keep Jane busy tonight. She'll shove them in Jane's room and get the downstairs TV to herself.

When Brianryan gets there and Penny lets him in, he walks straight into Jane's room without coaxing, which throws both girls off. Penny turns on the TV and watches *Best Week Ever*. Britney Spears checked into rehab. Meg White had a fake sex tape hit the Internet. Jane turns on Sublime, and slowly increases the volume so that their voices become barely audible.

Kiefer Sutherland's been arrested for drunk driving. Adrienne Curry made a racist statement on her website, but Penny doesn't know what because she can't hear it. She shouts, "Jesus, Janey, turn it down!"

Jane pops her head out, laughing at something. "What?"

"I said turn it down! Christ, you could hear me if it weren't so loud."

"Come on! Who cares? You're just watching TV."

"Yeah, and I can barely fucking hear it, Jane, now turn it down before I kick him out!" Jane rolls her eyes, and instead of turning down the music, she closes her door to muffle it. The Olsen Twins are having the *Best Week Ever*, audibly now. The phone rings and Penny doesn't even want to look, she's so depressed by the inevitability of her own life.

"Hi, Shawn."

"Are you sitting down?"

She stands up, dutifully. "Yes."

"Good, because guess what?"

She walks to the kitchen and hunts through the empty packs of cigarettes for a fresh one.

"Hun?" he says. "Guess what?"

"What?" she says, as though she had already asked.

"I got a raise!" he says like a little kid. For once, he's ignored her mood, hasn't let it bring him down; she can hear it in his voice and (odds, it occurs to her) that makes her happier for him.

"Really? That's great, Shawn." She walks outside and begins to smoke her menthol, picking at the plastic grass on their porch.

"Yeah. So why don't we go to dinner tomorrow night? Your choice."

"No, come on. It's your promotion. It should be your choice," she says, and means it. She is endlessly grateful for how sincere she can be at a time like this.

"I don't care where we go. I just want to take you out so we can, you know, discuss things."

She does know. She's known for a while that this is his plan. She takes a puff and lets the orange illuminate her fingers, and then blows out her thought with the smoke.

"Not yet," she says. There is silence from the other end and she knows she's disappointed him. "I have to go check on Jane."

She hangs up the phone and walks inside, feeling cold and mean. She looks at the phone for a moment until something catches her eye. There is no light coming from underneath Jane's bedroom door. There is still music, but no light. Even to Penny, someone who resents the job with vigor, this feels as though she is being a bad babysitter.

She walks towards the door slowly, and puts her ear against it to hear what's going on. The music is drowning out everything. Maybe they went out, and she didn't see? She knocks. No answer. She knocks again, louder. Still nothing. The acoustics have been set up in the room so that nothing of the outside world can be heard. She knows because she's the one who arranged them that way.

She opens the door, just a crack, not enough for light to pour in but enough to see a slice of what's going on. She doesn't see much, except for long, skinny string-bean legs, and a masculine elbow moving up and down, up and down, awkwardly, fast and without grace of any kind. Penny can't hear anything, until the weary, dry, drained sound that breaks her heart.

Achingly, but very quietly and slowly, she hears Jane's voice, saying, "No."

The next few seconds are a blur. They occur completely without thought. Before Penny knows what's happening, she has a tuft of Brianryan's hair in her hand and she's ripping his entire slimy, lanky, teenage body out of her old bed and off of Jane. He begins to protest, but before he can get the entire word "bitch" out, Penny is literally kicking his ass

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out of their screen door, where he trips down their steps. He pauses only for a second on the sidewalk, where Penny grabs an empty vodka bottle from the front porch and launches it at his head, full speed.

"What the fuck!" he shouts, his voice cracking on "what," and then he runs away. Penny waits on the porch for a moment, heaving and looking at nothing in particular, just their street at night, which now, in late August, has fewer visitors than earlier in the summer. The air is thick and warm, and buzzing with silence.

The music inside suddenly stops, and Penny waits a moment before going back in. The bedroom door is closed again. Penny knocks.

"Janey?"

She can hear the covers of her bed being thrown around.

"Janey?" Penny whispers again. "You want a cigarette?"

Penny doesn't expect an answer any time soon, so she goes back outside and smokes one herself. She hears laughter faintly, in the distance, coming from towards the ocean. The laughter comes out in little giggles, uninhibited.

The door opens behind her, and Penny doesn't turn around. Jane sits down next to her, and Penny hands her the cigarette she's smoking.

"Have the rest."

"You sure?" Jane asks.

"I should quit anyway."

Jane takes the menthol and looks vaguely sick, but otherwise unchanged. Penny picks some fake grass from the front porch.

"It's really fucking hot," she says.

"Yeah," says Jane. "Let's get an air conditioner."

The giggling is louder now, it sounds like it's next to them. They look down at the sidewalk and see three young girls, ten or eleven years old, lit by the streetlight. They're carrying prizes from the boardwalk, and one trips over her flip-flop as they walk past. Jane takes a drag and leans back on the porch. Penny smells the air and the ocean, and fans herself with her hand.



CHRISTOPHER HILL

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# GRANDFATHER

STEPHEN HALLIWELL

The rains fall down on our somber procession  
As we make our way to that final place  
To bury away a precious possession  
That will no longer fill this earthly space.  
Our tears run down our skin as one.  
We look to the ominous sky, whose clouds  
Blot out the sun; its brilliance  
Does not seem right to allow.  
Our roses fall on the cherry red casket  
As the bugle plays the familiar song,  
And though we try so hard not to think it  
We know our grandpa, our father, is gone.  
His body to a rest like he has never slept;  
His spirit to a place where man has never wept.



JEFFREY GLUCK

