

Trillium



2007



Trillium 2007

James Firehouse





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Dedication

We dedicate this year's *Trillium* to the memory of Professor Robert Christopher. He dedicated his life to literature and to the students of Ramapo College and we are richer for it. He will be missed.

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Trillium regrets that the following photograph, which served as last year’s back cover, was not credited properly. The photographer’s name is Kristina Chiappetta.



Thomas Glaser

A Walk Beyond

Thomas Glaser

A lone traveler in the cold raining night,
Runs from the wrongs he could not make right.
This man's future is made of many schemes,
Though he only has hopes and meaningless dreams.
His fingers are numb as the air grows cold,
Yet he plays his cards with no intentions to fold.
Though it may seem his luck has run out,
The tricks up his sleeve will challenge all doubt.
He may feel lost in the cold falling snow,
Yet he is led by a feeling that only he can know.
His mind fires questions about life and death,
As the cold tries to take his last breathing breath.
Though the cold crystal air is thick and still,
He continues his journey with only his will.
Thoughts turn loose and plague his mind,
He remembers everyone he has left behind.
For each friend he has known, each one he has seen,
For the bitter, the angry, the mad and the mean.
He can't change the past, even if he could,
He hasn't gone back nor thinks he would.
What matters is now not what happened back then,
Even though he remembers "how it was when..."
Though these were his thoughts at one time before,
He wishes for his world to be something more.
As his cold quest continues through time,
A warm fire sparks a newborn rhyme.
He sees the snow disappear from sight,
As darkness leaves a promising light.
He sees the warm sun begin a new day,
And decides to change his frozen cold way.
So instead of turning his back on the past,
He decides to backtrack his footprints at last.

The Turnpike

Shawn Ferguson

Bleak outposts
Searching for new coasts
And horizons, cruising
In the fast lane following the seaside
Destined for something greater
Than what this peanut has to offer

Correcting the shoebies along the way
That the shore is from
North to south
Not up to down
We ride the low riders, the hot wheels,
And tricked out monsters
Out of this rags-to-riches, run-down, ghetto-ass hell hole
Marked by bloods, crypts, Latin Kings, and
Innocent civilians
Capped in a three lane circus sideshow

Yet gas is the only commodity
I can afford to watch get pumped
As the death tolls get higher
Every time I get to the end
There's another road
Turning me back around again

And I can't escape the four-leaf clover
Driving in repeated U-turns and circular circles
No outsider can maneuver
But this complex maze
Known as the highway

Is the only way
We can get out of this place

Underneath
Smog clouds and smoke stacks
We ride the airwaves
Like radio is going to die
A slow, quiet death
Amidst the roar of urbanization

Of Nowhere-You-Know Ville, Suburbia
As the fuel tank runs suddenly dry
Finally we luckily made it to the last exit

Standing between us and our future
A link between this small world and the next
The bridge is crossed and we burn it
To cover our dirty tracks

As we won't let our past catch us
Nor the cops chasing after
The burnout marks instilled on the roads
That took us away
To green and blue sky pastures
Or at least to first spot
Where we can truly see the stars in ourselves
And heaven smiling for the first time.



Andrea Vitellaro

Ocean

Vincent Gisternino

Cupping my hands the sea I touch
Lifting my hands to water clutch
Between my fingers. Absorbed by skin
Yin and Yang together kin
Now the water will forever be
Again the oceans and some of me.

Staying

in Bounds

Nicole Arvidson

Neutral ground makes us wait
Striving for something
And it's borderline too late
And I'm hanging on your words
Every thought you ever told
Every reason that I've ever heard
Every time you touch my hands
With every step you go to take
Remember we are staying in bounds.



Sarah Dowman

The Last Thing I Did Before Applying to Art School

Ted McLoof

“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. ‘Which road do I take?’ she asked. ‘Where do you want to go?’ was his response. ‘I don’t know,’ Alice answered. ‘Then,’ said the cat, ‘it doesn’t matter.’”

-Lewis Carroll

I work in a coffee shop. Trite, I know, but it has its upside. Say what you will about Starbucks, with its expensive coffee that doesn’t compare to a one-dollar Dunkin’ Donuts cup and its annoying subservience to capitalism, but it really does give the employees here good benefits. There’s not a whole lot you can do without a college degree at my age, and most of my friends from town (almost none of whom go to college) have become truck drivers or work for their parents’ companies. I didn’t want to do that. I wanted a nice, clean job, far away from Henslowe Park where I grew up, and Starbucks provides that. The free coffee is just a plus.

I’d be lying if I said that the health plan is the only reason I took the job here. I tell my mom that to get her off my back when she complains that there are plenty of places to work that aren’t a half an hour away. The truth is that Starbucks (at least the one I work at) is in the middle of a really wealthy area, and the girls that come in here are always expensively made-up. I know that there are other reasons for liking women (I’m not that stupid), and that there is much to be said about plain, physically flawed girls, girls whose birthmarks and unbleached hair make them idiosyncratically pretty. But when you’re looking around, in that idle sort of way, it’s the short-skirts-with-Uggs, heavy-perfume, hair-down-to-the-butt girls you look at.

Every day, at around 3:20, there is a school bus full of Catholic school girls that march in and drink coffee, waiting for their parents to pick them up. They giggle with each other, sometimes the usuals will say hi to me or my friend Jack who works here, and I have to say (I hope it’s okay for me to be talking like this, because it’s true) that it’s the high point of the day. I don’t lust after them or anything. I just think it’s so cute sometimes the way they whisper to each other and point in our direction, the way they talk about this or that that happened at school today, and it kills me. We didn’t have buses at our school, because the town was so small that everyone’s house was within walking distance. We didn’t have a Starbucks either, or an independent equivalent to hang out at. And we certainly didn’t have Catholic school girls, because it wasn’t a Catholic school, and the girls we had didn’t look like that. All we ever did after school was take pills and listen to Pink Floyd.

I used to draw a lot back then. In high school, I mean. It was the closest I've ever come to having a talent. It started when I was young, mainly because I didn't pay attention much in class, and I'd doodle a lot when the teachers were talking about European socialism and parts of the sentence and Algebraic equations and all that. After a few years, I kind of got proud of myself when I looked at my notebooks. Some of the stuff I was drawing wasn't half bad, and that was just with a pen and all. Sometimes I would leave my notebook open on a page that had a doodle I thought was really neat, professional, even, so that the girls sitting next to me might notice and say something about it. They never did, though.

I mention that because today was one of the days when I got to chalk up the signs around the shop for the new season. Every month or so we have new drinks here, and someone has to make the signs everywhere in chalk to let people know what we're serving. I know it's stupid, but it really gives me a kick to get creative when I'm making them. Last month we had Pumpkin Spice Lattes, and I drew this Jack-O-Lantern instead of a regular pumpkin, with a kind of vampire face on it. A few people told Jack they thought it was cute and asked who did it, and he just pointed my way, and I had a smile bigger than that Jack-O-Lantern's, let me tell you. Today I had red and green chalk all over my fingers, because I got to draw the stuff for Christmas, Gingerbread Lattes and Eggnog Lattes and that stuff. I made some Christmas trees and present boxes and things. I wasn't sure if I was allowed, with all that "Happy Holidays" jazz they have around now, but the owner gave me the okay when I was done. That made me happy, because I didn't want to erase them after all that work. It's the only thing I've ever been okay at.

Today I was sort of in a daze because of a fight I had last night with my mom, and I didn't even notice the girls coming in until Jack poked me. My mom had been at me again about how I should apply to Roxbury Community College, get an Associates or maybe transfer to Boston College, make something of myself. You had so much potential, she always says. I don't really know what she's talking about most of the time, especially because she doesn't know about my drawings. My high school teachers didn't like me all that much, and I don't blame them. I was stoned a lot in class, so I never got very good grades, but my mom seems to think that's because I was—what's the word she uses?—advanced, that's it, too advanced for the structure of high school. As if I wasn't challenged enough, so I got bored or something. I guess all moms think like that, but it makes me sad. It must be hard to watch your kid grow up and realize that he's not good at anything.

Anyway, when Jack nudged me I woke up a little bit, and I looked out that huge Starbucks window at the bus stop.

"There's your favorite," he said to me. "She's got those other two on her arms like always."

My "favorite" is a girl named Allison, a really sweet kid who usually gets a Chai Tea and talks to me while she waits. Allison is the kind of girl I would really have liked to have met when I was fifteen (I think that's how old she is now, but I've never had the guts to ask). She's short, maybe five-three or so, with really pretty poker-straight blonde hair that goes just below her shoulders. She usually doesn't wear makeup, and it doesn't seem like she has to, because she's naturally very attractive. Her hair is a color blonde that the other girls usually try to imitate with

store-bought product, but my Allison doesn't need that CVS stuff. What's funny about her is that she's prettier than those other two girls she hangs around with, and she's nicer, too. I don't know the other ones' names, although I think I overheard the name "Gina" one day. They're not too friendly, the others. They're both taller, and the one, the one that might be Gina, clearly wants to be just like Allison but can't get the tone right. She usually orders the same Chai Tea, but Grande instead of Tall, and she never talks to me or tips afterward. Usually she just gives me a dirty look on her way to the holding counter (that's what the place you wait at is called, if you've ever wondered).

Allison seems like she fights with her mom a lot, which is maybe another reason I'm so fond of her. Her mom drives this newish Mercedes, one of those family jobs that probably has a baby seat in back (why don't they just get minivans?). When she comes to pick Allison up, she always seems like she's in a hurry, like picking up her daughter is the same thing as picking up her laundry or the groceries. Allison usually argues with her, although I never really know what about, because I'm just watching them through the window while her mom is parked outside. Last week they got in a big one, and Allison slammed the door, daring her mom to drive away I think, and what ate me up is that she actually did drive away. Allison had to wait here until about seven, calling her dad, who was probably up in some big-shot corporate office, telling him what happened. I was going to offer her a ride just when her friend's mom came to pick her up. Man, did I hate her mom after that.

Today when she and her friends walked in, they were all hovering around this piece of paper with pink handwriting on it. The other one, not-Gina, kept putting her hand over her mouth like she couldn't possibly comprehend what was written in it, and then she kept hitting Allison on the arm. I took a guess that Allison wrote something that was un-Allisonly naughty, and that not-Gina was letting her know that she was impressed and shocked at the same time. I could have been wrong, though. I've never been all that good at reading girls.

When they got near the counter, Gina kept saying, "Put it away, put it away," and Allison blushed a nice hue of red, the red that comes up on a Microsoft Word screen when you spell something wrong. She folded up the paper and put it behind her back. The other two were giggling, and Allison was holding in her laughter.

"Uh oh," I said to her. "Causing trouble, ladies?"

As usual, it was only Allison that kept eye contact with me, but for some reason what I said made all three of them convulse with laughter. I must have been blushing myself after that, because Jack couldn't keep his eyes on the cappuccino maker.

"Oh, no. Not me, Henry. You know me, always up to something," Allison said back to me. I liked that she said it. It made it sound like we were friends, like I really did always know what she was up to.

"Chai Tea? Tall, right?" I said. That made them laugh even harder. I found myself wishing that Jack would stop staring. He made it kind of obvious that I was flirting a little. On top of which, I was starting to think that they were maybe making fun of me or something, instead of being cute.

***Natalie Magaro***

“Um... yea. Yea, tall’s good. Tall’s great,” she said. When she said that, she leaned down on the counter to make herself shorter and looked up at me, I guess trying to show me how tall I am. Apparently they don’t teach subtlety in Catholic school.

“Ok, ok. Watch out now. You’re gonna get me in trouble. I’ll be right back with the tea.”

I walked away and started making the tea, but I put in the wrong ingredients. I couldn’t really concentrate, if you want the truth. Jack had just rung some old bag up at register two, and then he walked over to me, real close, and started whispering. I really wished he wasn’t so damn obvious.

“Hey, man. What’s with you and those girls? Those uniforms getting to your head, or what?”

I didn’t know what he was talking about at first. I thought he meant our uniforms, the black shirts and the stupid green aprons. That just shows you how I wasn’t paying attention to anything. He was talking about their uniforms, though, the plaid skirts with the high socks and all that.

I couldn't think, though. All I kept thinking about, for some reason, was Cindy, the girl I kind of fucked up with in tenth grade. Cindy used to look at me the way Allison was just then, which is probably why I was thinking about her. She had a friend who didn't like me much, either. They used to giggle and stuff when they walked up to me and the other burnouts I used to hang around with. She was pretty cute, Cindy, but not the way Allison or the other girls are. She had these red streaks in her hair, and a bunch of piercings in her eyelids and lip, and a ratty green backpack with a Soul Asylum patch on it. I thought that was pretty cool.

She used to bum cigarettes off me a lot, and my friends always liked it when she'd hang around, because we didn't hang around with too many girls back then. Cindy and I didn't talk all that much; usually we would just smoke in silence, or talk about this teacher or that teacher that we thought was a bitch. I wasn't too sure whether she'd make a good girlfriend or whatever, but I was fifteen and it didn't matter. What mattered was that she was a girl and it seemed like she liked me. I guess that's why we had sex so soon.

It's not like I didn't know about contraception and pregnancy and all that. They teach that stuff pretty early now, and Mr. Nelson, the gym teacher, told us all about the statistics and whatnot that you're supposed to think about before you have sex. It's just that I didn't carry anything around with me then (I didn't know Cindy would want to do it at all, let alone that soon), and everyone else was always joking about us doing it and asking about it and everything. And I didn't have anything else to say for myself. I figured (and I'm only trying to be honest) being the first one of my friends to do it would give me something special.

Like I said, Cindy and I never talked much, and we talked even less after the abortion. Her mom pulled her out of Henslowe High pretty soon after anyway, and I think we were too young to deal with that kind of thing. When I think of Cindy, I always wish a lot of things. I wish that I knew her better, and that we talked more. I wish that I didn't do something as stupid as that, just giving in to my friends, or myself, or whatever. I wish that I still talked to her now, to see what she's like, all grown up. But more than anything, I wish that I had had something more to say for myself back then, so that I wouldn't have gone through with it. It kind of scares me when I think that I haven't changed all that much by now.

Jack waved a hand in front of my face finally, after I re-did Allison's tea for the third time.

"Hey man, hurry up. I can't handle all these girls myself," he said. That confused me a little, because Jack's always excited to help the after-school crowd when they come in. "And those ones keep asking for you. Get a move on."

I looked over and saw the three of them, still at the register, kind of arguing about something. Allison had that paper folded up real small in her hand, and she was fiddling with it, sort of rotating it around and around like she was thinking, and they kept pushing her closer to the counter. Gina finally pushed her so hard that she almost knocked over the tip bucket, and Allison got really embarrassed after that. I felt so bad that I had to intervene.

"Here you go, Allison. No ice. Like you like."



Laura Penna

That threw her off guard, and I wished for a second I hadn't said it. She never gets ice, but she always asks. I think it made me sound like what I actually am, a twenty-seven-year-old guy who memorizes a ninth-grader's order. I tried not to look at her after that, because I felt I was overdoing it. But then she slid the paper over to me, just as the other two ran away with excitement. She started to say something, but then Jack came by and interrupted, trying to be smooth like always.

"On the house," he said, even though I'd already rung her up. Jack's been working here longer than me, so he's kind of my superior. He's not allowed to give people things on the house (if it were up to him, no one with a skirt and a backpack would ever pay for coffee), but we can do it every now and then when no one else is working. I figured Allison lost her nerve after that, because she walked away and didn't even say thank you, even though she always does even when I'm charging her for her drink. She left the note, though.

I pocketed it and helped the next few people, and then when it calmed down a little I took it out and read it in the can. Jack really wanted to see it, too, but I didn't want him messing it up. I'd watched Allison walk around here every day for a year, and this was supposed to be my moment, I thought. I didn't know then what the note said.

It was in that pink handwriting, like I said, and all the "i"s were dotted with little hearts, just like you'd expect. But I sure didn't expect what she wrote. It was some pretty kinky stuff, let me tell you. I don't want to get into it, because I'm not sure how she'd feel about me spreading that sort of thing around. But there was some stuff in there that they don't teach in Catholic school. Stuff about what she wanted to, you know, do to me, and for me to do to her, and I figured she had heard a lot of it from TV, or maybe Gina. She didn't look too sweet, that Gina.

But then, at the end, the end is what got to me, I think. Up to the end it was just Penthouse Forum stuff. It was shocking for some young girl like Allison, sure, but it was just suggestive and that. But at the end, that's when she started talking about where and when we could do it, and how her parents were going to be out this weekend, and I started realizing that she wasn't kidding around. I was thinking of maybe hiding out in the bathroom until 4:00, when I knew her mom usually picked her up, but Jack started banging on the door. The 3:45 crowd was starting to come in, so I knew I'd have to go back out and say something to her.

I didn't know how to handle it, even though there were a few pretty obvious answers banging around in my head. If Jack got a hold of it, he'd probably go wild. "How will anyone catch you if her parents are out?" he'd say. I can hear him. And I know he'd have a point. At first I was disappointed that Allison wasn't as innocent as I thought when I read the note, but after a few minutes I started thinking some pretty bad stuff. No one would know. She even said something like that in the letter. And if she already had that kind of dirty mind, it wouldn't be like I was taking away her innocence or anything. It wasn't the least tempting idea I ever heard in my life, I'll tell you that.

I started walking up to Allison with the note. She was sitting behind that fireplace we have in here, so I couldn't see her at first. When I started turning the corner and got a look at her face, I saw her looking down at her tea, not really talking and a little pale, if you want the truth. Actually, she looked a hell of a lot like she did that day her mom didn't pick her up, that same

lonely look. You know, it's really weird to say and I don't know why this happened (she hasn't crossed my mind in years, so twice in one day was confusing the hell out of me), but just then I started to think about Cindy. So I walked up to her with the note in my hand.

"Hey. You left this on the counter, I think," I told her. I made sure to fold it back the way she had it when she gave it to me.

"Oh. Thanks, Henry," she said, and she looked caught somewhere between surprised and grateful. The color started coming back to her cheeks. Man, did that make me happy.

"I gotta get back to work. If you need anything else, you know where I'll be."

She said thank you, back to the sweet, polite kid that I knew before a half hour ago. Her friends looked like they were having a fit about what happened, but Allison just looked relieved.

I walked back to the counter and gave Jack a hand with the lady he was helping. I started thinking about all the dumb stuff I'd done up to then. About how I never quite fit the skin of the guy my mom thought I was, and about how I didn't pay attention in school because there was too much fun to be had in skipping class. And all those drugs. And that lonely look on Allison's face when her mom didn't pick her up. And about Cindy. Cindy Kelly and that whole crazy night, and that sad stuff that happened afterwards. It seemed to me that I had spent a lot of my life making pretty stupid decisions.

I saw Allison's mom pull up just then, and I wondered if she'd throw the note away when she got home. I kind of hoped so.

Sonnet

(To and From Silence)

Shawn Ferguson

Shame me through silver tongue and violet sleeve,
Down worn hands to blistered fingertips,
Past flesh unto my bone's cracked lips
Let sins singe, sizzle, yet no longer deceive.
Blame the last precious promised horse
As a forgotten gift and trust broken,
Not upon a stream of words spoken
But a lack of heart's freedom and force.
At final rest, I beg you least:
Tame this blizzard biting beast
Locked inside a concealed weapon
Sharper than Muramasa's children
And end this war by a voice's sentence
Than by spite and scorn's stinging silence.

Sonnet 2

Thomas Glaser

Will your anger invade your peaceful state
Or can you control your emotions still
You deeply desire to rule your fate
Though hatred continues to seize your will.

Anger threatens to overthrow your rule
It dictates your actions and causes strife
It leaves you alone like a foolish fool
And forces a surrender of your life.

You want to have power over your days
Yet your feelings rebel against your will
You try to revolt over your old ways
Though hatred continues to seize you still.

After all this anger and all this hate
It still governs the future of your fate.



Kristen Rovon

The Sweetest Card

(The Poem Every Girl Wants to Hear)
Eric Zimmerman

Yes

I will give you a Hallmark card

Laden with sweet lies

Because your eyes glitter like the stars

And your cheeks are red with ruby desire

While your teeth sparkle like flawless diamonds

I will confess my undying love

And how you are sweet and funny and caring

Your self-esteem will ascend

Like a rocket to the heavens

Because no one wants to have a card that says

"You have a homely face and a soul that sings

And an average body with a brilliant mind

Or a modest smile that wins my love

And raptures my heart."

No

I will give you a Hallmark card.

Off the Cuff *trillium 2007*

Alex Felker

scat it out
words
 on your tongue
or sounds
waves emitting
 from chords
 shaped lips
 feel it
 vibration
 of throat
 of air
 of soul
 like a pulse
 (*pounding*)
 into your chest
 (*heaving*)
 lines like blood-flow
 (*dripping*)
from your mouth
 (*pouring*)
out your heart
 (*beating*)
against the world
 with hands that speak
 eyes that dream
 lips that love
 a tongue that sings
 to push the teeth
 with a curve
 a primal dance
 take it in
fill your lungs
 give it back
 ten times ten
 and maybe
 (*maybe*)
 air could
breathe for once
so say it
 caress it
scream it
 feel it
 bursting out
 breaking free
 spinning out
of control
 it's all
 (*that's all?*)
 your everything
 (you're everything)

Approaching Misery

Caroline DeFino

The countdown begins, as she stares blankly into the matrix, finding her number in its never-ending rows. In three weeks, her soul will change and gain undesired knowledge. One week passes and more outrage, realizing the impending pain is eminent. Her horizons will swallow her whole; sprinting on paper-thin ice, she tries to escape from what she desires most. The song she cannot stand reverberates through her mind, and she fights to break free. Today is the day, and she remains unchanged, yet she has become an unknown winner. Realizing her newfound prison, she closes her eyes anyway, and blows out the candles.

Teardrop

Mehwish Jawaid

Whispers of a sweet despair
As I'm gliding down a face so fair,
Entangle me in her fragrant hair
And let me lay there until morning.

Then with the breath of aurora air,
With one sweet kiss her lips to share,
Her gentle skin so soft and bare,
Let me leave her in the morning.



Eric Holzappel

Shadows

Mehwish Jawaid

When you've gone,
The shadows remain to haunt...
Shapes from the past surround me.
Like the dark night,
Thoughts and memories engulf me.
Ghosts of what was still linger...
I try to run and leave the shadows behind,
But over my shoulder, I see them still
Descending upon me,
Suffocating me with lost desires of the past,
Whispering to me of times long gone,
Clinging to me and never letting go.
As I struggle to escape,
I realize that the shadows do not cling to me;
It is I who hold onto them.
I must let go.

Ever Closer, Ever Sweeter

Mehwish Jawaid

Ever closer, ever sweeter
Once a lover, then a cheater
Simple words, complex meanings
Great big hugs, empty feelings
Lavish wrapping, worthless gift
Always carry, never lift
Warm hands, cold heart
Keeping near, but always apart
Save my soul, just to steal it away
Tell me, my tempter, when you decide to stay.



Thomas Glaser

Cactus

Abigail Gunnell

Brian's eyes peeled open like leather off raw skin. They shifted, focused, and glared at the blank spot on the nightstand. There was something missing but he couldn't think of what it was. He rolled onto his back and stared up at the white ceiling with a heavy sigh. He was so tired. He hadn't been able to sleep well since Tara had died. The worst part of it all was that they'd fought the last time they saw each other.

Time and shock had blurred his last memory of Tara to the point that he couldn't hear the words anymore. But they had fought horribly over the phone for an hour before breaking up. That was the last time he had heard from her. Had she really killed herself so long ago? It still felt so close. It wasn't unusual for them to break up, they did so almost every day this past year, but they never stayed apart very long. It was always Tara breaking up with Brian and Brian convincing her to come back. It was an endless cycle that left no real time or energy for anything else. It had been going on for six years. Tara was always afraid that Brian would break up with her and kept heading him off at the pass. She was never convinced that she was good enough.

Brian shifted in his unmade bed and looked around at his dimly lit room. It was not quite dawn yet and the weak light made his room look like a cell. There were boxes and jetsam everywhere; most of it was memories. There was a small collection of stuffed animals Tara had gotten him over the years pushed into a corner. A small lion with a fuzzy brown mane, a black teddy bear with a gold and red bow on the collar, a small eye-eye creature from the tropics (Brian never had figured out where Tara found that one), and several others. Each one stared at him with cold, unforgiving eyes. Glancing down he saw a lumpy scrap of pillow that Tara had sewn for him. She'd tried very hard to make the pillow correctly and ended up with a lumpy, patchy mess. But it was comfortable and it smelled like her so Brian loved it.

Tara was always giving him little gifts, like she needed to bribe him to love her. Brian remembered the time he'd spent in an apartment five minutes from work. His first night in the apartment she'd cooked him up a five-course meal. There was salad, soup, two different meat dishes, and a thick chocolate cheesecake. Brian didn't know much about cheesecake but thought it must have been pretty time-consuming. The only thing he'd been able to think of as she sat across from him asking shyly if the food was cooked well enough was that she was a vegetarian. She'd gone out of her way to make something she knew he would like.

The phone rang suddenly, its shrill tones breaking the long silence of his apartment. With a sigh Brian pushed himself off of his old mattress and out into the hall.

"Hello?" he said into the dusty mouthpiece of the phone.

"Brian? It's about goddamned time you picked up the damn phone! I want you to bring my baby girl's things back to me. It's been a long time since the funeral and so much of it still needs to be organized... How do you expect the family to start to heal if you keep hoarding everything to yourself?"

"Hello Mrs. McAndrew." It was Tara's mother; she had never liked him.

"Yes, hello, we've passed that part! When can I get my baby's things back?"



Sarah Dowman

Brian sighed heavily into the phone. He wanted to keep something, just a small part of her. At the same time it was painful to look at everything day after day...

“Don’t you start with me! I’ll sue you if I have to! You have no right to any part of Tara; you were never good enough for her!”

“Yes, Mrs. McAndrew.”

“Stop droning at me and get Tara’s things over here! Every last bit of it! You owe her that much!”

“Yes, Mrs. McAndrew.”

“Don’t ‘yes’ me, just do it!”

“Yes, Mrs. McAndrew,” Brian repeated for the third time like a chant. He really couldn’t put it off anymore. It might even be a relief to have her things gone. It would be less crowded. Brian was tempted to leave the phone hanging from its cord but it was already beeping accusingly at him so he set it back in its cradle.

One by one he sorted the boxes. Lifting and rearranging six years of memories into sloppy little piles. He lugged them up and down the steps of his apartment building and into his car. It was such a cold way to deal with her things, just giving them away like this, but he couldn’t look at them anymore...it was too painful. He had kept it all too long. He caught a glimpse of one of her favorite white sweaters as he shuffled from the apartment building to the car. She’d felt so good and soft in his arms when she wore that. She felt even better when she wore nothing at all. He had to fight to keep from crying as he shifted and rearranged the boxes, making sure nothing would fall.

There were so many things to take... Boxes full of her artwork; all that he had managed to save from the garbage can. There were sketches of eyes, animals, and hands mixed in with paintings of bloody roses and wide, rolling hills. She had such a talent for drawing and painting but she never saw it. The majority of her work had been destroyed before Brian could get to it. He never let her know he’d kept her artwork; she’d just try to destroy it again. She drew inspiration from so many things, but her favorite project was working with imagery from her beloved romance novels. There had to be eighty to one hundred romance novels and poetry books stacked in the boxes alongside the art. The novels were just another thing Tara felt guilty about. She never admitted to actually liking the books, but he often saw her lounging in bed reading them with her long dark hair splayed across her bare torso. And then there were the clothes... There were so many clothes, soft sweaters and tight jeans. They all smelled of cat urine like her house, a nostalgic smell to him now. Many of her clothes were too tight for her. She’d never been happy with her weight. If he’d ever gotten her to a doctor she would probably have been treated for anorexia ... All he’d wanted to do was love her. He left the boxes behind, on her mother’s doorstep in messy little piles, just like his room, and just like his life.

Brian managed to get home and up the stairs to his apartment before he remembered. He’d forgotten completely about the cactus. Almost two years ago Tara had given him a little cactus plant. He’d smiled and put it in his window. He wasn’t particularly fond of cacti but it was from her and, like the pillow, he loved it. He’d left it in the window for a year, unattended and forgotten between school, work, and fights with Tara. When he’d had to change apartments he’d found it again in the windowsill. It looked just as vibrant and as green as when he’d first received it. Considering himself lucky he gave the cactus to a friend, Jason, to look after for a while. Jason had many plants and would be able to care for it better than Brian had. It was from Tara and he wanted it to live.

Brian remembered Tara lifting the window shades every few months and chastising him for his neglect as she watered the cactus and fussed over it. It had been one of the few things she never seemed too obsessed over. All it took was an apology and a kiss and she’d forgive him, leaving the cactus in the windowsill for another long stretch of time.

Trudging back down the steps Brian started the journey to Jason's house. It wasn't far. He couldn't just leave the cactus there. It had to go with the rest of her possessions. He doubted Mrs. McAndrew would notice its absence or care, it was just one little cactus. Still, in order to finish the job the cactus had to be with everything else.

It was a short drive to Jason's house filled with an endless reel of memory. The past six years were on auto-repeat in Brian's mind. There must have been something he missed. He must have had the chance to get through to her somehow, and he missed it. Tara was just telling him that she loved him, for the first time, in his mind's eye when he knocked on the smooth gray door of Jason's suburban ranch house.

"Hey, long time no see," Jason greeted him, ushering him inside the small house. There were gray and metallic decorations everywhere giving off the cold, modern feeling that Jason was so fond of. "You look a little worse for the wear ... Still hung up about Tara?"

"In a manner of speaking," Brian said in a deep, deadpan voice as he flopped down on a hard black couch. The couch sat to the left of a big bay window that looked out onto the street and gave everything a bluish tint.

"Is something wrong?" Jason asked as he sat down on the couch opposite his friend. He seemed to just become aware of how bereft his friend looked. Brian's eyes were sunken like he hadn't slept in days, his face was unshaven, and he looked markedly thinner and unkempt. "Does this have to do with Tara?"

"Do you still have my cactus?" Brian cut him off.

"Excuse me?" Jason asked, a little caught off guard.

"My cactus, do you still have it? I gave it to you to look after for a while."

"Oh, I'm sorry, man," Jason sighed and pulled his hand roughly through his hair. "I lost it."

"What?" Brian snapped, straightening in his seat with an ominous glare.

"Are you okay, man?" Jason asked again, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "Do you need something? Maybe I can call someone for you?"

"You lost it?" Brian repeated, scanning the walls as though expecting the cactus to materialize before him.

"Uh ... " Jason looked around, as though afraid of being overheard. "Yeah, I lost it. I mean, you made it sound as though I was only going to hang onto it for a little while. It's been almost a year, man. Hell, I might have left it at my last apartment."

Brian laughed a hollow laugh. "It figures," he muttered, running his hands over his ashen face.

"Man what are you talking about?" Jason asked, standing before his friend, almost pacing. "Look, I'm sorry. It's just a fucking cactus. I'll get you another one."

Brian caught his friend's eyes with a glassy, pointed look and held Jason's gaze for a moment before he spoke. "No. You lost it. I don't want another one; I want that one."

"Stop acting like a kid," Jason scolded. "It's just a cactus and you're not going to find it here."

The two friends stared at each other in silence. Brian rose to his feet and turned away. Jason called out to him, but Brian was unmoved. He strode out the door, past his car, and kept going. Jason stood pensively on his doorstep, watching his friend wander aimlessly away.



Laura Penna



Solipsistic Hypothetical

Ted McLoof

If i wrote a poem
about how much
I
like the word “solipsistic,”
what would that mean?
Would the content be
consistent with the theme
and the subject, because to write
a poem about how much
I
like solipsism
and not about solipsism itself,
is solipsistic, or narcissistic,
I
can never remember
which is which,
but there
I
go again,
talking about myself.



Laura Penna

Butterflies

Alex Folker

Look around as if you are
without your wings that touch the earth
spanning the sky and hurling stars
that billow dust with gentle beats.

Sit in your cocoon encased
in crystal soft as silken threads
never parting veils that shine
like diamonds pressed in windowpanes.

Skirt the edge, refuse to fall
and spread your folds of gossamer
filling sails against the wind
the bulge of bubbles through a screen.

Find through windows pretty things
that flutter past and then are gone
swirling colors smeared and streamed
by motion's dance upon the glass.

In your comfort don't yet see
stubs of wings that quiver useless
reeking, rotting from your back
like crude cleaved flesh hung from the bone.

Wonder then how it must be
to swim out there through sapphire seas
floating free among the air
a living leaf caressed by wind.

Maneuvers

Kara Singh

Okay,
so you wanted to make a sacrifice
for the ceremony of giving
(or was it getting)
but nothing would quite suffice.
As if in the irony of living
there was something to be found
(a thing of some spice)—
humming all around, unseen, unsmelt,
even unheard.
Sightless and deaf you grope for
a sliver true, if not pure of a shore
of possibility
a separate silver rule to set you free.

Where would you go though
if found?
Into the water
or onto the land?
Does it matter?



Laura Penna

Lance Armstrong Has Nothing On Me

Stephen Halliwell

“Come here, I have to tell you something” I said as I leaned on the reception desk. “Come closer” my voice now down to a whisper as I gestured with my finger for the nurse to also lean in.

“What is it, sir?” she also whispered, as if we had both just been told to quiet down by the school librarian.

“If you don’t move me into a different room, I am going to take a piss in that old man’s I.V. bag!” Maybe it wasn’t the best way to put it, but it was the only thing that came to mind. At this point, anything less would not have been as satisfying. My anger was somewhere in between Bruce Banner and Hulk, only instead of being about to turn green and immense, I was making sure nobody could see my naked ass through the opening in the hospital robe they gave me earlier.

You see, it had been a really long day that was turning into a Greek tragedy more quickly than I would have liked.

I remembered when I first found out about it. You hear about people getting cancer all the time, but you never really stop to think that someday it could be you. I cried. I didn’t know what else to do. Everything came on so quickly. I found out on a Monday evening that I would need to have surgery to remove my thyroid on a Thursday. I didn’t know how to deal with that. I didn’t care that it was one of the most common types or the easiest to cure. I had never broken a bone, been extremely sick, or anything like that. To me, cancer was an event that served as a reminder that I am not immortal.

Perhaps that is why, when I had pulled into the hospital parking lot at around 8:30 a.m.—which was a real stretch for me since my own personal rooster died at, well...birth, and noon became my preferred hour of grave rising—I was tense with anxiety. I can’t really tell you what the thyroid does, not because they didn’t tell me, but because I was too glazed over with the thought that I actually had to get an organ taken out to prevent a disease from spreading around my body.

I found it a bit odd that they asked me to come in at nine for a surgery that wouldn’t take place until noon. The last thing I remember the doctor telling me two days earlier was that they didn’t want to delay because the cancer could possibly be spreading at that moment. I guess that is why, after spending half an hour trying to get checked in, they led me to a waiting room. However, this waiting room was like none I had ever seen before. It was still a large space filled with unhappy people, but instead of the scoliosis-inducing chairs, there was a nice, comfy hospital bed surrounded by a tarp-sized shower curtain to enclose the room.

I was about an hour into waiting in this tiny “room” when an African-American nurse poked her head through the curtain. She had a warm face with hair that was going slightly gray on the sides. Her dark features were emphasized even more by the purple jumpsuit she wore.

“Hello there! How are you feeling this morning?!” she said in a homely manner.

“Good, considering I am about to be carved like a Christmas ham,” was my first thought, but I only tended to blurt things like that out when I was incredibly annoyed. “Not bad, how are you?” I went with it. “Pretty good, thanks for askin,’” she said with a delightfully large and grandmotherly smile. This is when she pulled something out from behind her back. Remember the hospital robe I mentioned earlier? “I’ve got somethin’ for you. Now, if you could just put this on, and Dr. Talbot will be in to see you soon.”

“So what, of the clothes that I’m wearing now, do I keep on?” I inquired.

She giggled as if the question was silly, “Nothin’, hun!” and walked out.

Great. I can’t tell you how exquisite it was to exchange my extremely comfortable sweatpants, socks, and long-sleeve shirt for a paper-thin, covered-in-what-looked-like-a-floral-design, blue hospital gown. By the way, did I mention that my entire back, including my ass, was hanging out like a fat person wearing a mid-riff? This is about the time I looked down at the table and saw the other item she left on the bed. Now, I’d never worn a shower cap, never had the desire to, and never really thought I would in the future. However, God had apparently willed this to be a day of change in my life, since it’s not often you get to say, “Yeah? Well, I’m going to be organ-less by this afternoon!” Unwillingly, I donned the puffy cap and thought that all I needed now was some face paint and a flower that spit water.

When it was about 11:30 a.m. Dr. Talbot decided to finally show up...and stay for all of five minutes. Yet, in those five minutes he was able to explain to me a great deal of what he already had two days earlier. Thanks, Doc. I knew I could count on you. It was not much longer after that abbreviated visit that a Korean male nurse came in to move me, and my bed, to a different location. As it turns out, he took me directly to the operating room, which was actually quite comfortable...if you’re into the whole Frankenstein-laboratory type of décor. It seemed to me that the table, which was flat like the nurse’s chest, was the absolutely perfect setting for attaching bolts to my neck and jolting them with electricity. Anyway, they moved me onto the table, and the anesthesiologist—which is basically just the formal term for the person who is going to trick your body into not feeling pain by knocking you into a short-term coma—entered the room.

“So, how are you feeling today?” It seems that’s the only question these hospital people know how to ask. To my dismay, I couldn’t come back with, “Well Doc, I have cancer and you are about to cut my throat open. If we were in a dark alley and all you wanted was my money (wait, maybe it’s not so different), then I’m pretty sure you’d be going to jail. Other than that, I’m feeling pretty damn good about myself!”

“Not bad.”

“Well, I’m going to tell you how we’re going to go about this. First I’m going to give you an intravenous anesthesia, which will begin to go through your blood and start to make you feel groggy. After that, I’m going to give you two kinds of gasses that, when you wake up, will make you feel like an old fart.” Doctor jokes. These guys really need to get out more.

“Pardon my humor,” he said with a smile. “The first dose will be a laughing gas (how appropriate) and the second one will knock you into a very deep sleep.”

Hey, while you’re at it, why don’t you get me addicted to heroin too?

“So how’s that sound?” he ended.

“Good to me, I just want it over with” I said as I put my head back. The last thing I saw was the Korean nurse strapping me to the table. Right, because I normally have epilepsy during surgeries.

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The next thing I knew, I woke up in a different room than before and with only a little pain in my throat, because if I remember correctly, the doctor had told me they would be placing a plastic tube down there to help me breathe. A nurse who was nearby told me I was in the Recovery room, but I was feeling so out of it that I didn't really care. Wait, let me rephrase that. I was feeling so out of it that I didn't really care until I noticed there was a small tube filled with red liquid that ran into this doughnut-looking contraption. This wouldn't have been so bad if it wasn't firmly attached to my NECK. The nurse calmly told me it was so that any excess blood or fluid could drain out of the area. I guess that was better than having a blood filled goiter appear a few hours later. However, I could not escape the thought that all I had in my neck was a glorified tampon. Must be for those heavy days.

I looked over to my left and realized that I had another tube; only this one was attached to my arm on one end, and an I.V. stand with the pouch hanging from the top on the other. This is when a nurse came by and said it was time to go up to my regular room. I was extremely excited to hear this because I knew my family would be up there waiting for me, ready to greet me with hugs and kisses. The relief that the whole ordeal was over was almost too much to handle...that is, until the nurse opened her mouth again. Now, usually females are much better at breaking potentially bad news to people than males are. This was not to be as she said, “Now, when we get up to the room, I want you to try and go to the bathroom. If you can't, then we're going to need to put a catheter on you.”

No, no. There was no “can't” in this situation. I was going to the bathroom come hell or high water. As far as I know, a catheter is a long tube that they put up, as my one friend once referred to it, “Ye flaccid Boab,” in order to drain urine from your bladder because you can't do it yourself. Don't ask me why he called it that. Now, I don't have the first clue what a female catheter feels like, but what I do know is that they, unlike men, are size-wise meant for larger objects such as, I don't know, BABIES. This was not going to happen to me. Although I did wonder how they would deal with a eunuch in that situation.

Anyway, when I finally got back to the room, I was told I had a couple of seconds before my family was to arrive. I immediately got up—which was a chore, since I was a little woozy from the plethora of anesthesia they had given me—and headed straight for the bathroom. The suspense of basically having a fire hose in reverse attached inside my precious member was killing me. I stood there for a few seconds, nervously trying to coax it to work with me here.

“Come on, Captain. Think of all I've done for you! True, I've made you wait all these years, but at least I've kept you clean! Look, please do this for me. Please? PLEASE? Go...Goooo...Go Go Go, GO!”

The chorus of angels sang in the background, a leprechaun presented his pot of gold, and a small cherub gave me a flower to hold before it flitted out of the window as the threat of catheterization was mercifully avoided.

After getting back in bed, being careful not to trip on my own I.V. tube and making sure my robe stayed closed, my family was allowed in to see me. It was good to spend that time with them. Nothing quite brings people together better than this type of ordeal. They explained to me how difficult Dr. Talbot had described the surgery as being. There was a good chance that if he wasn't extremely careful with me, I could have lost my voice for a very long time. I looked at my fiancée, Elizabeth, and momentarily thought of what it would have been like to never

again be able to tell her, “I love you.” I know that, if she were in my position, I couldn’t handle the absence of the phrase. That is why I hugged her a little tighter than everyone else and whispered those three words in her ear, realizing that I’d still be able to do so for a long time after this was over. Everyone left and I was alone in the room.

I was scheduled to have blood taken from me at around 11:00 p.m. and it was now 8:00, so I had a couple of hours to kill. After a wonderful meal of salty beef broth, orange jello, and cranberry juice, I was still not very tired, so I flipped on the baseball game, which was the only part of the room that wasn’t a bland, tan color. 11:00 came sooner than I thought it would, and the nurse entered, stuck the needle in my arm, did what she needed to do, and left. Finally, I would be able to get some sleep.

That is when I heard a good deal of conversation coming closer to my room. I was hoping and praying it would just pass by, but on this night, my friends, it was not to be.

They wheeled him in, a dumbfounded look in his aging eyes. His white hair was the typical hospital style of “Everywhere,” and age spots interrupted his pale skin. I had almost made it to sleep without a roommate. There was another one of those shower curtains separating us, so I couldn’t see him when he actually got settled in. It was a good thing too; I really didn’t want to have to look at the tubes that were coming from his nether regions all night long. This is when things started to go downhill faster than that time I rode an inner tube into a small creek during one particular winter snowfall.

I heard his deep voice utter, “So, young man, what are you in for?” Funny, I wasn’t aware I had been transferred to County.

“I just came out of surgery to remove my thyroid because it had cancer,” I said hoarsely, as my voice was still very weak, but I figured the more I said now, the quicker the conversation would end.

“What?” Great, not only couldn’t he pee, but hear as well. I repeated myself, straining as much as I could to be louder.

“What!?” Shoot him. I repeated my ordeal again. “Oh okay!”

“So, what about you?” Wow, was it starting to hurt to talk.

“Well, I had a stroke a few days ago and they’ve been moving me around this damn hospital and running all these tests on me to see what’s wrong. I tell ya, these nurses don’t have a clue as to what they’re doing.” He was a talker. “These young folk don’t care nowadays. They are just here for the paycheck. They don’t want to help you at all. It’s your money they’re after. People used to want to help other people. You know, I used to play tennis when I was in college, and there was a guy there on the team that really helped me to become a better player...”

At this point, I zoned out and sent a string of “Yup’s,” “Uh-huh’s,” and my personal favorite, “Wow’s” his way. Then I noticed that I had to go to the bathroom again. Something that everyone had failed to mention to me was the way an I.V. bag affects how you piss. If you recall the scene from the original Austin Powers movie, right after they free him from his cryogenic freeze, he proceeds to evacuate his bladder for the next couple of minutes. Carefully imagine having to experience that almost every hour. Now I know what many women go through as far as frequency.

When I got back in bed, I heard that he was still talking, not noticing that I had been gone. The next time he took a break in between sentences, I took my shot and said, “Well, I think I’m gonna try and get some sleep.”



Thomas Glaser

“Well, alright. Goodnight,” he replied, sounding a little disappointed.

Finally! We both turned off our individual lights. Sleep was going to come any minute now! It was going to be... Why did I just hear a click...NO...he wasn't doing this. The light was blinding after a few minutes of complete darkness.

“Nurse? Nurse!” he called out to no one. Use your call button, you old fool. The slightly overweight female nurse strode in, calmly. “What is itcha need, sir?” she spoke in an unexpectedly Irish accent.

“I'm cold. Can you get me a blanket?”

“O' course!” she replied pleasantly. After getting him settled, she came over to my side, asked me how I was, and informed me that they would be taking more blood at 6:00 that morning. Yes, by now it was morning. I will spare the details, but if I remember correctly, it was another five times that this man, opting to shout for the nurse instead of using his call button, would complain that he was cold.

It was only at about 3:00 in the morning that he finally seemed content. About time ... Suddenly the lights flickered on and then off. This wasn't happening. They flickered on and off again, and again. OKAY! They work, dumbass! I heard the television pop on next. I remembered when the doctor told me that post-operation rest was important to recovery. I turned and glared at the curtain, imagining my gaze causing it to catch fire. It was 3:30 in the morning and my toleration of this man was quickly slipping away and the urge to take off his catheter and spray him with his own urine while shouting over and over again “Are you warm now!?” was growing ever more powerful.

However, cooler heads prevailed and I calmly got out of bed. Closing my robe over my hind parts, I walked out of the room, using my I.V. stand as support. I made the immediate left out of the doorway and headed for the reception desk. All of the overnight nurses looked bored as they filled out their paperwork. I chose the young, blonde nurse—not because she was attractive, but because she was closest to me.

“Come here, I have to tell you something,” I said as I leaned on the reception desk. “Come closer” my voice now down to a whisper as I gestured with my finger for the nurse to also lean in.

“What is it, sir?” she also whispered, as if we had both just been told to quiet down by the school librarian.

“If you don't move me into a different room, I am going to take a piss in that old man's I.V. bag!”

“Sir, please calm down and we will see if we have an open room for you.” she replied, taken aback by my statement. She looked through some papers for a minute or two, and finally turned back to me saying, “We have something for you a little further down the hall. We'll move your bed in there right away, okay?” I appreciated the coolness with which she said this and began to walk back with two of the nurses. The satisfaction and relief of seeing them move my bed down the hall was wonderful. We entered a room where, again, there was a curtain partition. Another man was lightly snoring on the other side, but compared to what I had just been through and the fact that it was 4:00 a.m., anything else would be heaven.

I closed my eyes and slowly drifted off to a peaceful sleep.

.....

I woke with a start, hearing loud babble coming from the other side of the curtain. I looked at the clock. I had been asleep an hour and forty-five minutes. This couldn't be happening. Shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!

I couldn't even understand what he was saying. He wasn't talking about tennis; he wasn't talking about how cold he was. No. He was talking about how, "Ughh ba bah naaa meeeh" he was. I quickly reached for the call button and a nurse came in to see what was going on.

"Excuse me, what's the deal with him?" I asked in exhaustion.

"Oh, he's a nursing-home patient."

Shit ...

All I wanted to do was go home. As the man became louder and louder, I tried to fight off the sound. I was tired of walking around attached to an I.V. that was now becoming cold in my arm. I was convinced that the night would never end. I sat there, in my bed, not moving and trying to hold back tears—not of sadness, but of someone who was at the end of his rope. I had given up all hope of sleep at this point.

6:00 a.m. They took blood and left. "Ehhhhh nub bunne eeeeeeeeh"

7:00 a.m. Two more hours until I could have visitors. "Sabaaa taaakeemmee"

8:00 a.m. I want to die. "EeeeeerrrAAAHH" SHUT UP YOU FUCKING RETARD!

9:00 a.m. In walks mother and fiancée. "Ehnnnniii baaaAAAHH" She looks confused at the sound from the other side of the curtain and then looks at me. I know my hair is disheveled and the bags under my eyes are sagging further than Britney Spears after her first child.

"Please, mom ... I just want to go home."

"Honey, I'm going to get you out as fast as I possibly can." I knew she had never seen me like this; that explained the expression on her face. It wasn't right away, but it was another couple of hours before any progress was made. My breakfast was hard jello and cranberry juice. I tried to eat it, but all I could think of was the noise to my left. If I ever get like that, I think I want to be shot. My mom came in after yet another trip to the nurse to see what the hold-up was.

"They've ordered one more blood test before they are going to let you leave. It's almost over."

As two nurses finally came into the room, I held out my arms. My left I offered to the one nurse so she could take the I.V. out, the right so the other could take blood. Unfortunately, I have more hair on my arms than others, so when the nurse jerked the tape off that held the needle in, it didn't really work. I looked to my right arm to try and avoid the pain in the left and saw the other nurse stick the blood-taking needle into an existing wound. A third nurse roughly took the tube out from the inside of my neck. If only a car had run over my bare feet, I could have laid claim to having come closer to crucifixion than anyone else in about a thousand years.

I sprung up from the bed as they gave me my clothes to change into. We checked out of the hospital soon after. As I stepped outside into the late summer air I felt warmth that told me it was over. The clouds which had made the day before so gray had been burned through to show a clear blue sky. As we walked to the car, Elizabeth put her arm around me and whispered, "I love you."



Michelle Krupsky

***David M. Magowan—
402 Bomber Group D. (I)***

Daniel Bradlau

There are no flowers on his grave
it has not been visited for years
except by the maintenance men of the graveyard
trimming the weeds that climb his tombstone
to keep it neat for strangers
visiting his dead neighbors
who had their own lives to live,
families of their own to raise.

***David M. Magowan—
402 Bomber Group D. (II)***

Daniel Bradlau

A flag folded in triangle rests
cozy in a glass case on the mantel.
In the corner of the room, his daughter
wraps Christmas presents for his grandchildren
while his son-in-law paces back and forth
sipping a beer and talking to an invisible employer.

The kids poke their heads into the room
trying to get a peek at what mom is wrapping.
You should be in bed, she tells them, or Santa
will not come to visit you this year.
She remembers when she was young.

Her father would knock on the front door
on Christmas Eve, dressed in red with a white beard
holding a sack full of gifts.
She looks to the mantel, sighs, and smiles.

The Problem With Falling

Denise Giaino

I
in love with your neighbor (whom your father knew first)
is that after you leave,
you still hear the grumble of that awful pickup truck,
and your mother (so sincere) still insists he stops by to chat.
And, coming up the stairs,
he still can't see it—
it wasn't supposed to even last that long,
and that you held on as long as you could for his sake,
because he needed you to carry him.
So you showed him how
to walk and talk and laugh and fight and call and dance and
kiss.
And after leaving all of the worry
and the disappointment behind
he has lost everything,
and you have gained nothing.

II
in like with a man
because, mere days and eons later, 22 is a man,
who insults your everything
(except for that one time)
is that the realization comes far too late.
A summer of smiles,
knees grazing under the table
naps in the grass
with those unreal blue eyes slapped on the hairiest face.
It hits you hard and fast
(like that time you forgot about the broken door hinge).
And you know it's a problem when
(months later) the nice Spanish boy takes you out
buys you the lovely dinner,
ignores your neurotic tendencies,
and instead compliments the lightness of your eyes.
Yet you are still lost in the haze that was August.
A blink and a snap.
His eyes give you nothing.
(Because, really, whoever wants what they can actually get?)



Jamie Grisafulli

The Secrets of Sound

Brian Schaab

cummings knew something I don't.
More likely, many somethings.
Words are just for play
show and sound.
Any word can -ing or be br(ok)en
and me's my's and little i's
are playful as rocks skipping
on the water, landing this way
and that with seemingly no pattern,
but really
each jump is determined
by the little grooves, imperfections,
the spin the speed.
By the genius mind
bending words to his will
careful as spring.
I want him to teach me
the secrets of sounds,
how they make me smile
even when their meaning
is far from me,
and ask how he knew
a lonely leaf falling
could break my heart.

Seeds

Shawn Ferguson

September is half today
Of what August heat has burnt away.
Quietly,
God hushed
His liquor's chastity beneath the rug
While working
A world fair among the slugs,
He stroked his favorite guitar
Strings
Along to the flickering beat
With a frail smile looking down on homeless
From the edge of his charbroiled feet
Watching Cancer skies
Fade to Leo's moon
It stirs
Once upon midnight's black lagoon
Strumming through campfire this tumbling memory
Humming underneath
Johnny Seed's apple tree
To sleep in balloons and spider bubbles
To dream,
To forget his weary troubles
Into the darkness time slowly creeps
With his guitar pillow.

Persephone Goes to Live With Hades

Alisandra Wederich

Persephone never expected
The rush of darkness
As the sky closed over.
Six months and she would never see the sun.

She didn't think she could survive.
She didn't think she could stand it—
dark dampness,
without even the stars or moon.

She could feel her senses grow numb,
As the smell of warm wheat in the summer meadow
Grew out of reach
As the world she knew
Fell away.

She only grabbed for Hades
So that she wouldn't feel so alone
But even then
His hand was rock to her soft petal fingers

She went to let go of him,
But misled, he seized her shoulder,
Started rolling his dead fish tongue
Around her pollen mouth.

But she wanted to scream,
But his skin on her skin
Was death.
She couldn't move.

Later, he would offer her apologies,
Laying six more pomegranate seeds at her bedside,
And a note:
“I don't know what I did to upset you.”



Billy Ludwig

Domestic Savior

Dave Shaw

He turned and looked away, resuming his duties. After all, it wasn't his concern. He was a relative term. Only recently had the machine begun to discriminate male from female, which were not strictly opposites; thus they were difficult to capture in Boolean logic. Male and female were exclusive subsets within the superordinate set "Human." Among his analyses, irrationality was one that became well-associated with the male gender.

Gears and servos whirred in quiet harmony while the machine swept the hardwood floor. Although Claire had first insisted on sweeping herself, he had quietly persisted until she smilingly assented. It was a smooth, wavelike motion—each sweep was an undulation of pure Zen, quick and accurate. His model had a penchant for menial chores. As a progressive device, adapting simple routines to more complex operations was an effective method of improving upon himself.

Claire smiled through her bruises. It was an empty smile, hiding a lifetime of pain and suffering. She sat in the stool as her shaky hands grasped the violin. Steadying, she played for her husband, Joseph. Her tears never hit the lacquered surface of the instrument. She was perhaps not a master, but was certainly wasted material outside of an orchestra.

Joseph always appreciated the intricacies of her art, though he didn't approve of orchestras. "Too much confusion," he would say, "too many dirty men." He kept her from auditions. He kept her from much of the world, for that matter. Whenever Claire mentioned the orchestra, his unwarranted jealousy and selfishness flared. It often manifested itself physically in some form or fashion. The machine kept sweeping through those times. Eventually, Claire stopped trying.

The following day, Joseph asked Claire to play for him again, but he grew more agitated than soothed. Day after day, Joseph remained adamant that Claire play the violin for him. Fearing reprisals, she performed each night. Still, he remained discontent.

Two weeks passed, and Joseph was as angry as he had ever been. He announced that they would be moving to a smaller house, and might have to sell their mechanical maid. He asked Claire to play for him once more, but the music angered him no matter how much she smoothed its soothing chords. He put his fist down onto the table, roaring at the woman to cease. The violin cut off with a sharp squeal, echoing Claire's fear as she hastened to comply. Even her silent weeping aggravated Joseph, so he drove out into the night, "to think." He slammed the door on the way out.

The machine paused only momentarily before resuming his quiet sweeping.

One night later, Joseph demanded that Claire perform again. His breath was awash with the acrid smell of alcohol. He staggered over to Claire, towering over her. At first, she asked him if he was sure. Even through his profanities and demeaning remarks, she was slow to draw the bow and instrument. Before she set one to the other, she repeated, "Joseph, are you sure?"

He saw Joseph in a way no human saw: he saw his body as a system of motors, structure, and regulators. The whole idea of being a learning machine was to assess cause and effect, observe, and adapt. He made a new schema, dragging and dropping specific correlations, protocols, and parameters.

Joseph took the violin, and as he raised it up on high, he took Joseph's arm.

"No," proclaimed a synthesized voice. It was calm and pleasant; it could not be otherwise. Joseph was surprised and normally may have stopped, but alcohol and pride made him mad with confidence. He wouldn't be made a fool in front of his wife by a can opener.

"And now you've got the fucking butler on your side! What's next, disobedience from the fucking toaster ov—"

Joseph's right arm snapped relatively easily. Bones are more flexible than metal, but they are still support structures, and must maintain an amount of rigidity to function. The machine knew this, but reveled in the curiosity of it. He was shocked, actually; he had only intended to twist the arm. Releasing the person he had harmed, he spread his metal limbs in front of Claire to protect her. She wept uncontrollably.

"No," he repeated in the same peaceful tone.

"You broke my fucking arm!" Joseph yelled redundantly. "If can openers have a hell, I'm going to send you there tonight!"

Being an upstanding citizen, Joseph kept his shotgun in the living-room closet. He clicked the remote to immobilize the machine. His wife didn't require so sophisticated a device to stop her at the door upon his return. Although she froze at his terrible voice, he smashed his heel down on her back, pinning her to the floor, just to be sure.

"Watch this, Claire. I haven't used this in months."

Firing a shotgun with a broken arm is dubious, but Joseph was that kind of guy. When the first shot threw him off, he braced against the door jamb. When he ran out of ammunition, he clubbed the maid with the shotgun until his other arm got tired. His gun had taken out most of the machine's head and blew off the left arm at the shoulder-actuator. The product was resilient, but not that resilient.

Claire sat behind her husband, carefully being quiet as she fiddled with the remote. Just as Joseph came to his senses and turned around to Claire, she turned the machine back on. It booted quickly with a faint whirr of hard drives and heat sinks. Though most of the sensory devices were obliterated, the machine's core remained unharmed inside of its chest—the most logical place.

"Do you fucking know what you're doing?!" Joseph screamed at his wife.

"Yes," the machine answered for her. He marched towards Joseph, unrelenting. Joseph tried to slap away the machine's probing arm as it backed him into a corner, but failed to fight off its resolve.

Joseph's urine stained the front of his pants as the machine's hand found his neck and slowly clenched down. "Possessed... fucking Devil..." Joseph stammered.

"I died for your sins," he answered.

Claire stood, fascinated as the machine strangled her husband. Slowly, she picked up the bow and instrument and began to play a sprightly fiddle—one of Joseph's favorites. He gargled and fell limp under the machine's unremitting grip just as Claire reached the crescendo.

Postcard

Kate Capelli

No roads, only waterways,
no cars, only boats,
more bridges in this one city
than anywhere in the world.
Standing on this bridge, lined with shops and tourists
powerful marble connecting two towns,
across the Grand Canal,
you're miles away from where I am.
Even with years of history under my feet,
the city doesn't look as perfect.

Solitude

Nicole Arvidson

He's got a silent situation
A silent set of aggravation
Changing with each gesture of manipulation
He secludes himself

He drowns his sorrow with another drink
Another smoke and thoughts to think
Standing so far from the edge, but on the brink
He alters his perception

Slowly weeding out each attempt of restoration
To bring back a life, a family, an occupation
Ignoring, but secretly recounting every allegation
He stands alone

He to himself becomes a danger
More in sorrow than in anger
Leveraging all there is to wager
He's choosing solitude.



Anthony Cheski

Time and Sand

Kaitlyn Malsky

How long before Take It Easy's power runs out?
My life is everywhere around me,
including on the ground,
which is in danger of breaking.
Small shards of what I thought I wanted
crushed to an ultra-fine dust
that sits useless in the palm of my hand.

How long before Do What's Best for You is no longer an option,
and the years that seemed to slide by effortlessly in the past
push you into the skin of a young adult?
I know I have been caught, perhaps blissfully unaware.

But the years push me to do too many things,
making for me a list of things
I am forced to face:
the consequences of self-imposed solitude,
the lack of experience that makes me trip over the feet of Naïveté,
the pangs of isolation, felt within and outside of family,
which seemed to transform me into a little atom,
spinning alone, always away from where others were carrying on.

How long before proving myself ceases to be
the subtle goal hiding beneath social situations?
There is no weapon against those who see difference.
They make of it what they will, constructing strong towers
of assumptions that I must disassemble,
to draw eyes away from the legs
and assert my capability.

A goal there, a desire here,
is a specific grain of me,
part of a future yet unseen,
part of a past that weaves its thread in and out each day.
The dust of things I thought I wanted
sits still in my palm,
the only place it looks whole.



Thomas Glaser

Antique

Colleen McGuire

I raise my left foot to the top
of my faded green dresser
and think of my grandmother—

of that summer morning
when we sat on the porch
with a can of green paint
as the sun beat at our backs.

You were young then
and didn't think twice
about having wrinkles
or sagging arms.

You were young
and wore a red bandanna
without worrying of sunburn,
and we painted.

I raise my left foot onto the dresser
and touch the cold razor to my lotioned leg
hoping that I will not make a mess.

I can still smell the must of the drawers—
just the way I did when my boyfriend and I
loaded the green drawers and frame

into my car
and left her house for the last time
left my childhood
where we once painted.

I raise my left foot to the top
of a memory
and shave my legs, hoping I won't make a mess.



James Firehouse

Jacob's Ladder

Shawn Ferguson

You strike at daybreak:
Even asleep,
You can wipe the stardust from my eyes
With a graceful whisk of your hands,
Making
My winter mornings shiver at your side,
Turning the ice on the window ledge
Into ghostly vapors.
It seems as if a dark piece of blessed space has fallen
From the sweet milky way
And painted itself into my soul,
Like you,
Lifting me out of my dreams
And into your arms.
Here, where the darkness is safe
I melt quietly
Into forgotten memories of slumber
Over and over again.



Michael Matagrano



Laura Penna

