



Trillium 2006

Trillium



BIL THOMPSON



Staff

Editorial

Annarose McLaughlin
Lori A. Rizzo
Theresa Graziano
Bette Lynn Shelly

Design

Kristina Chiappetta
Anton Djamoos
Jennifer Belthoff

Layout

Meagan Heaney
Kerri King
Nicole Arvidson
Christine Mancini
Cathryn Davis

Proofreading

Dominick Turitto, Jr.
Kathleen Appleby

Faculty Advisor

Carol Hovanec

Design Consultant

Ellen Whitney

Photo Consultant

Debora Prado

COVER: Debora Prado

BACK COVER: Christine Mancini

Dedication

We would like to dedicate the 2006 edition of *Trillium* to Carol Hovanec in appreciation of her hard work and commitment, not only to the magazine, but to Ramapo College itself. She will be sorely missed by all of us following her retirement this year after an extraordinary long run as a professor at Ramapo. Thank you for your time and devotion.

A special thanks is in order for Dr. Anthony Padovano, who has always shown us tremendous support. At the end of the 2005-2006 academic year, Dr. Padovano will be stepping down from his post as literature convener and Professor Edward Shannon will be taking his place. We would like to congratulate Dr. Shannon on his new position.

On behalf of the entire trillium staff, we welcome you and proudly present the 2006 edition.

Museless

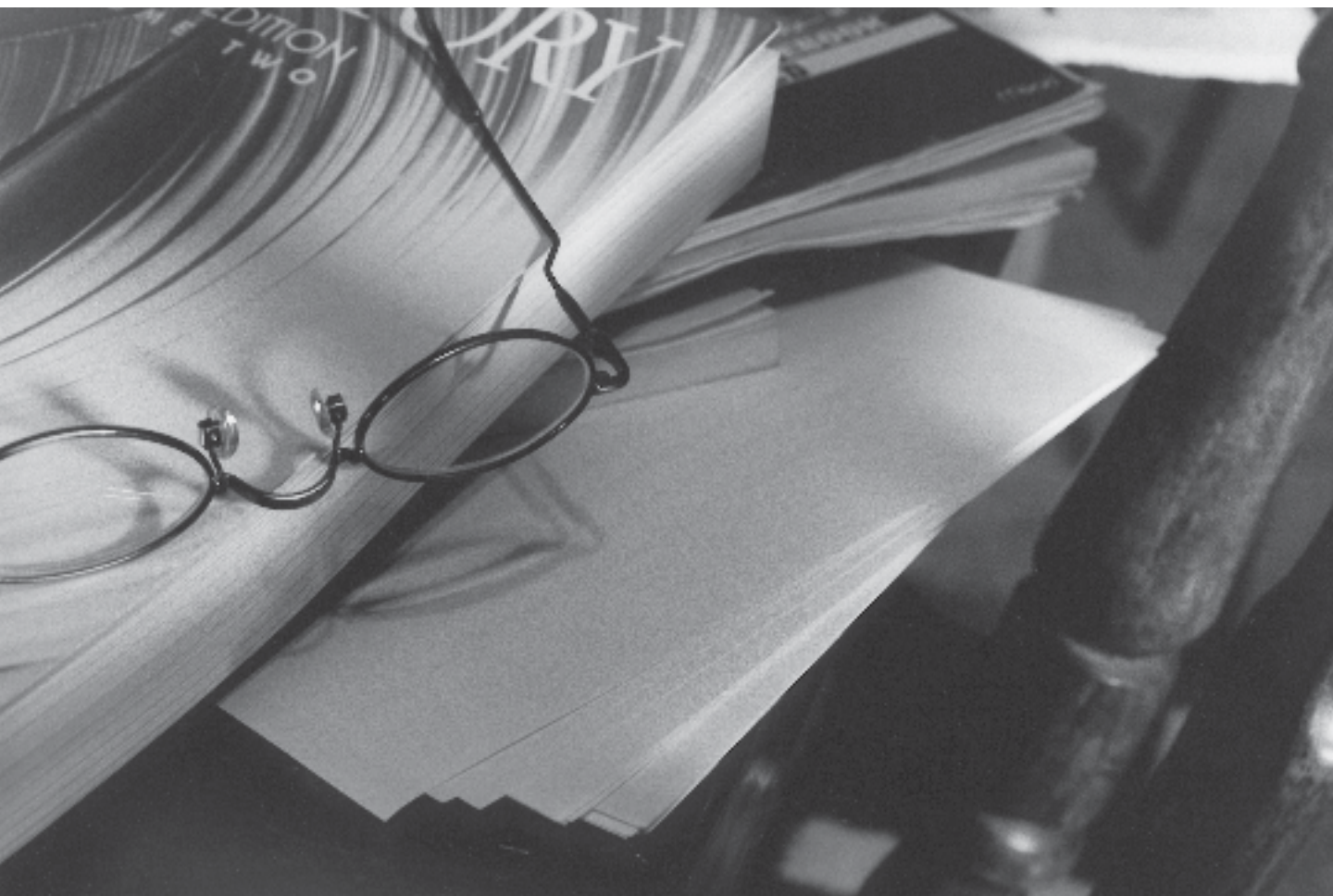
KEVIN DELANEY

Something seems to be escaping me,
What it is, I wish I knew.
This something is so hard to see,
It won't appear despite what I do.

Masturbate thoughts, manipulate melodies,
Though neither falls right into place.
Words cover paper, some harsh, some subtleties,
But it is the blank white laughing in my face.

“Where are you going, what's your intent?
What does all this dribble mean?
Of all the time and ink you spent,
There's no message here to glean.”

“Call it a night, go get some sleep,
Hope to dream of dreams,
Some perhaps that you can keep,
With inspiration bursting at the seams.”



BARBARA KALINA

Can't Stand Your Silent Questions

ALISANDRA WEDERICH

I'm sitting here -
Your heart is
Lying on the floor.

Your lips move,
But I don't know
What you're asking anymore.

Sweet surrender
Body tender
Listen to it break.

The sound wave
Magic rainbows
Make my body shake.

I can't stand
your silent questions,
The way they make me scream.

The answers pulled
From sinews and veins
Don't answer anything.

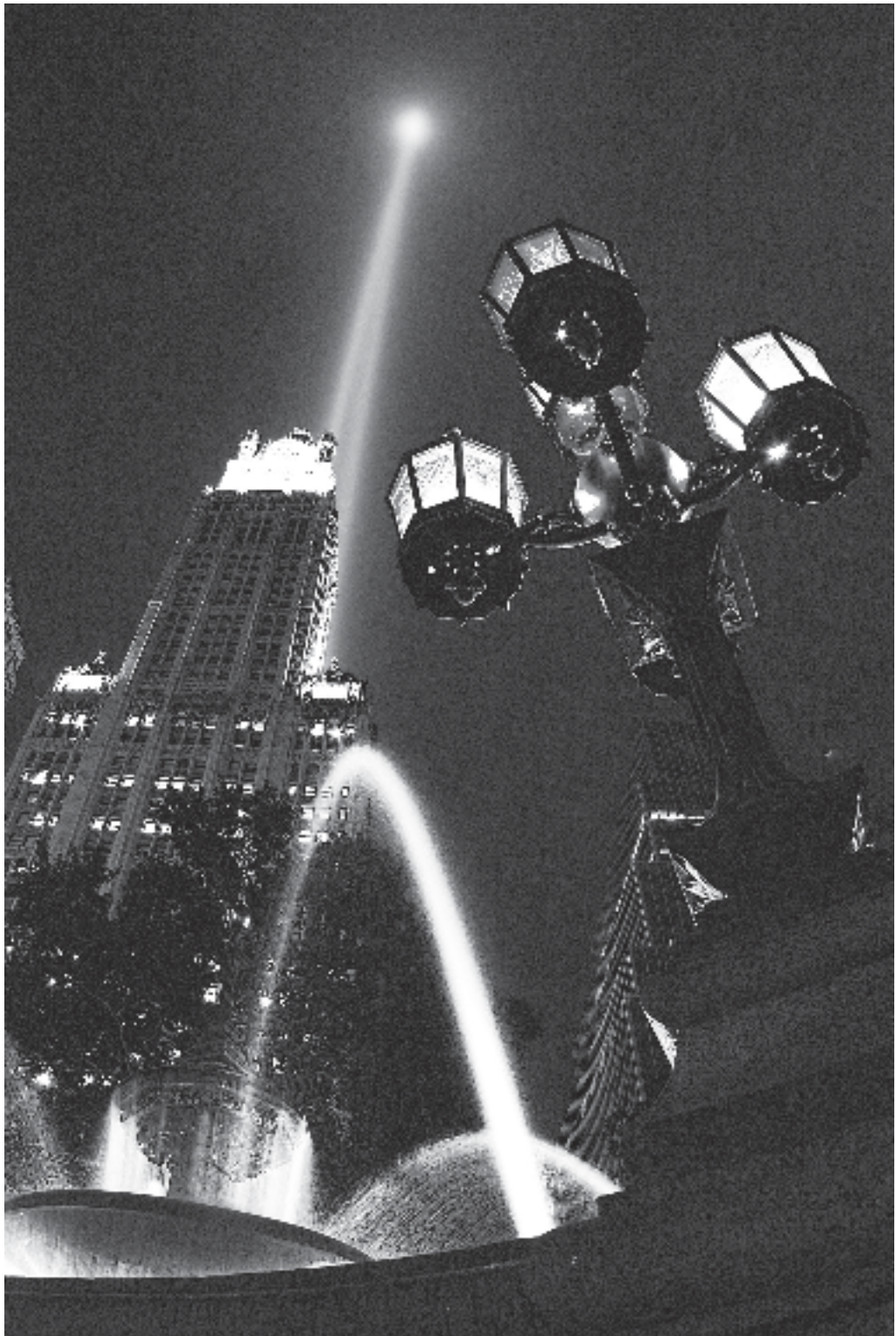


KEVIN PURN

11:20:05

ELYSE JANKOWSKI

so it was a mis
take this cruci
fix what was bro
can you under
stand still with
out comes the voice of rea
son hear my cries and for
give me your hand
some will tres
pass it off like no
thing.



OLEG KIKIN

Tumbleweed

MATTHEW NAGEL

Tumbleweed crosses the barren desert unquestioned;

A bouncing ride of unearned joy,

A journey limitless in opportunity-

Roll on,

Roll on,

Roll on,

Is there any intention?

A guided path?

A goal?

Thought not I did...

The freedom of a tumbleweed,

Surpasses that of all.

The freedom of a tumbleweed,

I hope to someday hold.

The Principality of I

MARLI A. CREESE

Look to the North if you seek reason,
Plato's light shines brightly there.
Into the West, tempestuous waters,
Fount of all that love creates.
In the Eastern lands,
From the Light of Heaven,
A shadow of the cross is cast on the ground.
Steer clear of the South,
Its alluring darkness,
With fair-seeming demons of dire intent:
Visions of power, delusions of greatness,
And others that should not be named.
In the midst of it all stands my citadel,
my sanctuary,
Overlooking the Principality of I.



OLEG KIKIN

On Silently Observing the State of this Literature Class

LOUIS MARAJ

Save me from this prison of false titles and exaggeration
Of prejudiced chains that suppress imagination
And expression
Of the lies that we worship as unworthy Goddesses
With no plausible perception of what reality is
Her Kisses
Unmet, discarded and ignored
Her character unmannerly deplored
As an unheard chord
Defamed to the silence of the chosen state
Ruminate, contemplate
Suffic.....ate until I was satisfied.



BARBARA KALINA

And Maybe That's as Far as it Goes

BRIAN SCHAAB

I look at my phone and see “Incoming Call: Mel,” and I get the feeling that it’s going to be a long night.

“Hello?”

“Hi... can you come over?” she says. And I can hear it already, she’s upset. They must have broken up.

“Are you alright kid?” I ask out of habit. I know she’s not. She’ll be hysterical when I get there.

“Can you just come over?” she asks again. So now I’m gonna havta go to A&P, pick up a carton of her favorite ice cream, drive to her house and console her.

“Yeah sure, I’ll be right over.”

It’s always the same. Every guy falls for her. She’s like a virus, as soon as a guy comes in contact with her, they’re obsessed with her, and she infects every guy she meets. This is how it happens. A guy falls for her, if he’s lucky they go out for a couple months, she breaks up with him, and gets terribly upset for some reason. That’s the part I can never figure out, why does she get so upset when she’s the one breaking up with them? There are a million other things I could be doing tonight, but I’m gonna go over to her house, because I’m infected too.

I remember the day I realized I had become infected, October 6th, 2004, I was a junior in high school. There are days that you remember for the rest of your life. Sometimes you remember minute details of a day for no reason. I remember telling my friend that I could eat bologna sandwiches for the rest of my life when I was four years old. I hate bologna now. But anyway, I’m infected, and I remember when it happened, because you just don’t forget some things. October 6th, 2004, I was infected with this horrible, awful, oh so wonderful virus: love. And the carrier of this disease? The girl I’m going to be consoling in a few minutes, the girl I’m meant to be with, Melissa Morgan.

I had gotten my license a couple weeks before, and my dad had just given me the keys to a sweet, big pimpin, attracts the ladies like a magnet, 96 Ford Taurus. First stop: Where else? My best friend Melissa’s house. I pulled up to her house and called her cell phone.

“Hello.”

“What are you doing right now, Mel?”

“Hello to you too.”

“Yeah, hi. What are you doing?”

“Watching *Golden Girls*, why?”

“What are you, like, 70? Get your ass out here, I wanna show you something.”

We drove without a destination. We probably drove for a good two hours. Taking random exits off the parkway, going down side streets, around our own town, you know, everywhere. That’s our thing. We like to drive around without actually going anywhere. We play all of our favorite CDs, blast all of our favorite songs. We sing as loud as we can, and we sound terrible. Red lights do not stop our noise pollution. We sing with the windows down, so that

the people in the cars around us look at us and laugh. We are shameless.

Anyway, October 6th 2004. It was getting dark out; Mel had to be home since it was a school night, so I made my way to her house. Rascal Flatts was in the CD player. The words “shiny mini van, kids in every seat” blasted from the speakers just as I pulled up to her house. I turned the music down so we could say goodbye.

“Yeah, that’ll be us someday,” she said to me, laughing.

“What are you talking about?”

“That line, with the mini van, that’ll be us.” Still laughing.

“Yeah right” I said, and I laughed. So awkward. We had a pact to get married to each other if both of us were unmarried by 35. Kind of a joke, but I couldn’t help but think about it sometimes.

“See you in school tomorrow. Goodnight.”

“Yep. See you there’, night.”

A few seconds passed.

“How do I get out of here? Where is the handle?”

I sat back and smiled, it was too cute. I watched her search helplessly for a way out of the car. She was wearing gray sweatpants and a green hoodie. Sweats, no makeup: the effects of showing up at a girl’s house unannounced. The only sign of preparation was the scent of warm vanilla sugar that filled my car. The dimple on her left cheek became more noticeable as her smile grew. She giggled and threw her head back in frustration. She turned to face me, her curly brown hair a mess. I looked at her, sweats on, makeup off, hair out of control, a big smile with only one dimple; she was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

“Are you going to help me? Or just sit there and watch?”

And that’s when it happened. The virus which had remained dormant until that time, was now wreaking havoc. I became infected with the sweetest cancer, enslaved in a wonderful hell.

That school year was wonderful, filled with moments proving to me that we were meant to be together. I don’t know if it’s because we grew up in the same town, and our parents knew each other when they were our age, but we seem to have so much in common. Even the little things that no one really talks about, the things you just discover by accident. Like those miniature Christmas village buildings, she loves those things, and I’ve always thought they were cool too. We both have the same plan, get one of those every year when we’re married. It’s the little things. The little things like that that make us perfect. The only awkward moments for me were when she talked to me about guys she was interested in. She told me about all the guys who fell for her, which was basically every guy she met. So when she told me about John, I brushed it off. I figured he was like every other guy who fell for her. It started out the same.

“I met a boy this weekend.”

“Name?”

“John.”

“He fall in love with you yet?”

“If he has, he hasn’t told me yet.”

“He will, they always do. I swear, you’re like a fucking virus, you infect every guy you meet.”

“Shut up!”

“No, really. Every guy you look at falls in love with you. You should come with a Surgeon General’s warning or something. Warning: Coming in contact with this girl may cause insomnia, daydreams, loss of logical thought, and

doing and saying things that make you look like an asshole.”

That was the birth of the virus metaphor, and the introduction of the guy who would make my life immeasurably miserable, all in one shot. That was in June, right before school got out. Melissa and I spent most of the summer together. I was over her house so often that I started to call Mrs. Morgan, Mom. The more I was around her, the more I fell hopelessly in love with her. I can't describe why she has this effect on me. She's just not like other girls. She's simple, but so confusing. She's selective about what she spends her money on, but she doesn't even need the things she buys. She must have 200 chapstick lip gloss things! Her two favorite shows are *Golden Girls* and *Murder She Wrote*. She claims she loves sushi but only eats the California Rolls. She won't go on escalators. She drinks at least six cups of tea a day. At least! She is sweet and naïve, completely innocent. She's like no one else I've ever met, and I love her for it. She drives me crazy! She seems so simple, but I can't figure her out no matter how hard I try. She has this way of saying exactly what I'm thinking, or answering a question I'm asking myself before I say it, like she can read my mind. She is absolutely perfect for me, and I'm perfect for her. We are meant for each other. When our senior year began, I was as sick as ever from this delightful disease.

I came close to telling her I loved her one night in early September. We laid on our backs on her trampoline, exhausted after an intense jumping session, and stared at the stars. I just enjoyed the moment, being next to the one I loved, smelling warm vanilla sugar, like always.

“Can I ask you something serious?” she asked, propping herself up on one elbow to look directly at me.

“Of course Mel, you can talk to me about anything, you know that.”

“Do you think there is someone out there for everyone? I mean, like there's someone in the world who is absolutely perfect for you, just out there in the world, and you have to go find them?”

Yes, I'm right here. I'm yours.

I placed both my hands behind my head and breathed in deeply, pretending I hadn't thought about it for countless hours since I fell in love with her.

“Hmm, I've never really thought about it before. But yeah, I guess so. Yeah, sure, why not? I think every person has their perfect match,” I said, looking in her eyes, wondering what would happen if I kissed her, wondering if it was the perfect moment I had been waiting for.

“Ok then” she said, clearly having the next question prepared in advance, “so if there's someone out there for everyone, do you think that Fate will bring them together, or is there a chance that they won't find each other?”

I've already found you.

“I think Fate will bring them together. Definitely. 100%,” I said, still wondering, still debating whether I should risk kissing her. It would have been so easy, she was so close. She thought about my answer for a few minutes, and then fired another bullet.

“What do you see your life being like in 20 years? Do you ever think about things like that? What do you want out of life?” she asked.

I want to be with you.

I thought about holding her hand.

“I don't know,” I lied. “Married I guess. Live in some small town. Have kids, a dog, you know, the usual.”

“That sounds really nice. That's what I want too.”

She leaned her head against my shoulder. The rest of the night passed uneventfully. This wasn't the only time I've had to lie to her. Our relationship was so much easier before. Now it feels so strained, I feel like I have to be so careful about what I say to her. I hate it! But I don't know any other way. I hate lying to her, I hate keeping her in the

dark about how I feel. What I hate most are those movies that show the guy and girl are best friends, and when the guy confesses his love for the girl, they always live happily ever after. Those movies are bullshit. It doesn't always work that way. And what if it didn't work that way with us? There's no recovering from that. There's no going back. So I lie to her from time to time, but they're white lies, they're for the protection of our friendship. And let's not forget about my old pal John, he was another variable, making things even more complicated.

Mel and John hung out more than I was comfortable with. Their official title was "together," whatever the hell that means. I decided I had to tell her, before things got too serious between them. I told myself I would do it, and I would never forgive myself if I didn't. So I picked the perfect day, the anniversary of my infection, October 6th. I had the perfect plan. We'd drive around for a while, and then I'd stop at a park. We'd play around on the swings, hide and seek, something like that. There would be an awkward silence, I was going to tell her how I feel, and God knows what would have happened after that, either a kiss to remember for the rest of our lives, or the ruin of our friendship. I was confident it would go well, after all, we were meant to be together. My plan worked for about five minutes, and then it went horribly wrong. We were only driving long enough for us to butcher one song, which was, ironically enough "Just a Friend" by Bizmarkie. But as soon as the song was over, shit hit the fan.

"I'm going out with John now," she said nonchalantly.

FUCK!

"Oh, how'd that happen? I thought you guys were just 'together,'" I said, trying to sound as calm as she was.

"Yeah but we've been 'together' for like two months now. So last night I was at his house watching *Jurassic Park* and he turns to me and says 'I think we should make this official.'"

Kill me now.

"Christ, that's the worst line I've ever heard. This guy is real smooth."

She laughed at that, God I love her when she laughs.

"I don't get it, I mean he had like two months to figure out what he was going to say, and that's the best he can come up with? I was expecting something better, but oh well, it's done now" she said.

I wondered what I would have said. Could I have come up with something better? I tried to put myself in his shoes. If I was the one looking at her, everything I had ever wanted, what would I have said? I probably would say something even dumber. I've had over a year to think about it, and I haven't come up with anything.

"So does this mean I'm never gonna see you now, cuz you'll always be with him?"

"Of course not! Stop being stupid, that's not gonna happen."

Yeah right.

"Whatever you say. Are you free this Friday? I need someone to come to my little brother's birthday party. You know how much I love being surrounded by six year olds."

"Oh, sorry, I can't. I told John I'd go to the movies with him. Please don't be mad at me."

It starts.

And I thought it would never end. But apparently it has ended. Good thing too, this infection is killing me. I'm at her house now. She threw her arms around me the second I walked through the door. She's wearing the same green hoodie she wore the night I became infected, I've known her for years and I'm still shocked at how gorgeous she is. She forced a smile when I gave her the ice cream, but her eyes told me that she was devastated. She's in the bathroom now and I'm sitting on her bed waiting. She'll be really upset tonight and kind of upset for the next week or two, but these past four months have been hell for me. I hate seeing her cry, but I am really happy they're broken up. He's not a bad guy, but he stole Mel away from me. I knew they weren't going to last.

It took about three and a half months, but the relationship finally started to falter. It hurts me to say this, but I've never seen her as happy as she was those three months. My only thoughts during those months were about how much better I was for her, how perfect we are together, how it's fate that we end up together. As happy as she was, I was equally miserable. I began to see her less and less. She'd show me pictures of the two of them, like I wanted to see that shit. I hit rock bottom on the night when he did something that I could only do in my dreams, and he heard her speak the words I would die to hear.

"I had an interesting conversation with John last night."

I don't care.

"Yeah? 'Bout what?"

"It was so weird. He said 'I think I'm in love with you.' Don't you think that's weird? Who says that? Why not just I love you?"

If it was me saying it, I would make sure everything is perfect.

"First 'I think we should make this official,' and now 'I think I'm in love with you.' This kid is a regular Romeo. Well, what did you say? What do you say to something like that?"

Please God, tell me you didn't say it back.

"I said the same thing back to him. Then we kissed, and then he smiled at me and said 'No, I don't think, I know I'm in love with you.' And I told him I loved him too."

Fuck! No!

That was the first time she said "I love you" to someone. I had daydreams of being the first, and John had taken it away from me. Other guys fantasize about sex, I fantasized about hearing the words "I love you" from Mel. I was crushed to hear that I would never be able to share that moment with her. Of course, it still might happen in the future, but it won't be like the first time. But in spite of it all, as depressed as I was, the smile on her face when she finished her sentence made her look more beautiful than I thought possible. It was the happiest I had ever seen her. As much as I hated John for having everything I wanted, he made her happy, and that's what mattered to me.

I guess you could say their relationship was like a cliff, a steady climb for three months until they reached the high point of "I love you," and then a drastic fall. It was probably about two weeks ago that she started to complain about their relationship.

"Are you free this weekend, or are you hanging out with John?"

"No, I'm not seeing him this weekend. Probably not next weekend either," she said dejectedly.

YES! FINALLY!

"Uh oh, trouble in paradise?" I asked, trying hard to contain my excitement.

"I guess. It's just hard with him being from out of town. We don't get to talk on the phone much, and I almost never get to see him. I'm just not sure that I want this right now," she said sadly.

Cellllebrate good times. Come on!

I don't like seeing her upset, but truth be told, I was thrilled. I thought the kid was an idiot. If she was my girlfriend, there's no way I'd do anything to fuck it up. I'd buy her roses, take her on picnics, sing her songs, and we would be perfect. It's meant to be, how could it be anything less than perfect?

"Aw, yeah that must be hard on you. Are you gonna break up with him or what?"

Please, oh please, tell me you're gonna break up with him.

"I don't know, we'll see what happens I guess."



DEBORA PRADO

And that was the last I heard about it, until tonight. She's crying in my arms now, I'm stroking her hair saying the usual "Shhhh, it's alright." I go through all of this like a routine. Between sobs I can kind of make out what she's saying. He became too serious, she wasn't ready, and it all happened so fast, something like that. She is worse than I thought she would be. I expected tears, but just a little crying and some sniffles. But the tears won't stop coming, and her body jerks every time she inhales, as if she has the hiccups. It's painful for me to see her like this, but I can't help smiling a little bit. After all, she's in my arms, exactly where she belongs. I feel bad for her, but I know nothing I do or say right now will make her feel any better, so I just breathe deeply through my nose and let myself become filled with her scent, warm vanilla sugar.

It dawns on me that college is coming soon, and the odds of us going to the same school are minimal. I always thought I had so much time to tell her how I feel, but what if I don't have all the time in the world? What if she goes away to college and meets someone else? No doubt about it, she'll go off to college and infect the entire campus. Another thought occurs to me, something I never considered before. What if this is a passing thing? What if this is like the bologna sandwich thing, and ten years from now I can't stand her? I am doubting for the first time. I start thinking about that night on the trampoline. We're meant to be together aren't we? We'll end up together in the end. After all the sobs and the half sentences and gibberish I've been hearing for the last twenty minutes, she says something so perfectly related to my thoughts that I swear she can read my mind.

"Why can't I just find that one person I'm meant to be with and just be happy for the rest of my life?"

Her first full sentence since I arrived. For the past year and a half I told myself how perfectly I'd do everything when I had the chance. Everything would be perfect. And now, here, in this perfect moment, I'm at a loss. Something about that night on the trampoline still bothers me. And for the first time I consider that maybe there is someone for everyone out there, and maybe Fate will bring them together, and maybe that's as far it goes. I had always assumed we would end up together because, well because we just had to! But what if this moment was set up by Fate, and the rest is up to me? The thought is completely new to me, and my faith that we are guaranteed to be together in the end is shattered. If I tell her I love her, maybe she'll say the same. But if not, what then? She is still staring at me. This was the one question that was not rhetorical. I open my mouth to answer her, completely unaware of what words are going to come out of my mouth.

Chaos

LAURA IZZO

I watch
 as the world spins
 be(for)e
 me
 Swirling
 like a violent Storm...
 Heaven crashing
 d
 o
 w
 n

Spiraling- like a Meteor
 (from outer space)

the Sun glares Menacingly at me
 ...like a great ball of fire
 blazing streaks of defiance...

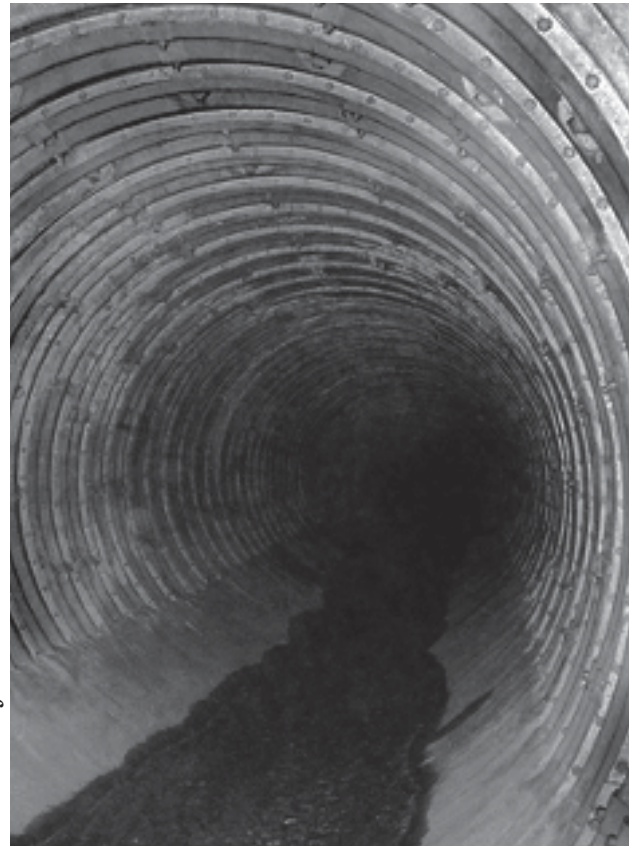
Scorching the unkind earth with its rays

Clouds (of hate)
 thrust rain to the ground
 like Acid
 Burning up the world
 be(Side)me

I look on with an ignorant
 Stare
 watching, waiting, disbelieving
 this earth with
 no (inner) core
 Sadness pervades all
 Who glare with indignation
 at this whirling twirling universe

S
 P
 I
 R
 A
 L
 I
 N
 G
 Out of Control

The earth is malicious, wicked
 And I am
 left
 with the aftermath



ELYSE JANKOWSKI

Kilmer in Autumn

ANTON DJAMOOS



BARBARA KALINA

She is dying they say, as chlorophyll
Corpses cover her frosty, barren womb.
Her crispy, muddied offspring leave her naked.
Naked and rough-skinned, she becomes a tomb.

And at her funeral you can hear the echo
As her life falls away from her.
But you can't hear the woman as she screams,
For the life which is lost in wintry blur.

She is not dying, I know, just merely
Mourning for a brand new day and season.
For when the sun shines and the ground is greened,
Her hibernated life will have reason.



BARBARA KALINA

Kate!

TED MCLOOF

“Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. General opinion’s starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don’t see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often it’s not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it’s always there – fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge – they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love actually is all around.”

Love Actually

. . . .

I’m walking outside of class, drinking my third Gingerbread Latte of the day because it’s Christmastime, when I see Mike walk towards me in the hall.

“What’s up, bro,” I say to him, and when I get his attention, he smiles back, says, “Hey, Will, what’s going on,” and then he walks away. Something about the greeting really gets me; I haven’t seen Mike in at least a few months, and even though he’s a great guy, we were never all that close. But there’s a warmth and familiarity between us in that second that makes me proud to be part of the human race. Are we each other’s bestest friend in the whole wide world? No. Will that greeting mean anything to him in a few minutes, let alone a few years, when he’s in class, looking down the shirt of the girl next to him? Probably not. But that’s not the point. The point is that Mike and I aren’t particularly good or bad people, we’re just . . . dudes, from different parts of the world (well, Monmouth and Bergen county, anyway), and right now this friendship exists, and a year ago it didn’t, and that, in itself, is a small miracle.

I couldn’t tell you why I’m feeling this generous (besides the obvious, which is Christmastime, the greatest 30 days of the year); I’m not prone to sappiness and sentimentality. Maybe it’s because this is, after all, my life, and it’s going ok, and it feels good to know that.

But then my phone rings, and it’s Caitlin, and I realize that, in a lot of ways, I have to stay happy and normal and afloat, because buoyancy is a characteristic that serves your friends more than you. If Mike’s quiet hello meant piss to me, I’d probably go under with the rest of them.

. . . .

“I want you to tell me what you honestly think,” Caitlin tells me as she hands me the note, “because you’re a good writer and you can fix it for me.”

“Caitlin, I’m a journalist. I write articles about government policy and mass-murders and acquisitions of large internet companies. I don’t think I qualify for the we-had-sex-and-then-you-didn’t-call-me letter.”

It’s a pointless argument, not least because Caitlin has sex with guys who don’t call her all the time, every

weekend, nearly, and while I've never re-written an actual note, I've certainly given her enough advice to fill one up. It's telling about our friendship (and probably women, and men, too, for that matter) that the two of us haven't had sex yet, and yes, I stand firmly by the "yet."

She slides the letter over to me, which is four pages, front and back, and I start to read it. As a Journalism major, I spend a lot of time editing other people's stuff, and even though I'm protesting reading this thing over for her, I wouldn't say it's entirely uninteresting. In fact, if I had the choice between Caitlin's love life and, say, Peter Simmons' editorial about migrating birds, I'd choose Caitlin any day of the week. (What am I talking about? I do have the choice between them, and I always pick Caitlin, every day of the week.)

So I'm not terribly bothered about handling her boy problems. Most of them are interesting, anyway, and I know some stuff about her that not even her parents or boyfriends know (stuff I won't tell you about because it's none of your business), and that makes us a lot more intimate than any of the (startlingly) large array of guys she's been with, I think. And, anyway, the fact that she's beautiful helps a lot, and after working all day every day, I can't say it's too bad a way to end your day, drinking a beer with a gorgeous nymphet who wants nothing more than to tell you her intimate secrets.

I'm so busy thinking about this that I start to do that thing I used to do in ninth grade when we were reading *Flowers for Algernon*, where I read through the pages and don't soak in any of the words. Caitlin looks over at me.

"Too mean?" she asks, as if she could ever be such a thing, and I feel bad because I don't really know what I'm supposed to be talking about. In the end, I just mumble something about being clearer about what she wants, which seems to do the trick because she kisses my cheek and says thanks. I get up and put Ben Folds Five's "Kate" on the jukebox, and when I get back, it seems Caitlin has completely forgotten about the note she's just given me to critique; she's too busy giving the trendy bartender her number.

. . .

Caitlin and I met last summer, in a way that would disappoint any romantic-comedy screenwriter: she was (is) working at a day-care center, the one that my two-year-old niece, Ashley, goes to, and one day my sister called and asked if I could give her a ride. I love Ashley, so I went, and when I got there, I found that my niece had to wait her turn for my attention, because Caitlin caught my eye right away. It wasn't a love-at-first-sight thing, because I see her all the time now, and I still wouldn't call it love, even at the three-hundredth sight. And it wasn't an "if someone gave me a million dollars to describe what I felt, I'd tell him to keep the money" sort of thing, because I don't think I'm important enough to have feelings that are inexplicable. It's just that Caitlin has a quiet confidence that comes across as grace to anyone who's not too braindead to notice it, and at twenty-four she can handle both children and their parents with the warmth and patience of a caring grandmother, and how can you not fall instantly for a girl like that, when she simultaneously wears tank tops and a tiny nostril ring?

My poor sister got to see very little of her daughter for the rest of the summer, because I insisted on picking Ashley up every day (a plan that Caitlin caught onto quite fast). After my sixth visit I shamelessly got my niece to ask her out for me, and if you think that's pathetic and manipulative, then you're not telling me anything I don't already know. Caitlin said yes, the good sport that she is, although when we met up at the bar, she let me know about Roger, the guy she was seeing back then (there have been several since). At the time, I can remem-

ber feeling much more confusion than disappointment- why would she bring me out for a drink just to tell me she can't go out for a drink with me?- but that, I suspect, came from the fact that I didn't know Caitlin very well back then, and normal rules still applied. There have been several instances since, for example, where I've had to stop her in the middle of her stories and ask her to clarify the conflicts of her situations (most common question: "Why didn't you just not have sex with him?"), and she usually puts on a look of confusion to show that I'm an idiot for not immediately acknowledging the simplicity of the answer (most common retort: "Because I was attracted to him.")

This probably doesn't seem like a very promising start, and maybe that's something I should have noticed and considered back then, but there wasn't any time. Caitlin and I began a very fast friendship; we ended up calling each other almost every day for whatever reason (she helped me move into my new apartment; I went with her as a last minute date to a concert her boss had invited her to), and the advice I was giving her was always in response to a problem that seemed like it was desperately urgent. How are you supposed to have a Big Think about your romantic status when the two of you have a dinner date with your parents in ten minutes?

"What are we gonna do about Caitlin?," I asked Ashley one day on our ride home from the day-care. She dismissed the question as rhetorical (or, at the very least, she looked out the window and chewed her binkie), but I really did want an answer. It's not all that shocking that Caitlin and I have such a dysfunctional relationship once you know that this was the longest and most meaningful conversation I had (and have) ever had about us.

. . . .

John Milton, as anyone who's studied *Paradise Lost* knows, spent most of his youth studying Greek and Latin. As the story goes, the other guys at Cambridge called him a "sissy" because he didn't want to go out womanizing and drinking every weekend. He spent nearly every weekend night inside, studying. My favorite thing about this story is that, of course, Milton had the last laugh, because his friends died completely unremembered while he lives on as the author who told us what hell looks like. This is the life I decided I wanted to lead freshman year, when I was told about it by my professor, a man who reads every piece of popular fiction there is, followed by every piece of popular criticism on it, a man whose lead I have been trying, very hard, ever since, to follow.

I'm thinking about this in the computer lab, where I'm supposed to be finishing a PowerPoint presentation for my Media Issues & Ethics class (spot the irony in that title), but really I'm typing Caitlin's letter for her. She assured me by the end of the night that she still wanted to give it, and while I didn't entirely believe her, watching her get into the bartender's car was reassurance enough for me that it could still be used for a rainy day.

I'm not usually like this, I should point out. I'm pretty anal about getting my work done and in on time, and I, as each year passes, like to think I have less tolerance for bullshit. But Caitlin's letter isn't bullshit, not to me; it's the meatiest part of our friendship, because it's solid, rock-hard evidence that I'm a living, breathing presence in her life. It makes me feel like I mean something to her in a way that my advice can't really accom-

plish, because she can always just not take my advice (I know what you're thinking: you're thinking, 'Well, Will, she could always just not use the letter, too', but I know she won't ignore something I've clearly spent time on). If that makes me sound feeble and self-serving, ok then, fine. But, you know. I could always just go back to my PowerPoint and ditch the fucking thing.

She calls me just as I'm typing out the "Love?, Caitlin" (which I think is the cleverest part of it), and asks me if I want to meet her and her cousin Desiree out for a drink tonight.

"I'm in the Lab right now. I don't know when I'll be done."

"Do they charge you rent? You're always there."

"I'll be out by seven."

"Ok. Desiree's bringing a guy, and he's driving us. So you can just meet us there."

I don't (and anyone who knows Caitlin wouldn't, either) like the sound of that last sentence, because all this guy has to do is be halfway charming and most of the way good-looking for me to have to work overtime to keep Caitlin in her chair.

. . .

When I get to the AB&G, I see the three of them in a pretty dark corner, a corner that we don't usually sit at when we're here. I can't get a very good look at this guy, but he's got a denim shirt and a sort of hemp-sewn hat on, so I can tell straight off that he's not My Kind of People.

"Hey, I'm Dan," he says as he shakes my hand, and I'm almost too busy listening for whispers from the cousins to analyze whether he's friendly or not.

"Will," I say back, and we get in a brief conversation about what we do (Dan apparently "travels." "For what?" I ask him. "Huh?" is his answer. It's going to be a long night).

I can't tell whether Caitlin is into him or not, although recent experience has taught me that when in doubt, assume the affirmative. But I'm not having a terrible time; I'm not judgmental, and after all, he's not a bad person, by which I mean he doesn't seem to be amoral or cocky or down on things. I order my third beer just as Dan is telling the story of a barfight he was once in.

"The guy was just right on top of my friend, so I grabbed him, and all of a sudden he just starts head-butting me. Bam! Bam! Bam! Just like that, over and over, so I just, you know, put my palm on my forehead, just as a natural reaction, you know? 'Cause you're not really thinking in that kind of situation, are you? You just do whatever comes naturally. And while it's happening, I realize I have my ring on."

"That must have got him away, huh?" I say, off of the huge ring he currently has on his hand, mostly because it's not the kind of story that lends itself to colorful commentary.

"Yea. But here's the coolest part: I realized what ring I had on the next day, and you know what it was? A fucking Grada Crystal."

A silent beat happens right now in the group, and I don't know why he'd expect anything else.

“Is that is that bad?” says Caitlin.

“Are you kidding? They’re supposed to protect you! They expel all the negative energy from you, and put it onto those who want to harm you. That’s why I won the fight.”

We kind of sit there for a few minutes, because that’s a hard story (that’s a hard a lot of things) to follow. And finally, Caitlin says she wants to go home, so we say our goodbyes and nice to meet you’s (“Your aura gets bright around her,” Dan tells me), and head out to my car.

“He was gorgeous,” is the first thing Caitlin can say when we get outside, which really makes me rethink my friendship with her.

“Who? The Dalai Llama in there? You’re actually attracted to him?”

“Well, yea. He’s a good looking guy. But he was a little rude. When I tried to tell him about the day-care center, he started talking right over me.”

Is this really how people think? I mean, to each his own and everything, but, you know. Crystals? Negative energy? Are his table manners really the only thing she can find wrong with him?

“I wasn’t a huge fan of him,” is the best I can do.

“There’s a surprise.”

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing. You’re just always judging me.”

“I am not,” I say, because I’m not.

“Yes you are. When was the last time I judged you?”

“You don’t judge me because I don’t do anything around you worthy of judgment,” I say, and of course I’m immediately sorry. The statement is ignorant and stupid and holier-than-thou, but why am I the only one who’s never allowed to be an asshole?

“What do I do that’s ‘worthy of being judged?’” she asks me. There are a lot of answers to that question, and I could probably list them in alphabetical order for her if she wanted, but I can’t bring myself to do it. After all, it’s just some sex, right? We’re adults now, and if she wants to do something like that, she’s more than free to do so. She’s always safe (as safe as that kind of promiscuity can be), and she doesn’t brag about it, and she doesn’t have low self-esteem. In other words, she doesn’t do it to do it, if you get what I mean; she just likes sex a lot. Who the fuck do I think I am, anyway?

I look at her, as she waits for a response, and all I can say is there are certain moments in a man’s life when a girl’s eyes level you to the point where your skin is stripped away and you have no choice but to be the honest, decent, sincere human being she knows you are; the kind of moment when you see how insignificant something like a person’s promiscuity, or religion, or education, is, because you’re just two people in a car; the kind of moment when you recognize how beautiful a thing like love is, not sappy or stupid, but beautiful, and you know it’s all around you, and who wouldn’t believe in the human race at a moment like that?

“I’m sorry, Cait. I didn’t mean to be cruel. All I meant is that I love you and you deserve better than what you get.”

She looks at me like I’ve just handed her her newborn child, which is funny when you think about it, because all I’ve handed her is the truth, and not only that, but truth that I’ve all but articulated to her in the past six months of knowing her, and then she leans over and kisses me, really softly, and I put my hand on her cheek, and all I can think is how could you possibly not call this the next day.

. . .

At seven o’clock the next morning, Caitlin’s alarm goes off. She won’t wake up for it, but I do, and I end up lying awake in the red glow of the Christmas lights in her room.

“Caitlin!” her mom yells for her, and that definitely does the trick, because she grabs the clock and goes, “Oh, shit!”

I don’t know if I’m being paranoid or anything, but I can’t shake the feeling that she’s not waking up (or, rather, only waking up when she knows she’ll be rushing and won’t have time to talk) on purpose. I really don’t want to say anything, though, because I could be wrong, and I’ve fucked up a good amount of relationships by jumping the gun like that.

“You want me to drive you?” I ask her as she grabs her pants and pulls them on.

“Why would you do that? I have a car.”

“I know. But I’m going that way anyway, and we could... I don’t know. Talk in the car.”

“How would I get home?” she’s putting her mascara on in the mirror, so I’m kind of having the conversation with her ponytail.

“I’d pick you up. We can grab a drink or something.”

“I told my sister I’d go shopping with her tonight.”

“Oh. Ok. Well, then, give me a call later or something.”

She doesn’t respond, but she can hear in my voice that I’m getting increasingly depressed. She throws the rest of her make-up into a bag, grabs it, and then walks towards her door, where I’m standing.

“I’ll call you later,” she says, and then kisses me on my cheek, and then, as she walks down the stairs: “You really should have woken me up.”

. . .

Four days later she calls me back.

“Where have you been?” I ask, but I make sure not to make it sound like an accusation, just a question, with the right amount of ambiguity in it to put the ball in her court.

“Sorry. I was down the shore with Heather for a few days.”

“Oh. When did you decide that?”

“I don’t know. Friday.”

She's not being cold, I should point out. It's not like she's trying to blow me off, or at least she's not making it sound like that. But what pisses me off is that she's being so non-partisan about it; she's just presenting this stuff as information, like it's the homework we got in health class when I was absent or something.

"Well, we're all going to eat tonight. Do you wanna come?" This is the first note of warmth she's shown in a while.

"Who's 'we all'?"

"Desiree and them. Dan's coming, too. She wants you to come," she says, with the emphasis on "come", not "she", and I start to think that I never before had to dissect her sentences like this.

"Yea. Great," I say, because I think she deserves a little understatement right back. She tells me where and when, and I wrack my brain for an explanation, or a solution, or a question, even, as long as it's something that makes some sort of sense.

. . . .

When I get to the restaurant, I see the empty chair next to Caitlin, and again try to determine whether there's anything significant about that. All of the waiters are wearing Santa hats, which puts me in an endlessly good mood despite the context, and Caitlin says possibly three words for the remainder of the night.

Finally I get sick of it and turn to her.

"How was the shore?"

"Point Pleasant in December. It was great."

"How's Heather?"

"She's good. She has a house down there now."

"Does she?"

"Yea. She wants to know if I want to move in with her."

This would be a cause for panic if it were anyone besides Caitlin talking; she has a new plan for her life almost every week (after I showed her *Almost Famous* for the first time, she was dead-set on moving to Morocco), and, at least in the time that I've known her, she hasn't gone through with anything much. This is not to say that she's lazy or insincere about it, just realistic, I think. If she packed her bags and bought plane tickets purely on a whim, for example, I'd be much more worried about her.

But that doesn't change the fact that I'm getting a rising bout of anxiety after she says it.

"Really? And are you going to go?"

"I don't know. Maybe. It's a nice house, and I do sort of need a change."

There are a million questions on the tip of my tongue, of course, like what about the other night? And what about me, and us? And does it mean anything to you, or am I just a number, and if you move, does that mean this is going to end?

“What about your job?”

Where the fuck did that one come from?

“I haven’t worked that part out yet. It’s just an idea right now, you know.”

That’s where that came from: I wanted to give her something with real weight to consider, so that she could tell me it’s just an idea, whereas if I asked her any of the other stuff, she’d probably just give me an embarrassed silence, or an embarrassed confession, or an embarrassed denial, none of which I want.

Everyone’s done eating now, more or less, so we all talk a little more and get the check, and I end up going home feeling really inconvenient feelings that I haven’t had since high school.

. . .

Christmas gets closer and closer, and I don’t talk to Caitlin (by which I mean that we talk, but not in the way I’d like), so the only thing I can do to keep myself occupied is to think about better times. Christmas is a pretty nostalgic time of year anyway, so I try to think about other Christmases that have gone by—relatives, eggnog, the time the dog chewed open the wrapping paper on most of the presents before we got downstairs, that sort of thing—but I just keep coming back to the most recent better times that I knew, ones that don’t remind me of Christmas except for how they made me feel, the ones that invariably involve Caitlin.

The first time I told Caitlin about the Milton thing, and my professor’s admiration for how he spent his life, she didn’t seem to agree with me a hundred percent.

“Why would you want that to be your life? Just studying all the time?”

I didn’t really consider the question as anything besides Caitlin not going to college, and therefore not really getting the mindset.

“Because you find out all sorts of things about the world, and the stuff that came before you, and then maybe you can become a great man, like Milton. Look at what ingenious stuff he wrote,” and I knew the statement wasn’t lost, because Caitlin is quite literate, and she has indeed looked at a lot of stuff that a lot of people wrote.

“Yea, but he was also grumpy and arrogant and misogynistic. I mean, I’m all for being well-read about stuff that came before you, and I know it’s important. But you can’t seriously consider Milton’s life well-spent, can you?”

“Why not?”

“Because it just seems to me that you can choose a whole lot of different paths for your life, and yea, he wrote *Paradise Lost* and *Lycidas*, and all that, and he’s remembered hundreds of years later. But you’re missing what was going on around him. When all of his friends were, as you say, “drinking and womanizing” on the weekends, they were also living. They got to get involved in life, they got to do things and not just observe them. I can’t tell you who spent their lives the better way, but I can put a safe bet that his friends had a better time.”

At the time I just rolled my eyes, and told her she didn’t Get It (I still can’t tell you why I thought I did), and we just moved onto the next subject. But I start thinking about that a lot on Christmas Eve, it just keeps echo-

ing and echoing, and I can't shake it off. And that, I assume, is what can be held accountable for the fact that, right in the middle of the family doing our traditional one-present-before-Christmas-morning opening, I excuse myself, get in my car and drive to her house. It doesn't occur to me at all that I have no idea what I'm going to say.

. . . .

It's really cold outside when I get there, and I can just barely hear her family talking inside, probably doing the same thing I'm supposed to be doing right now.

I ring the doorbell, and I'm thankful that she's the one who answers it, because I think I'd lose my nerve if I was face to face with some uncle I'd never met.

"Hey," I say off of her, perhaps understandably, confused look.

"What are you doing here?"

"I just, you know. I figured I'd come say merry Christmas."

"Well, merry Christmas to you, too. But I'm kind of busy. My relatives are in town."

"Yea, I know. I don't care."

"Thanks."

"I have to tell you that I'm an idiot for not making things right right away. And I'm sorry." She's standing pretty firmly in the doorway, and I kind of wish she'd let me in because it's freezing right now.

"You can't just do this, Will."

"Do what?"

"You can't just show up on my door on Christmas Eve and expect everything to just be ok. We're not in high school anymore. It doesn't work like that."

"But why not? I don't see why it is that you have to lose your ability to make an ass out of yourself just because you get older. I love you, and you should know that, and any other guy who doesn't show up on your doorstep on Christmas Eve is an idiot. I should have to be waiting at the end of a line right now in order to get to your door."

She's not trying to stop me anymore; she's just waiting for me to get it all out.

"Don't leave. I don't want you to leave because I'd miss you too much, and I don't want to be anywhere that you aren't. This is better than anything I could read in a book or watch or listen to or study. I don't want to be anywhere besides here, right now, doing this."

The fact that she lets me kiss her is a good sign, because I was kind of nervous that she'd just back away, or close the door, or slap me. When I move away again and open my eyes, I'm pretty shocked to see a tear rolling down her cheek. She looks up at the mistletoe above us.

"You and your Christmas," she says, with a half-smile.

. . . .

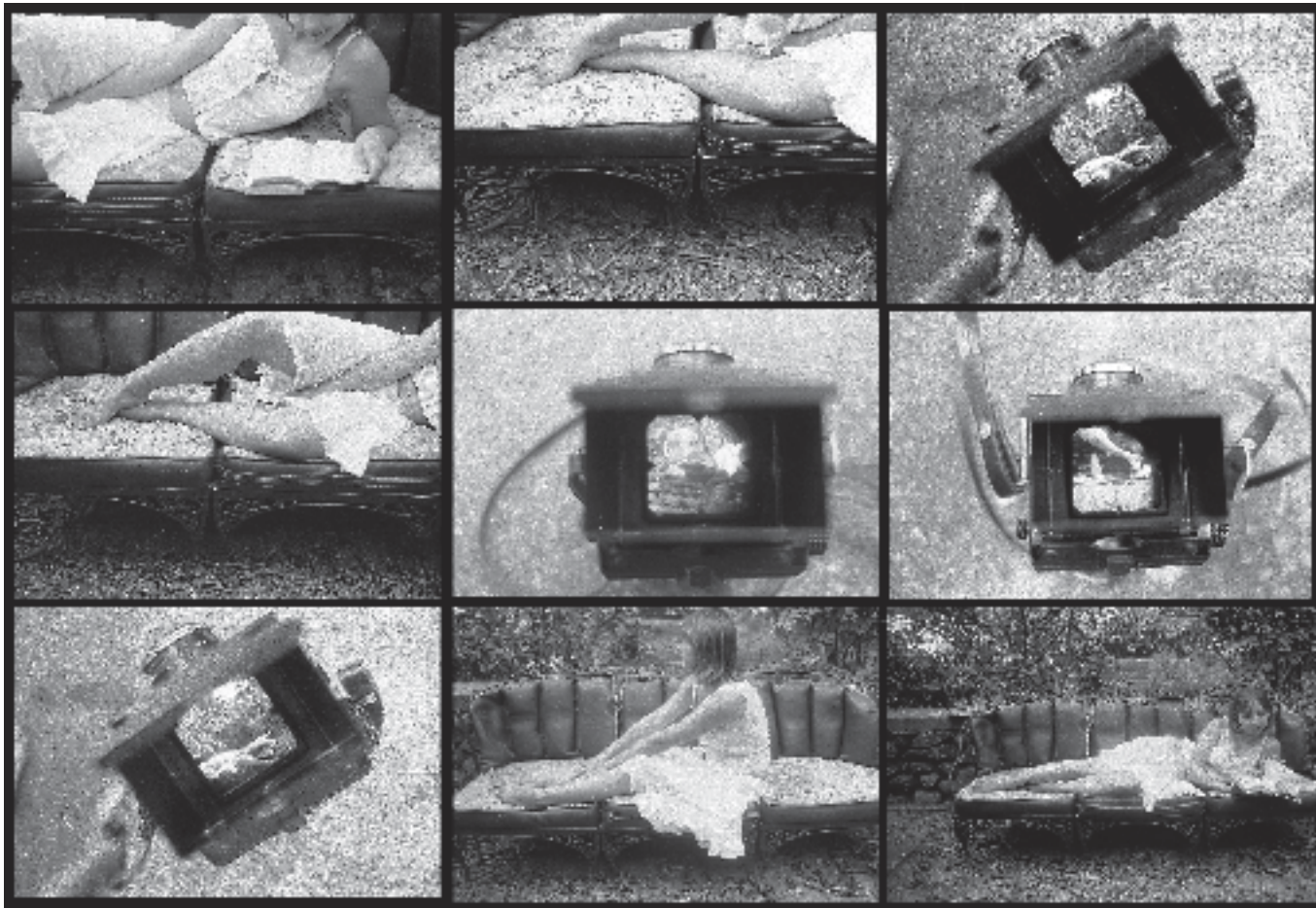
“It’s almost time,” she tells me as the clock counts down.

New Year’s is pretty cool, too, but I stand by Christmas as my favorite, and I’m sure that now I have a whole new reason for that. Desiree and Dan are on the couch watching Dick Clark as I go to grab the champagne bottle. We’ve made sure to put a Grada Crystal, or some fucking thing, in the middle of the living room, because Dan says that it will give us positive energy for the coming year, although I think I have enough positive energy right now to last me the next ten.

I put the glasses on the table, next to the two books I’ve been studying: *Paradise Lost* and John Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, in which he writes:

“No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.”

I like them both, of course. But tonight, for the first time, I can see why I should like Donne better.



DEBORA PRADO

M. J.

MEGAN CURLEY

twenty two- just a child with child...olive skin and dark dark hair · radiant and beautiful -- he was born and died in a moment -- twenty two and twenty four -- forced to grow up, instantly -- a soul quickly slipped in and out of the human form -- for a reason only known to the All --twenty two and childless twenty two and alone twenty two with this life as a wife and a baby no more -- fill the void fill the void fill the void -- twenty three -- a woman with child -- a baby born and lives lives lives! -- a girl unto a girl -- a child died so that one might live? -- fill the void fill the void fill the void -- beer and nights of loneliness -- he didn't come home at all at all at all -- she left him then, home to mama with a baby girl by her side -- fill the void -- grew up on her own in a year or two -- bars and cars and nights that dawned anew -- learned about herself amidst cigarettes and dim lights-- crawling in at night peeking at the child- the girl who lived and slept so sweetly--reconciliation!-- twenty five and with child -- a girl unto a girl unto a girl -- beautiful and healthy -- alive alive alive! · · three girls learning to live -- a woman really only a girl -- one child died so that others might live?--- left a void so big only more emptiness could fill -- four in a family tripping through -- thirty four and two children -- with child --this time a boy a boy a boy! -- he lives! he lives! she is his! --from that moment on-- he is love he is all --

one soul slipped away so far -- in a moment -- his purpose... she had to grow up, he had to slow up -- he came as an angel, quiet as a lamb -- Matthew; God's Gift -- a gift bestowed from the Source above -- did they learn their lesson? -- not at all, not at all

But Matthew John -- I am drunk on your gift -- I am dipped in your healing message-- You are the first link in this broken, rattling chain -- you are the One who came in an instant, with lessons worth a lifetime -- because of you I live! -- because of you I am whole --

twenty one and just a child-- on her own -- linked to a rusty, kinked chain -- twenty one and just a child -- turning that nowhere -- into now here...through you, Matthew John, the originating spirit -- I will not let your moment of life be in vain



AEZANAS YOHANNES

Beyond the end

LOUIS MARAJ

Splinters of life, broken, shattered across the faceless ground,

Snippets of past, replay minus sound.

The future abates,

Subsides and vacates ...

Cruelty, never the casualty

Why create such monstrosity?

Why construct, if only to burn down?

Why highlight the unchangeable wrongs?

Why give birth for the purpose of slaughter?

Why separate, the child from his mother?

The answers ironically lie, in the silence of death,

Tangled responses yet to be met ...

For breath, geared with all fret,

Departs from nature's subset.

And subdued,

In nude all that is reciprocated lay,

The epilogue of the encore of Passing Away's pay.

CHRISTINE NEWBY





BIL THOMPSON

NFL

JOE MERALE

NLF is going to win
 "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh.
 NLF is going to win."
 Was the cry in the streets of Washington
 during Nixon's last Presidential Inauguration
 in protest of our Viet Nam Police Action.
 Millions of protesters from all our nation
 filled Washington's streets to saturation
 while cops, on rooftops, took their position
 readying their machine guns in anticipation.
 "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh.
 NLF is going to win."
 I cried from a safe, elevated, grassy location
 as two uniformed cops approached my position.
 "What is NLF?" One asked me for clarification
 as the other cop assessed all the commotion.
 "National Football League." I said sans hesitation.
 He left shaking his head in disgusted agitation
 saying, "These kids have no comprehension".
 "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh.
 NLF is going to win."
 We joined the Inauguration Parade procession.
 Then the police intervened in great profusion
 to put an end to our massive parade intrusion
 forming a blue wall of machine gunned opposition
 forcing us back onto the sidewalks in mass unison.
 Pig faces were strained as if attempting defecation
 and pig eyes were devoid of all human recognition.
 "Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh.
 NLF is going to win."
 We cried as a protestor breached the pig formation
 and kicked over a pig motor cycle in provocation
 (Being faced off with a pig... It gave me apprehension.)
 and the crowd surged forcing me against his position.
 He held his machine gun against me in deadly erection

as I studied the pig's eyes that had Death's expression.
The mob jammed me against it with mindless intention.
"Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh.
NLF is going to win."
They cried as I looked around in all direction.
I studied their faces as things went into slow motion
(It would be the last I'd see in this fatal progression).
I noticed a woman and child caught in the procession
(The site of them caused me to see our transgression)
My heart began to break. I can't allow their destruction!
But I could still see in the cop's eyes Deadly Intention.
"Whoa! Whoa! There's a woman and child here!
We're killing people in Viet Nam
and now we are going to kill here.
Where will the killing end?"
I shouted so that all could hear my urgent question.
My words hung in the air as I saw the cop's eyes soften
and he looked back at me as if in recognition.
As if angel attended... The crowd released it's tension.
Looking around I could see The crowd go into dispersion.
So! So! Ho Chi Minh
and his NLF finally won
and the Vietnamese won their right to self determination.
But because President Nixon brought peace to our nation
he brought upon himself the ire of some dark machination
that set him up, surveilled, and brought him defamation.
But I learned that words can kill, or prevent devastation,
and can even put an end to a Presidential Administration.
But that is I why I came... To bring peace to our nation.



CHRISTINE NEWBY



SARAH WHITNEY-PEET

CheckMates

TED MCLOOF

“You have to have the fighting spirit. You have to force moves and take chances.”

- Bobby Fischer

Black pawn to white queen.

Jimmy took his time with his moves because this girl was special. He had known Jenn for only a few weeks, but it was enough for him to obtain an inconveniently distracting crush on her, as it usually was for him. They had started to get into this routine, a ludicrously nerd-stereotype routine, where they'd play chess for an hour in the park and then go to the library (she called it the “li-berry,” which was incredible to Jimmy; he never knew a person could play chess and mispronounce library at the same time). He'd look at her face, which was something he didn't mind doing at all: she had a sort of make-up-less beauty that was oddly complimented by the streaks of light-blonde in her hair, the kind that all guys found sexy, and if you wanted someone to play chess with every afternoon, you could do a lot worse. But he'd try his best to look at her face professionally, as a chess player, trying to figure out her next move through her expressions, which was something Jimmy later figured he'd been doing with girls all his life. Yes, this girl was definitely hard to figure out, and she confused him, as all women did. But she was different. The others confused him in a way that either terrified or bored him. This one was too complex for that: even in her quietest moves, Jimmy wanted to stick around to see what was next.

“Shit,” she said, as Jimmy smugly grabbed her queen from the board. She could never remember to protect it properly, and rather than let her win to gain her favor, Jimmy would take advantage of it every chance he got. He couldn't help it. When Lisa played with him, she'd give up after he took a few pieces, because she hated losing at anything and saw no point in competing otherwise. And before her, Dana refused to even learn the rules; all she could do, ever, was complain to him about her ex, which Jimmy wouldn't have minded if only the conversation would have occasionally drifted somewhere else. It didn't. No, Jenn was something else, alright, and even if she wasn't the something else for him, she was certainly something worth figuring out, so, like always, he tried like hell to stay five moves ahead of her at all times.

. . .

The drinks! Thank God for the drinks, Jimmy thought, because he always felt he was one museum-trip away from having her think he was the lost cast member of *Revenge of the Nerds II*. At night, when Jenn didn't have class the next morning and Jimmy was going into work late, they'd go out for a quick drink in the local pub in order to cap off the day. It was a nice way of finishing things, Jimmy thought: this loosened her up, in the non-dirty sense. Jenn was a girl who loved to work and was frustrated by free time; as cliché as it was, the alcohol presented a way for her to escape from herself in the way that chess did for Jimmy. And there was a trick to it, too: when they first started to see each other, Jenn tried not to over share herself with him, but as she grew more intoxicated toward the end of each night, she'd spill her guts in a way that sobriety never would have allowed her, and consequently she became more comfortable around him. Which allowed them to hang out more. Which allowed them to go out for more drinks, which allowed her to tell him more, and so on, and on and on, until there was nothing left on the board but two kings that chased each other around and around and around.

The first time they went to Oak Street Pub, Jimmy was a little embarrassed. He had been going there since he was old enough to look like the guy on his fake I.D., and yet he realized on the car ride there that he had only done so out of convenience of location. It certainly wasn't trying to impress anyone: there was no drink menu, or uniforms for the employees, and the sign wasn't completely working outside (only the regulars knew that it wasn't really called "Oak Street Pub"). But Jenn didn't seem to mind any of that; she just thought it was cozy.

"One more before we go," Jenn said to Natalie, the bartender, who now knew without asking not only what Jenn's drink of choice was (Vodka and club with lemon), but also when to cut her off (four).

"It just never occurred to me to try. I never saw the point," said Jimmy. They were in the middle of a conversation about why Jimmy wasn't in school, a conversation they were having a lot lately.

"Well, I'm not going to force you into something you don't want, I'm just saying if you hate your job so much, you should consider another option." Jenn spoke with the kind of warmth you usually only see at the end of Frank Capra movies.

"I don't. I don't hate my job. It's just monotonous sometimes."

"Did you think construction would be more colorful?"

"Ha ha. I just mean..." What did he mean? She was right, after all, and while he hadn't lied about not hating his job, he knew that a change wouldn't be the worst thing. "What would I do in college? What would I major in, besides..."

"Chess?"

"Do they offer that now? Next to Pool & Poker 101?"

"Your mind works a certain way, Jimmy. There's all sorts of things you could be good at if you tried them."

"Like?"

"I'm not your academic advisor. Figure it out for yourself, I couldn't fuckin' tell you."

It was time to take Jenn home.

. . . .

If the most attractive thing about Jenn was her ability to participate in the odd chess game with Jimmy without making it seem forced, her biggest negative was her adamant assumption that he was obligated to reciprocate in some way; namely, she was constantly on at him to try and take an interest in her own hobbies. It wasn't like it was a big negative: she was an art major, and he quite enjoyed the things she had to say about paintings and murals and sculptures she had seen, even if he didn't quite understand them. It was just that Jimmy couldn't really grasp the concept of being so, so, so engulfed in the subject- art was just too abstract for him. It went all over the place, and the edges were smudged, both literally and metaphorically, and the final product of every idea was just too open-ended. How did you know if something was good and inspired, and how did you know if it was just pretentious crap?

Jimmy had this thought a lot, especially when dragged to an art show that Jenn was excited about attending. He'd stare at the paintings that she took him to and not know what he thought. Or rather, he'd know what he thought- this one's pretty, this one's boring, this one looks like something I ate and shat out during an illness- but he didn't know what he was supposed to be thinking. Most of the time, he just ended up feeling stupid and cynical, and when Jenn asked him what he thought of, say, Van Gogh's *Iris*, he'd just shrug and squint in a way that was supposed to convey bafflement at the beauty of it, but the minimalist criticism that he offered usually just gave her the truth: that he was stupid and cynical.

. . . .

Jimmy was trying to think. They were walking together outside the library, where they had just gotten a few books (Jimmy chose *Cash* by Johnny Cash, Jenn had *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger), and Jenn was trying to

get him to think of a relationship, any relationship, that he ever truly enjoyed.

“How much did I have to enjoy it?” Jimmy was trying desperately to stall, because his lack of an answer, he assumed, was going to make him look either inexperienced or pathetic, neither of which he wanted Jenn to think he was.

“Just... it doesn't matter how much. And anyway, if you have to ask the question, then you're proving my point. It should come to you easier than this,” Jenn said.

There had been those few dates with Megan, the girl Jimmy met through his sister... no. That didn't count. It wasn't even a real relationship, let alone one he enjoyed.

Jenn was still talking while Jimmy struggled to think of a plausible answer. “I'm just saying, you can't enjoy these things if all you're ever doing is looking for the finite aspect of them. Instead of being in the moment, wherever you are, you always opt for being a bystander. You spend so much time studying what went on on your dates that you don't enjoy what actually happened.”

Gina? Alyssa? Rachel? Jimmy knew there had to be one somewhere. He didn't even really care whether he could find one or not; he just wanted to hit Jenn with some semblance of a solid answer so that he could prove himself.

“It's like you're only dating because you assume it's something you're supposed to do. If it were up to you, you'd just play chess all the time.”

“Is that so terrible?” Jimmy asked. There was no need to argue with her last statement. After all, she was right.

“Not if that's what you really want, no. But I don't think you've ever really experienced something else that you enjoy because you're too preoccupied with the equation of things...”

She continued talking to him, and he certainly heard what she had to say, but he wasn't really concentrating on it. He was too busy trying to figure out what she meant.

. . .

“Don't you see?” Jenn asked. “He was driven by passion. He had to paint what he did.”

They had been looking at a book of Monet paintings until Jimmy told her he thought they discriminated against the nearsighted. He was only half-joking.

“Why'd he have to paint? To pay his rent?”

“No, he wasn't poor. It had nothing to do with that. He was... he was a prisoner of his own compulsion.”

Jenn only spoke in these kinds of words when she was talking about art, which Jimmy took as a futile attempt to speak over his head: as long as the subject was art-related, she could be spelling out the simplest of terms; it would be over his head anyway.

“He had it inside of him,” she continued, “and he needed to get it out in order to feel at peace with himself. That's why he didn't care if his paintings made any money. As long as he was allowed to do them, he didn't care if people thought they were pretty. He wasn't Norman Rockwell, for God's sake.”

“I like Norman Rockwell.”

“Well, I like taking my queen out early, so I guess we both do things that the other disapproves of.”

This was wrong, Jimmy thought. Norman Rockwell worked in a field where judgment of your worth was based on opinion. Chess was skill. Comparing an artist whose talent was entirely debatable with one of the most un-debatably detrimental moves possible was just... wrong. But at least she was making an attempt to connect his interests with her own, however false that connection might be. And she was learning the terms, too. So he was happy.

. . .

“You have a light?”

“No, man.”

“Excuse me, do you have a light?”

“Sorry, bro.” Jimmy was trying desperately to find someone with a lighter as he waited outside Jenn’s dorm for her to finish showering. She hated his smoking, and he tried his best to get one in as near to their dates as possible so that he could make it through to the end without another cigarette. It wasn’t hard: Jenn was, after all, like a nicotine-free cigarette to him, calming him down and easing his mind with a word or a glance, but romance aside, it was a physical addiction, and he needed it all the same.

Jenn came through the door of the big brick building just as he was stamping it out.

“You do realize I can smell it, right?”

He smiled and put his arm around her neck as they walked toward the park.

. . .

Black knight to white pawn.

Jimmy was always black. He liked it that way.

“Damn it.” Pretty much the only time he ever heard Jenn swear was when he was taking her pieces.

“Just study the board. You’re thinking too hard about going forward, look at it in the bigger picture,” Jimmy told her.

“Ok. Hey, did I tell you about that guy in my physics class?” she asked him as she took a long stride with her bishop straight down the board. “Check.”

“No,” Jimmy said back. He sounded like a little kid when he got nervous.

“He keeps asking me what the homework is, but there’s never any. I mean the professor told us the first day that there was no homework, just exams and stuff, and he keeps asking anyway.”

He stared at the board. Why couldn’t he see his next move? Usually Jimmy could predict what he’d do ten moves ahead, there was always a plan. But that bishop, damn, it was a good move.

“So what’s to tell?”

“Well, I finally realized that he was hitting on me today. He asked me to lunch.”

Could he castle? No... it was too late for that. “So what did you tell him?”

“I told him I couldn’t. I had to come to the park with you, remember?”

Ah! There it was. Black queen to white bishop. He stopped to recollect what she had just said. “You don’t have to come if you’ve got other plans. I don’t want you not meeting new friends just because of me,” he said. He was proud of the sly use of “friends” in the sentence.

“No, no, it’s fine,” she said, “I like doing this.”

He looked down at the board. He was back on track. He could see every move, right up to tipping the King (it was too important of a player not to be capitalized). He waited patiently for her to go. She was thinking.

“Besides,” she said, “I told him I’d go tomorrow.” She looked down, hard, and for the next few minutes they were silent. Jimmy was waiting, actively waiting, for her face to change. Suddenly she lit up, and Jimmy was too busy wishing she was always this easy to read to see her snatching his queen away. She clapped her hands: this was a first.

“Fuck!” he shouted, staring at the board. How had he missed that?

. . .

“I’d give you a key, but they don’t allow anyone in the buildings when they’re closed.”

Jimmy was taking his stuff back from her dorm because she was going home for Thanksgiving break. It was weird: he’d never “taken stuff back” without breaking up with someone, and even though she was only going home for four days, the afternoon had that same sort of finality to it. This was partly due to the fact that he’d never left anything at a girl’s place without dating her, but more than anything, he knew it was because he’d miss her.

As she looked around the room for where he had left his toothbrush (he had one there because, on nights that they were both too drunk to drive anywhere, he’d sleep over), he looked around at her place. He couldn’t believe how much it looked like the other girls’ dorms he always passed on the way there: a pink fur rug on the tiled floor, a poster of Johnny Depp on the wall, a TV with a small collection of television DVD’s (*Sex and the City*, *The O.C.*, *One Tree Hill*, etc.) on the side. There was the odd framed painting of *Starry Night* on the wall, but this was simply an expression of her education, like a stack of books or a calculator. Jimmy was baffled. He had always thought, as shallow as it seemed, that people surrounded themselves with whatever was going on internally, but this wasn’t who Jenn was at all, not the Jenn he knew. It wasn’t that Jimmy didn’t approve of her things (he had actually come to really like *The O.C.* after Jenn begged him to watch it with her), it was just that you could throw a rock on the campus and hit a girl who had the same place, and Jimmy knew from experience that not all girls had Jenn’s enthusiasm, or her heart, or her strange ability to inject him with ambition through good common sense.

“Ah, there it is. You really should clean that thing,” she said as she handed him his toothbrush and grimaced in a way that wasn’t too attractive, if you thought about it. He looked down at it, and he couldn’t blame her: it had crusty white toothpaste all around the bristles.

“Heh heh,” he started laughing nervously. There wasn’t much else to say.

He helped her move her stuff down to the car, and he met her parents (another first), who were nice and grateful and warm, and he could immediately see why Jenn was the way she was.

After he waved goodbye to her and she drove away, he went straight to the nearest CVS and bought a new toothbrush.

. . . .

Over the next few days, Jimmy did his best to keep his mind occupied: he worked, he read, and, of course, he played chess. But it was hard. He regarded any song he heard on the radio that had to do with someone liking someone else as spookily relevant, and seeing as Jimmy listened to music a lot, and seeing as this subject covers the whole of pop music, it meant Jimmy felt spooked more or less the whole time. He thought about Jenn a lot, of course, but Jimmy, being Jimmy, didn’t just think about her dreamily, he thought of how it was that he was going to figure her out by the time she got back. There had to be a way, he thought, some trick of the mind, some key move that he was missing, but hard as he thought, he kept coming back to the same problem.

Jimmy’s problem, he knew, was that he was too average-looking. He didn’t mean it as a complaint, just as a statement of fact. He was tall, and skinny, and while he was not particularly muscular, he was at least enough so that women could notice on the occasion that he found himself shirtless in front of them. He had dark hair, and glasses, which a few girls told him he looked good in, but he didn’t have any features that stood out in one way or the other. The problem with being average, he decided, was that things got too vague. If you were good looking, then that was that and everything fell into place from then on. If you knew that women would vomit at the sight of you naked, well, that was unfortunate, but at least you knew where you stood. Jimmy’s problem was that his looks were neither good nor bad, just a matter of taste, really, and this had left him painfully clueless about an unfortunately large number of girls’ feelings towards him.

That was ok. He didn’t mind. There was mystery there. He liked those relationships because he was always waiting for that moment when it all simply clocked. There’s a point in *Searching for Bobby Fischer* where Josh Waitzkin, the impossibly brilliant adolescent chess prodigy, is playing an unfortunate competitor in the final match of a national

championship tournament. The competitor child has most of Josh's pieces as Josh stares at the board, when suddenly, he gets a very solemn look on his face.

"Call it a draw," Josh tells him.

"Why? I'm winning," the boy retorts, unprepared for what he's dealing with.

"You've lost, you just don't know it yet. Call it a draw."

The boy refuses, and Josh reluctantly but forcefully proceeds to cream the kid, one piece at a time, in a matter of seconds, until finally, he calls "Checkmate."

Jimmy worked his other relationships like that: it didn't matter if he was Josh or the competitor; he just wanted to stick around until it all got to be too hard or too easy, and once he saw the dead end coming, he'd call it a draw.

But Jenn... he didn't know. She had this amazing power to keep him guessing, and wanting to guess. The other girls hadn't all come from the same town as him, but they certainly could have passed for next-door neighbors: they all thought the same way (well, not exactly the same, because Jimmy prided himself on having a particularly unique train of thought), the arguments they had contained no real substance, there were never any surprises, nobody offered him anything new. Jenn was the first girl that he ever found perplexing as a human being rather than as a girl and, for some reason, this made her a more promising woman than anyone he had ever dated. Why was that? he wondered. Was it just Murphy's Law- you're left constantly clueless by someone, so you're bound to find them endlessly fascinating- or was there something else going on here that he should think about? He couldn't imagine his moment of clarity being better than the time he was spending getting to know her, and his problem was that he didn't know if this was a good thing or a bad thing.

. . .

So when Jenn got back from vacation, Jimmy had a battle plan ready. He had it all clearly mapped out:

1. At the library, he'd make a subtle sexual joke (something like "Was it good for you?" after she finished a book).
2. She'd smile and say something flirtatious back ("Yea, I'm ready for another go," as she got another book from the shelves).
3. He'd pretend to look at the new book she was reading, and put his arm over her chair while doing so.
4. They'd both acknowledge the closeness and move in for a kiss.
5. They'd seal the deal.

It was perfect. All wrapped up in five easy moves. He could hardly help himself from smiling, thinking to himself, "James Michael Murphy, you are one cool character."

So it was naturally a surprise to him when he found himself, during their pre-library chess game, asking, point blank, "What are we doing?"

He looked around after saying it, trying to figure out whether the words had actually come from his own lips. Judging by the confusion on Jenn's face, he realized they had.

"Did you not want to play today?" she asked. This was going to be harder than he thought.

"No, no, I just meant, you know. Us. How long is this going to go on for?"

Why did he say that? Why was he being so up front, so honest? This had never worked for him before- why was he doing it with a girl he knew so well that he liked?

"What's 'going on,' exactly?" She was excellent at answering questions with questions, he had to give her that.

"That's what I'm asking. I mean, I don't know how you feel about me, Jenn, and I love our whole thing, the hanging out and the chess and the drinks and all that, but we're adults, right? We can have a mature conversation about this."

She sat up. She wasn't used to Jimmy shifting focus during the game.

"It's just, that guy," he continued off of her look, "the one from your class. I think about that and I hate that there's someone else who might come in and take my place. And I hope he's not an asshole, although he probably is because assholes are the only kind of people who use homework as an excuse to talk to women. But I can't help but wonder what he said to get someone like you to consider him. It just gets my head flooded with questions- is it really that easy? What can I do to blur the line of friendship?- that sort of thing. And I want to know, you know, your thoughts."

"You're certainly getting right to the point."

"I just want to know where I stand."

She paused, and started to look at him suspiciously. He reckoned this was how he looked when he was playing other people, waiting for their moves. And then, like that, he said it:

"I love you, Jenn. Did you know that?" But he said it tenderly, not accusing, and the look on her face showed she knew that he meant it.

"I knew it, yeah. I didn't know if you did."

And with that, she looked back down at the board and softly put her fingers on her King, scraping the top with her red, roughly painted fingernail. She knocked it over, stood up and put out her hand.

"Come on," she said. "The library's closing soon."

She held his hand, kissed his cheek, and off they went. It was the first time that Jimmy didn't know what to do.

He liked it.

. . . .

"3422? Or 4322?"

Jenn was amazed by the fact that Jimmy didn't know his social security number.

"How could you not know it?" she'd say, with the exact same inflection every time.

"I don't not know it, I just can't remember it. The last four anyway."

"But how could you not know it? It's like a phone number," she said. She was smiling now: Jimmy could always tell how much she enjoyed getting the best of him. He always tried his best not to show how much he liked it, too.

"When would I have had to use it? I get paid cash, I don't go to college, it's not a necessity."

Jenn pretended not to hear him as she put on her lipstick, getting ready for their night out: it was good, the breaking of the routine. They'd go out now and plan it on the way. Jimmy tried to fill the rest of the application out as fast as possible; seeing her dressed up made him really want to go.

"I'll drop it off in the morning," he said in a voice that denoted he knew she wouldn't have it.

"I'll drop it off for you. I pass the registrar on my way to class every day. But I can't drop it off until you finish." She shut the bathroom door to keep from distracting him.

So he looked down and filled the rest out, carefully. Jimmy was taking his time with his moves, because he knew she wasn't going anywhere.



ELYSE JANKOWSKI

Dream Sestina

BRIAN SCHAAB

In the hours of the evening my world
 Gives way to the realm of dreams.
 Shadows, sights and sounds blur what is real,
 Creating illusions throughout the night
 While I lay between my sheets
 Anticipating the joys of sleep.

Most times, serenely I sleep
 The same hours as the rest of the world.
 Peaceful rain falls in sheets
 Lulling me towards the river of dreams
 Where reality drifts away with the night
 And my fantasies become real.

Emotions change what I think is real,
 A questioning mind allows no sleep.
 Heart and mind darken with the night,
 Carefully analyzing my world.
 I reflect on the day, no dreams come.
 I feel the coldness of the sheets.

On these nights I fill up sheets
 With thoughts of what I wish were real.
 In late hours I always dream,
 Even when I do not sleep.
 I think of her who is my world
 And I write throughout the night.

What is it about the night,
 That makes me mark up sheets?
 The thought of someone in the world
 Who could make my reverie real,
 Who could make me lose sleep,
 Who could be more than dreams.

But what if these dreams came to life?
 Maybe at night my mind would let me sleep.
 No need to fill up sheets with what I wish were real.
 My wishful dreams would be my world.

Day and night she is my world.
 One day my dreams will be real.
 Until then, I can't sleep, I fill up sheets.

Unnamed Poem

MARTHA LIPSY, BETTE LYNN SHELLY, MATT WHEELER

The songs of a million reverb inside my body,
Pushing the blood from my heart to each limb,
Feeding the desire to breathe.
Succumbing to the passion of the moment,
I spin out of the status quo of superficial smiles;
Like an opiate detaching myself,
Soul splitting from body, becoming a non-entity.
As I lose sense of self in the whirl of embodied music,
I become sound



ZHENYU LIN

Point Pleasant

ALISANDRA WEDERICH

electric letter buzz opens the night –
a crescendo of neon glowing mechanical crickets letting out their love songs
and I walk through the busy streets of looming shadow people –
 faces I'll never remember,
 never really bother to look at
as I walk towards the boardwalk and beach,
searching through assorted 404's of long lost memories.

this is the URL: Point Pleasant, New Jersey.
oh, sure there's movies and books involving Point Pleasant,
but other people can't describe what I see –
aren't connected within the same color spectrum.

and besides, they aren't looking
for the washed up remains of broken hearts;
 fragile spider web veins wrapped in the shape of a ventricle –
they aren't searching the sea
 for the shade of his eyes
don't see the game where he won me a pair of fuzzy dice for my rearview mirror –
 or they do,
 but to them
 it's just a game;
 a series of hits and misses,
 wins and losses,
 rigged like every other game here.
to make me hope I have a chance,
when really,
the tide is already pulling me the other way.

sea foam
 is what I am;
 stuck in the ebb and flow
 of his astral gravitation
 I revolve around memories,
 spinning in and out of subnumbulations involving him:

a touch so gentle, it was like a breeze caressing my face,
 eyes hidden beneath the depths of dark bangs –
 eyes that scream seduction and whisper apologies consecutively
 hair smoothed back on his head,
 like rolling waves,
 always moving,
 never still.

I find a seashell that I hope is big enough to hear his whispers in –
 hold it to my ear, as though I were calling him on the phone;
 one hand holding the shell,
 the other, gathering my hair out of my face,
 straightening my shirt,
 as though he could see me.

I hold it to my ear,
 close my eyes to focus on the soft hiss of noise that escapes the hollows

but all I can hear are his last real words to me,
 the burning words that have marred my mind ever since,
 burning like hot rays of sun into my mind;

“you never cared.”

I try to scream,
 but am too busy drowning.

Wanderlust

THERESA GRAZIANO

Savannah hadn't suited us well. Andrew suggested we leave on a hot June morning, just a year after we had set foot in that humid, claustrophobic city. It was overflowing with stereotypic Southern charm—he despised it.

I asked him where in God's name he thought we would go next—we had exhausted every city on the eastern seaboard from Maine to Georgia. We moved through them with rapid speed, using them up and throwing them out with an unnerving ease. Or at least he did.

Savannah, having occupied us for a whole year, had been the place we called home the longest—a recent record, but nothing to be entirely proud of. Andrew, who became discontented faster than any other human being I've ever met in my life, had his reasons for his nomadic, if not irritating, ways. I wrote down each of his reasons for leaving in a spiral-bound notebook, which I had purchased for that exact purpose while living above a store that sold surfboards in Newport, our third city. I felt that if I documented these “reasons,” I would somehow validate his crazy ideas. At least in my mind, anyway.

The entries in my book went like this: Portland, Maine, January 25, 1998—too cold, he says. He cannot live like this much longer. Suggests moving to Florida. I tell him he's much too intricate to be involved with a place like that.

Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, October 2, 1998—he says he cannot stand how quiet it is here. Now that summer is over, he knows we will be too lonely. And he asked me, 'What kind of life is that?' I'm afraid I don't know the answer to any of his questions.

We left, in succession: Portland, Maine; Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts; Newport, Rhode Island; Ocean City, Maryland; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Charleston, South Carolina in the space of four years. It wasn't that we didn't like any of these places—they were each selected for special reasons—but he always said he needed to move on.

I even suggested moving inland, since the whole coastal thing wasn't working. My hope was that he would continue across the country until we reached San Francisco, my real home. But Andrew said he needed the ocean—he insisted he could feel the saltwater in his veins. I insisted he was crazy.

He never had to worry about money. There was somehow always enough for us. He did the occasional odd job for entertainment, but the rest of it seemed to flow endlessly. I didn't dare ask about it. I didn't know anything about his life before our little game of geographic musical chairs. Sometimes I felt as if I was just a pawn to him, a companion in his odd adventure more than anything else. I knew, though, that somewhere there was the answer to his past. I just had to keep looking.

I searched for a pattern, some sort of mathematical equation that would explain him. Why did he choose to stay in one place and not another? How did he decide? But I soon realized that there weren't any patterns or reasons—there was only the music in his head that guided all of his actions. And our lives.

I first saw him from the back of a Berkeley bar. His band finished its set and he put down his guitar and left the stage. I was twenty-two years old. I just completed my four years at UC Berkeley. I had a degree in Art History and no plans for the future. That night, after I met him backstage, he asked me if I wanted to travel with him. He said he needed new perspective for his “art”? He always called his music “art”? I didn't know it then, but his music consumed him. There was very little room for anyone or anything else.

I don't know why I said yes. I didn't even know him. But I went anyway. I had nothing else better to do.

In Portland and Vineyard Haven I worked at an art gallery. It was the closest approximation for a career I could find to fit what my parents called my “frivolous choice” of a major. Andrew held several jobs along the way, none that mattered much, but he didn't



DEBORA PRADO

seem to care. The music was all that mattered. He started performing more and more at bars and small clubs, selling CD's out of the back of his car whenever he got the chance. Eventually, though, he grew bored with what he called "the scene" and we would inevitably end up packing everything we owned into the back of his car.

The sun casts a blue teardrop of light onto the white carpet through the stained glass window. I stand motionless in the living room of our newest home, on the second floor of a Charleston rowhouse. It was his idea to move back to South Carolina. He decided that he hadn't hated it here entirely. One by one, our belongings were packed up and placed into boxes. They made their way back up the South Carolina coast. We had traveled in the opposite direction only over a year ago.

I'm not sure what possessed him to move back here, to an apartment only a few blocks away from our original one. I am grateful for

TRILLIUM 2006

the familiarity. The music scene in Charleston is, he said, nonexistent but he is convinced that he can make a go at it again. This is the first time he had ever decided to move to a place where we had already lived once. And so the work began. I unpacked boxes, cleaned the kitchen, the bathroom. I made up the bed in our tiny bedroom with crisp white linens. I planted flowers in the window boxes and watered them until they grew. All the while he sat in the middle of the floor, strumming his guitar.

He began looking for gigs and, in the meantime, took a job at a music shop selling guitars. He stays out late most nights, playing small bars and coffee houses. Occasionally I accompany him, hanging out backstage, talking to the other performers or the waiters, whoever happens to be around. Sometimes it reminds me of our early days in Berkeley. Most times it does not.

Around May, I begin to think that I could really stay in Charleston and build a life here. It feels more like a home than any other place I have shared with him. One morning, as I stand in the kitchen, sipping a latte from a paper takeout cup, I say to him, "There's a gallery downtown that's hiring. I thought maybe I could try to get a job there."

He puts down the entertainment section of the Charleston Post and Courier and stares at me with his pale face. "Meg," he says, "you don't need a job. Aren't you happy with things the way they are?"

"I just thought I could do something I liked for a change."

The car keys rattle in his hand. "I'm late for work" he says.

That is the end of that.

On the phone from San Francisco, I can hear the exasperation in my brother's voice. "Meg, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," I say.

"I mean, you have an education, a degree. You can't spend the rest of your life chasing Andrew around the country. You deserve better than that."

"I like my life here the way it is. I told you I'm trying to get this job. I think I would be good at it. â ?

"And what if Andrew doesn't let you get the job?"

"Don't worry, I'll work on him."

That night, when I come back from the grocery store, Andrew is sitting on the sofa, listening to Bob Dylan. "So," I say, "I found out more about the job at the gallery. The woman who works there says I would be good for the job. She wants me to go for an interview on Thursday."

Andrew reaches over and turns the stereo off. I wait for the inevitable explosion. "I don't understand you!" he yells. "I said you don't need a job and that is final. Why do you constantly have to go against everything I say?" He raises his hand slightly, and I instinctively jump back.

Suddenly, he softens. "Oh, Meg," he says, his voice barely above a whisper. "I would never hurt you. You know that, right?"

I nod. I know my eyes are full of tears, but there is nothing I can do to stop them. "I just want what is best for you. I want you to be happy," he continues.

His voice is soft, but his eyes are threatening.

I don't recognize him anymore.

The previous owners of our Charleston apartment left a petite piano behind. It stands prominently in the too-small foyer, positioned in front of the street-facing windows. It is a ridiculous possession for the two of us to have. Andrew has taken to playing it in the afternoons, watching the light shift on the street below. He says he uses the time to think. About what, I'm not sure.

I start watching him on those afternoons, and I use the time to think too. About what I am going to do with myself now that the magic has begun to wear thin. As I watch him, I am aware of what first drew me to him. The visceral, intense way he is playing that

piano echoes the way he lives his life. He throws his whole body into it. I remember the way, early on, he would sit on the floor of our tiny apartment in Vineyard Haven, listening to old Velvet Underground records. Fueled by too many cups of black coffee, he would clutch his guitar to his body, waiting for inspiration to strike. I would watch him, mistakenly believing that I was responsible for the music he would write. There is also the way he has, when meeting acquaintances, of not looking into their eyes, but somewhere behind them, beyond them. It is as if he is afraid they would otherwise be able to decode his secrets. He has the ability to be kind and shy and dark and powerful all at the same time. I used to think it was endearing. Now I'm not so sure.

I begin to wonder what happens when you leave someone behind. How long do they stay with you before they are gone completely? Could it be possible that they never truly disappear from your mind? I think about everyone I have hurt and left behind. My family, my friends. They are all still here with me, lingering in the recesses of my mind. They haven't left me. Will he be any different?

Andrew drops the mail onto the kitchen table, as he does every morning. "Here," he says. "I'm going to work." He walks through the front door, a guitar case slung over his shoulder. The first envelope I pick up is so thin that, at first, I think it doesn't contain anything. Then, I notice the San Francisco postmark. The front of the envelope is scrawled in my brother's handwriting. I shake the envelope onto the table and a clipping from the *Chronicle* falls out.

Bay Area art gallery seeks qualified assistant director,
bachelor's degree required in art history or similar field.
Prior related work experience required.

Written in red ink below the print are the words COME HOME!!

At first, I can't find my suitcase. Andrew stashed it far from sight in the back of the closet when we moved in. I throw everything from my dresser into the suitcase without bothering to pack anything neatly. My clothes, my jewelry box, my books, my journal, almost everything I own tangles together inside. I don't have many belongings anyway. That's what happens when you're expected to move everything you own in a jeep every year or so. I take the linen sheets off the bed and throw them into a bag along with my grandmother's quilt. From the living room, I take a dozen or so CD's and toss them into my shoulder bag. Standing in the desecrated bedroom, I throw my spiral notebook open onto the dresser. Underneath Andrew's reasons for leaving Savannah, I date the page and write Goodbye. I won't be needing that notebook anymore.

The door opens and Andrew yells "Hey, I'm back," before he realizes that I am standing in the bedroom doorway, holding several bags and my suitcase. He looks at me, stunned. "Meg, what are you doing?"

I shake my head. I can't say anything. I watch as he begins to realize what is happening.

"Meg. Don't do this. Please. Don't do this."

I watch him sink to the floor in front of me. I shake my head again. "I'm sorry," I say. "I'm sorry." He stands up, reaches out to touch me, but I push him away. "I'm sorry," I repeat.

All the way to the airport I can't get his face out of my head. I can't believe that I left him standing there alone, dumbfounded in his ignorance. I wonder, sitting there in the plane, how long it will take him to find the notebook. I wonder, once he reads it, if he will understand. I know he will never change. The music in his head will keep playing on a continuous loop. It will never stop. As the plane taxis down the runway, I am certain that I will see him standing on the tarmac, watching me leave. But when I turn to look, there is no one there.



OLEG KIKIN

The Deep

SHANNON DANZ

Sandy ridges carved of rock
Golden layers stacked atop
A balanced edge of stony knots
 Pointing to the deep.

Blue sky meets the yellow sand
Across this wide and barren land
Unchanged by the hand of man
 Waiting is the deep.

The landscape works the brilliant light
Around a patch as dark as night
In the midst of a burning fight
 Lonely is the deep.

Long since empty, hollow holes
In orange mounds from wind that blows
Molding the earth even as it goes
 Admiring the deep.

Baked beyond the point of dry
Thick clouds of dust wander by
Beneath a calm and patient sky
All envying the deep.

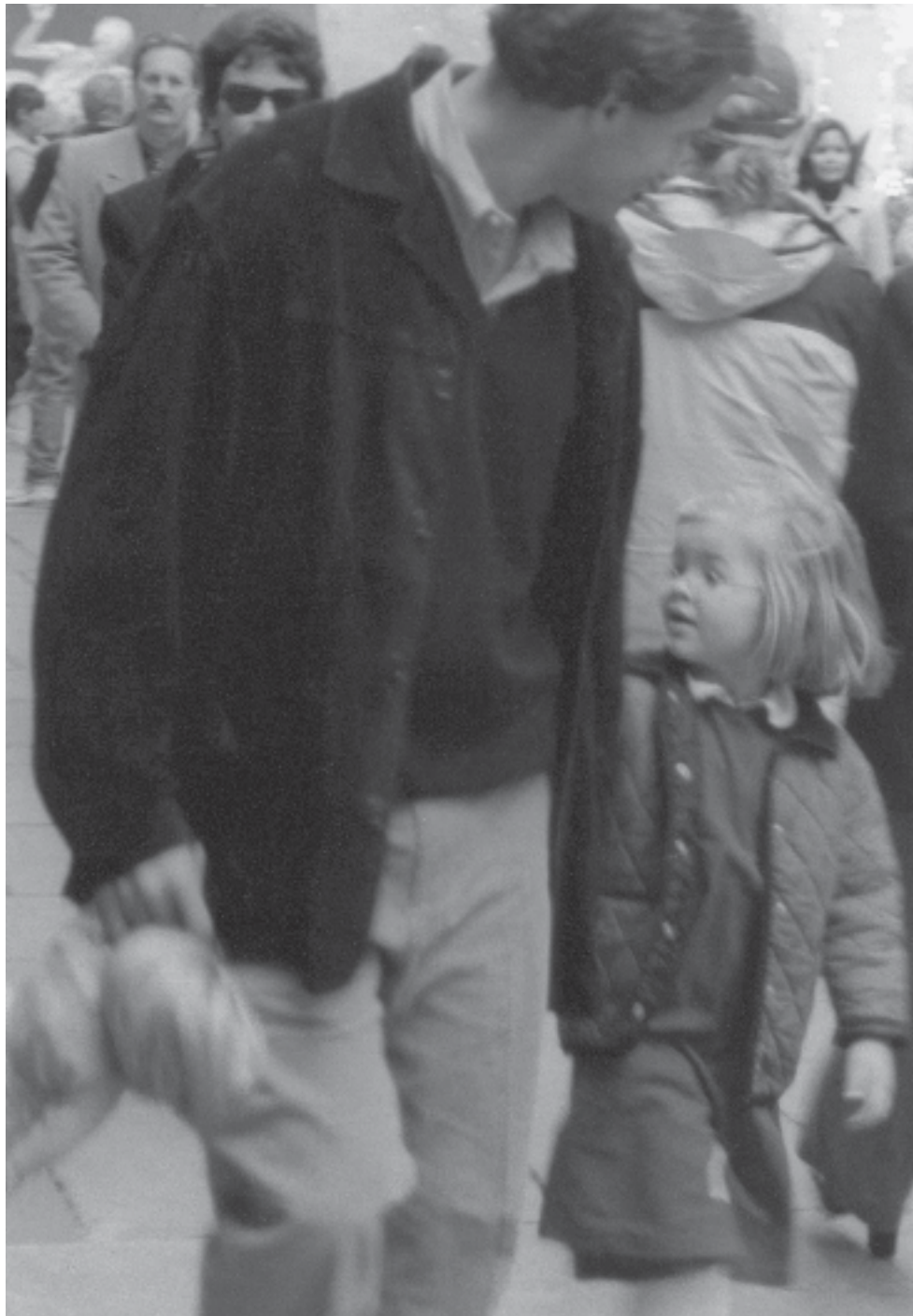
When You Think You Have Tomorrow

ALEXIS DARAKJIAN

Carpe Diem, seize the day
But responsibility always seems to get in your way
You are told you are never guaranteed tomorrow
So try not to live your life with regrets and sorrow
As we get older we seem to forget
What life was like without drama and debt,
'Someday' takes on a whole new meaning
Once procrastination and exhaustion takes over one's being
I'll call them soon, I'll see them around
You wonder how old friends are as you go to lay down
One week turns to one month, one month to one year
You look back on past loves with laughter and tears
'Til one night before Thanksgiving Eve
You get the call that brings you down to your knees
The room is spinning and suddenly you can't breathe
This cant be happening, he is only twenty-three
He's gone I'm sorry; it's a shock to us all
You hang up the phone and lean against the wall
You try to compose yourself as you walk slowly to your room
Pull down the box of pictures with a thunderous boom
All the memories of the past are like a rushing river
Flooding your mind and making you quiver
So young so happy so full of life
This cannot be happening, it isn't right
'It's just not fair' you mumble and then begin to yell
Suddenly the room has become a personal hell
If only I had called last week
I could have said goodbye
But who expects a young man of twenty-three
To fall asleep and die....



BIL THOMPSON



CHRISTINE NEWBY

Would

MEGAN CURLEY

We would be good. We would talk into the cool fall night. We would sit under stars and remember times we never knew. We would laugh until tears streamed down our faces. We would watch films that meant something, read books that make a difference, write pages of perfection. We would look deep within one another and find ourselves there, hidden, away for everyone to see. We would be present. We would be wonderful. We would be everything we wanted to be. We would travel along through seasons, living and smiling. We would be real. We would be all. We would play records into the early morning singing our souls out loud. We would shop amidst dusty shelves of books and treasures seen only by our eyes. We would find that center of ourselves where true peace can only be found. We would we would we would we would we would. We. Would. Love.



MILENA LACHETA



505 Ramapo Valley Road • Mahwah, NJ 07430 • 201.684.7500