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THE
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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.



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INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL MARTONE

ELLEN ORNER

Michael Martone is a professor of English and the director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Alabama. He came to Valparaiso University in October of 2009 as a guest of Wordfest's visiting writers series and gave a rousing performance of selections from The Blue Guide to Indiana, Pensées: The Thoughts of Dan Quayle, and The Sex Life of the Fantastic Four. He has recently published Double-wide: Collected Fiction of Michael Martone.

EO: Did you interview Derek Jeter for your piece in *Esquire*, "The Death of Derek Jeter"?

MM: No.

EO: What sort of research did you do?

MM: Well of course I follow baseball a little bit. But when you don't do narrative, what you're working on is a collage sort of form, and that works by juxtaposition, foiling, and association. And so, what I have here is, Derek reminded me of the Eric Clapton Band, Derek and the Dominoes, and dominoes brought me in my research to those huge domino exhibitions

where they set up thousands and millions of dominoes...and it turns out that, you know, they're a whole society. And so I just imagined Derek Jeter with the dominoes.

EO: That's not really a connection that you're expecting the reader to pick up on.

MM: No, no. And that's why, if you write like that, you have to give a lot more credit to the participation of the reader as opposed to you thinking you're going to direct the reader. Instead you're really creating—it's actually sort of like with dominoes: an interesting environment that the reader is participating in and makes meaning out of. And that does sort of lessen you as an authority, but I like it that way. I like making Swiss cheese instead of, you know, a solid block of cheese. There are all these holes in it that make for a more interesting texture.

EO: When did you start thinking of narrative in this way? As a student, were you always thinking of it as something you wanted to challenge but had to sort of, earn your stripes first?

MM: Well, yeah. I think it was easier for me to come to this way of thinking because I started writing poetry. And poetry, the lyricism in poetry, allows for that type of thinking, instead of being so dependent upon the narrative. And then, when I went to graduate school, I had a teacher who is a very good storyteller. And he was also very technical in what he meant by story. And the story had to be there. And in a conference one day he looked at me and he said, "Michael, you don't tell stories," and I said "I know." And he said, "That's okay, I mean, it doesn't mean that you can't write things, you just need to find another word for it." And that's when he said, "What you do is create fictions." So, I think of myself as a fiction writer, not so much a storyteller. And the prose that I produce are fictions, or collages, as opposed to being stories. I know how to tell a story, but that's just not as interesting to me.

In the *once upon a time* of a story, you have an evil queen, right? And she has a stepdaughter named Snow White, and she has a mirror, and the mirror tells her every day that she's the fairest in the land. Well, that's pretty interesting, and there's conflict there, and that can go on forever. And I can keep enriching that and making it more interesting. I can say that Snow White has a dog, and that dog's name is Snuffy, and she's a lesbian, and she has six toes on her left foot. That doesn't make it a story, but it's still interesting. It's anecdotal. But what a story does is have the *one day*. And the one day in Snow White is that one day the mirror says you're not the fairest in the land. Now, if that doesn't happen, then what follows would never have happened...it would just keep going like this. And so what a story does is, by the time you get to the end of it, it is different from the beginning. Someone has changed, or the situation has changed. And that's the part where I am different.

I'm not writing about the one day in their life that changed things forever, instead I'm creating a very interesting anecdote.

EO: Do you see real life as being more like an anecdote than a story?

MM: Oh yes, definitely. And that's what makes fiction so hard....St. Thomas Aquinas—so, before Luther—asked the question, why do we die? You know, if life is good and God is good, why do we die? And he said, well, we die because if we didn't, our life would have no meaning. And we need a place to be able to look back and judge how we've lived our lives. When you're in your life, when you're living, you can't see the story of it. And that's why we have so many memoirs about childhood. Because what you do is put a sort of artificial death in. Now that you're not a child you can sort of look back and make sense of what it is. But you're right...in your life, in my life...I mean, I'm fifty-four. I don't think I've had a *one day*. Now, you know, I've had two kids, I fell in love and got married...those are big things, but that didn't really change my life in the way story characters get their lives changed.

Here's the other interesting thing...we think of television as being narrative, but in fact, it isn't, because look what happens. Take a character like Hawkeye Pierce in *M*A*S*H*. You know, his best friend could die in the episode, he could kiss Hot Lips, Radar could be lost in a mine field, and at the end of the story, Hawkeye is pretty much the same guy. So all these things happen to him but they don't change him. And that's what we mean by melodrama. Great literature is like that, like the *Odyssey*. Odysseus at the beginning of the war and the end of the war is the same guy. Stuff happens to him—he went to hell and back, twice—but it didn't change him. And so as reader of it, we're interested in the adventures, not in the change of character.

EO: Do you feel like you're swimming up stream?

MM: Well yeah, definitely. It's especially true with the American short story since the 1980s. All the graduate students have been trained narrative things. That goes back to your question—do you have that before you can do this? I'm always one to say “no.” These are just different modes. That's why I don't call myself an experimental writer, I call myself a formalist. I understand all these different forms, and narrative realism is one form, collage is another. I can do all these forms, but it does mean that narrative realism is somehow the form to do—that you can only break its rules.

And you know art is the same way—you can't do the drip painting until you draw the horse. And I don't believe that, you know? I mean, one of the greatest artists of twentieth century America could not draw. His name was Joseph Cornell. He couldn't draw, he couldn't sculpt. All he did was go to Woolworth's and buy junk. And then he arranged them in boxes. Have you seen that up in Chicago? In the Art Institute in Chicago there's a whole room of Cornell boxes. He didn't draw a thing, he didn't paint a thing, he didn't sculpt a thing—all he did was take junk and arranged it in a box. And they're beautiful. They're amazing.

EO: So what if there's junk that gets arranged in boxes that doesn't appeal to us?

MM: That's junk!

EO: So you're still upholding an aesthetic standard.

MM: What do you mean?

EO: What comes to my mind is the idea of competition. I think part of the reason we try to define what's good is because we want certain things to be seen, because we are personally

invested in what we produce, and we can't be anything else. I'm assuming.

MM: I think that competition is deleterious for making art in the long run...Instead of thinking vertically or in hierarchy, I think far more in a horizontal way, a networking way, a collaborative way. Art is not what we like* to think of it as. We call ourselves freelancers, you know like we're room masterless warriors or something. But when you collaborate, by definition, it eliminates competition.

EO: But there's just this lack of room. Not on the internet, obviously, where it's absolutely...

MM: Limitless.

EO: But we still have an impulse to publish things like the Lighter, where the reason we make decisions between pieces is because we only have room for so many. And I don't think it's only because we feel that people are more likely to pick up a book than they are to go on the internet to read the entire collective poetry and prose and art submissions of Wesleyan students. I feel like there's some other impulse there to make distinctions that won't go away, no matter how limitless the possibilities get.

MM: Well, I know they're incredibly deep...I think part of the reason you can't get out of these sort of things is because of the institution itself, which is the ancient medieval institution that was based on hierarchy, that was based on the churches. Especially the Catholic Church and then the Lutheran Church as well. You've got the Pope down here and then you've got the priesthood and saints and angels. And there's all of this judgment that's going on all the time, and all of this differentiation.

EO: And it's totally constructed.

MM: Well, I think it is. But, just to say that it's constructed, and that it's an artifact, and then deconstruct it, still isn't enough. I mean, it still is real to people. And still hugely motivational. But, again, once you get outside of it, you can live your life differently. The exciting thing is that there's technology now that will allow you to do that, if you can free your mind from "Oh, the stories that I write must pass muster" of the *Lighter* or the *Georgia Review*, or the *New Yorker*. But that's tough. I mean, I know that's tough.

I'm interested in process, not product. Part of my process had to do with having children. So, all of a sudden the whole idea of having two or three hours of uninterrupted time to write changed me to writing in very quick bursts between the babies' needs. So, my stuff got very short, but I still wanted to write books so I tried to find projects that were made up of these little components that I could switch out and move around. So like, the travel guide seemed like an interesting form. I could write these little paragraphs, keep building them up, and all of a sudden I had a book.

Another part you should get your mind around is that it's your job if you're an artist to make things. And to actually change the question from, not is this good or bad, but is it interesting? To enter into a test for your writing or reading with curiosity rather than a critical mind. But that's so difficult because the university is so good at making you critical. And making you decide, this not worth my time, this is worth my time. To live in that kind of binary as opposed to living in a more horizontal or wide angle lens, finally, will stop you from writing.

Kids who really like to write come to graduate school, and they become such good critics of other peoples' work that

when they sit down to write they think, *well I better not write that because Johnny's gonna to say this about it, and if I write that then Valerie's gonna say this about it*, and pretty soon they're not writing at all.

EO: They've been paralyzed by the system.

MM: Yeah, yeah. Because that critical side of you is so turned on, so heightened as opposed to saying, my job is to make things. Have fun making things.





PATH IN CEDAR LAKE | CALEB KORTOKRAN



HOUSE OF BLUES | AMANDA GARTMAN

SYMBIOSIS

MEGAN TELLIGMAN

In shadowy waters, the sea lamprey lives as a parasite amongst the fish. The lamprey, a long, eel-like organism, attaches itself to the side of a fish, using its mouth as a suction cup. Then its tongue, covered in teeth, goes to work, rubbing away at the side of the fish like sandpaper, until the scales and other tissues fall away into the surrounding water, floating gently like wood shavings in the air, dyeing the water a deep red. The lamprey stay attached, floating on, still drawing blood, attached, growing greater, stronger than the fish that once was.

As I lay in bed, looking at the intricate pattern of my bedspread, my mind brimming with anatomy, I can't help but see the cross section of the lamprey in the greens and yellows, just as I had seen in slices of the lamprey, preserved rigidly in yellowed plastic. I note the pharynx, the notocord, the spinal cord, and the midgut, my fingers tracing the shapes as they did on my anatomy test that morning. Only the spinal cord is in the wrong place. For a moment, I'm tempted to take my pen and make the necessary corrections, sketching lines, arrows, and new details on the soft fabric. But no. Such is the relationship between life and art. Art takes from life, leeching off moments, until what was life now hangs motionless off the side, a thin shriveled testament to the art it inspired.

The relationship between art and life is a complex one, and one that I have always spent much time thinking about, of which the lamprey is perhaps one bizarre example. Art must be necessary to life, and life to art, but the relationships don't exist without confusion and paradox.

I am, of course, not the first, nor the last to consider the tension as I trace the designs of my bedspread. I am, perhaps, yet another in an endless line of artists (as I dare call myself) to wind around the issue and wonder if experience is necessary to the creation of an art that is supposed to involve all time, effort, passion, and energy. Henry James was perhaps the first person I had heard of who contemplated the relationship. James, from my quick glimpse of his work, best expressed the paradox between art and life, mulling over the fact that art requires, no, demands, experience for its creation. In short, it demands life as its subject and is nothing without it. However, the life of the true artist is described as one of seclusion and dedication to the art. There exists a sense that all of life should be given to art, or not at all, because the best of art is created in this manner. The paradox emerges from these images of art and the artist. Must we live life to create art? But how can art, true art, meaningful art, be created in these circumstances?

James does not seem to have decided on which side the importance lies. On one hand, life is most important, grounded in reality and thus more important than the fleeting powers of art. He is quoted as saying, "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?" Here James seems to be acknowledging the tendency of artists to ignore life. However, he cannot go on without making allowances for his art as well. On this other hand, James places equal importance on art as well, in the sense that the pleasures afforded by art make life worth living. "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance... and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process." On one side of the coin, life must take precedence, grounded in reality, but on the other side, is life worth living without the existence of art?

W. Somerset Maugham is yet another author to have noticed the tendency of art to overcome life. In *Of Human Bondage*, a novel considered to be largely biographical, Philip Carey contemplates the place of art in life. "It seemed to Philip... that the true painters, writers, musicians there was a power which drove them to such complete absorption in their work as to make it inevitable for them to subordinate life to art. Succumbing to an influence they never realized they were merely dupes of the instinct that possessed them, and life slipped through their fingers un-lived. But he had a feeling that life was to be lived rather than portrayed, and he wanted to search out the various experiences of it and wring from each moment all the emotion that it offered." Life understood through the lens of art makes life an object to be used, squeezed into the pages of a book, and stretched into the shape of a canvas.

But I? I can't admire the reds and blues of a sunset smeared across a sky and the impending horizon bearing down on me without almost crashing my car. I can't take

every moment in every day to write, to notice, to absorb the detail of every second, understanding how best to represent that life in the pages of a novel. I can't admire the complexity of the translucent, yellowed bones of a skeleton without being expected later name them. Life impinges on art. In a truly defensive strategy, as in those admirable scales of the fish, life in a tough skin of reality, prevents the artist from ever living in his art entirely.

However, in a manner parallel to art, the lamprey has evolved. The toothed tongue is remarkably efficient, and the lamprey dedicated, and at those moments, the tongue breaks through, and with a flood of color, takes life. In this way, art impinges on life. Artists, and those who experience art in any meaningful way, are pulled from the constraint of reality to the realm of art. I get lost in pages of novels, and value, above all else, the notes in certain songs. Maugham's Philip exhibits this same inclination, and as a youth reads ardently, creating unreal expectations for himself based on the experience of the novel as opposed to the experience of life. When the realities of his life do not match the realities of the novel, Philip reels with depression. And I? I see the flaws in the patterns of a blanket. But before these bouts of realization that art is not life, there is a moment of clarity, where the art is inseparable from the life, where the art feels like true representation, the best form of life, the only way to live. But then, I realize that the painting is just that, a painting. The faces and truths are more than streaks of color on cloth.

The relationship between plants and pollinators is perhaps the best examples of mutualism in nature. The flowers of a plant provide nectar for pollinators, who pick up pollen as they move in to take a drink. As the pollinator flits from flower to flower, pollen is deposited, fertilizing the flowers and creating seeds. The pollinators glean sustenance and the flowers are able to reproduce.

Maybe this thought, mutualism, better describes the relationship between art and life. The two use each other to their own ends, and are necessary to each other's creation. I can't help but feel as though something is lost in the interaction, that art sucks a little too much from life. Life is somehow drained in the creation of art, forming something that is beautiful for a moment, but nevertheless, not entirely true. Without the fleeting beauty though, and those moments of realization, life might not be worth living. But perhaps, this winding contemplation over the relationship between life and art further drains me of the energy, the attentiveness I need to pay to both life and art in order to take or create anything meaningful in either of them.



SOOT OF A YOUNG STAR

JOHN LINSTROM

But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars.
The rays that come from those heavenly worlds,
will separate between him and what he touches.

—Emerson

So unlike you and me, once trapped,
two supermassive stars
in binary attraction
will slide through easy space, meet in the middle,
violent and silent as candle flames again

a new creature, collision rite,
a weighty spin and darkling shine.

Not trapped, we're spread,
spread-eagle on pine needles,
muted by time and distances, stretched in the open woods
and you stir—and I hear—I cannot see your eyes,

a flash, fire swimming
under lashes, orbit unknown.

I cannot conceive
in the dark, the space
between our mouths—the space

between and the stars above
laughingly watch us stagnate but spin,
earth-bound and twin but unseen, I fear, and fast

the teeth of my mouth chatter,
the debris not to reach you for years—

feet become miles,
hands become roots,
and under each smile
we're bare-boned and soot.

*Soot, the pastor said,
thick-thumbed and sober, into my head:*

*Soot of a palm frond,
soot of a young star;
of soot you were first formed
and sooty you still are.*

On my head, scratched and spread
by a roving grubby fingernail
I recall, oh thumb, I think, the rite.

With the wind I lose sight
of the sky for the leaves of the trees,
the rustle and scrape,
the million atoms loosed into infinite space—
the pummeling insistent to the carbon of my brow

Be it chaos or a system of planets
just formed from the smudge of a newborn star
I can't tell, I can't see—

*a lift of the arm,
a slip of the chin,*

*and feeling your breath
when you lean over me,
stale and lovely, I recall*

leaning closer
eyes will glitter
and through the leaves
the stars burn back.



EVERYONE IS GONE | DAN LUND



CANDLE GNOME | NICHOLAS BURR'S

RAIN DREAM

DIANA STUTZMAN

Warm water trickles fingers
through my twiggy hair, streaks
my slippery skin with scars. I can melt
into mud, seep into skinny grassroots, marvel
at my multiplicity
and the stretching arms of trees

until I wake, alone
and alive at last





UNDER THE BRIDGE #12 | ADAM JACKSON

BAREFOOT

ELLEN ORNER

You, my Uncle Dave, stand on Grandma's front porch with a cowboy hat and a Sam Adams, and your Paul Newman eyes are twinkling. Charming. They all think you're charming. At dusk, it's boiling outside and too cold in the house, because Grandma keeps the air conditioning hiked up. Eighty-year-old Poppop gets cold and messes with the thermostat—Grandma gets angry and freezes everyone out, even herself. So I sit on the porch steps in a pink sleeveless sweater and skin-tight denim capris that my mother shouldn't have let me buy. I'm barefoot, feeling sand against concrete, sand mixed with bits of acorn, acorn with pine needles, needles and sand under my toes. Only in the Indiana dunes ecosystem do you find such a texture, or so I wrote in the tenth grade geography report I proudly showed you, Uncle Dave. You read it quickly and told me not to sound so authoritative.

On Grandma's front porch, you finish telling an uproarious, boasting story for your old buddies, gathered after a wedding to which I wasn't invited. John and Jeff Trathen, Dick O'Brien and his sons. You ask me if I want a beer. Of course I want a beer, but I say no because you're mocking me, proving I'm not as grown up as you were at sixteen. Would you have been sitting on your grandmother's front porch with your uncle's friends? Well, maybe, but not with your mom and dad inside, one of them probably watching through

the kitchen window. You weren't homeschooled. You weren't raised Baptist. You weren't a girl.

"Did you see the fox in the little green number that showed up late to the reception?" you ask Dick O'Brien. "Man! When a girl has legs like that she shouldn't be afraid to show them. You tip your cowboy hat forward and take a swig of Sam Adams. You're not really a womanizer, you're just a show-off. You're acting. Dick O'Brien, my sworn enemy since I was three years old, plays along. He's a forty-five year old man with long gray hair and a permanent sneer in his voice. The first time I met him, I was two and half feet tall and he scared the shit out of me by bending down and laughing in my face, with all that greasy gray hair bouncing. I still don't trust him, and his name repulses me.

"Oh yeah, I saw her," O'Brien answers. "And I saw her strut right up, with that look in your eye. That's Cindy's kind you know that?"

"Cindy? Cindy...what was her last name. The one who got her braces off in eleventh grade? God, Cindy never came close to looking like that. She must have married an attractive man. Was he at the wedding?"

"They're divorced. It's a good thing Daphne didn't show up—you—she would have killed you, David. Oh man, she would put up with nothin'!"

You laugh too loudly. “Yep, the old ball and chain.” You catch me trying to burn holes through your hat with my eyes. “Nah, Daphne’s alright. She just does her job, keeps me in line. Right, Ellen?”

I stand up from my cracked porch step, hoping I look as disgusted as I feel, and walk towards the house. I’m not calling you Uncle anymore. You don’t deserve it, and besides, how long must one go on paying respect to elders? You can be just plain Dave from now on.

John Trathen winks at me as I pass. He’s a gentle, round man, a little older than you and O’Brien, and he has a kid younger than me. This kid is John Henry, whom I can see through the slices of blinds in the front window. He’s sitting in the old brown lazyboy in Grandma’s living room, staring morbidly at the TV. He’s ignoring Poppop, who sits in the new green lazyboy, munching cashews and fumbling with his false teeth. I can’t go back in there, because I’ll suffocate, whereas out here I’ll only simmer.

I place my hand on the front door’s knob but instead of turning it, use it to perch myself on the rickety porch railing. I hook my feet into the decorative loops to stay balanced. Blisters of painted rust pop under my fingers. From here, I can observe John observing you, with his huge belly stretching a white button-up shirt, and a few white tufts decorating his big shiny head. He’s not paying much attention to you, actually. He’s smoking a cigarette, and flicking the ashes behind him into Grandma’s holly bush.

“How’s school going for you, honey?” says John. His voice is raspy and low, like he has a cigarette filter for a voice box. “Your Uncle Dave tells me you’re starting to look at colleges already. Man, you kids grow up so fast.”

I tell him about taking the PSAT at Wirt, the same high school you attended and excelled in. I don’t have my scores back yet, but the results will be sent to Valparaiso University, where you went to college.

“Good for you!” says John. “Valpo’s a good school. I took classes there a couple years ago.”

“You did?” I blurt out, before I remember not to sound surprised. “What for?”

“History. I’m just interested in it. I never went to college at the age I was supposed to.” I knew that. “Terrible mistake. But it’s never too late to change things. I earned 56 credits, just doing evening classes, so I guess that makes me, what, a junior?” He drops his cigarette butt and slides his foot over it.

“Why did you quit?”

“Well, they upped tuition, for one thing, and then U.S. Steel cut my hours, and I just couldn’t afford to go anymore. Besides, we had to put our two daughters through college—the youngest still has a year left. And I’m hoping John Henry will decide to get off his butt and do something with himself when the time comes.”

I’m sure he will, I tell him, even though I’m not sure of anything. “So Dave told you I was looking at colleges, huh?” I say, just to try out your new name. John doesn’t look surprised.

“Sure, he talks about you all the time. He’s real proud of you.”

“He only cares if I go to Valpo because he went there.”

John laughs, like gravel pouring out over boulders. “Yep, good old college boy. Well, God knows your cousin isn’t going to follow in his footsteps, so he’s gotta work on somebody.”

I decide right then I will never go to Valparaiso University. I hear Aunt Claire’s voice coming around the corner.

“Dave!” she says. “Mom wants to know if you’re going out with the boys tonight or if she should find something for all of you to eat.” Number One Son is what Aunt Claire calls you behind your back. Grandma would do anything for you. You live 1,000 miles away, you come home every six months or so, and she worships the ground you walk on and cries when you leave.

"Tell her not to worry about us, Clairey. We'll order fried chicken or something. Or we might go out."

"You should probably spend some time with her Dave," she says in a quieter voice. "But it's none of my business."

You don't answer. You open another beer. The screen door whines shut, and behind it the wooden door slams shut, keeping the hot air out and the cold air in. "Claire's the one you've gotta watch out for," you tell Dick O'Brien's son, the one who just got married. "All that women's empowerment will set a girl on edge."

"When Claire first started bringing home girlfriends during college, Dave tried hitting on 'em," says Dick.

"Well, Jesus, the first one, Debbie, she was smokin'! Clairey has good taste." You grin. The new groom laughs nervously.

It's all in good fun, of course. You can joke about how Aunt Claire's dive off the kitchen counter at age two gave her a concussion that altered her sexual orientation, and everyone knows you still love her. Her partner is one of your biggest fans. She thinks you're hilarious.

I hop off the railing and stalk back down the porch, out to the drive way. I'm going for a long barefoot walk, to think about how hopeless you and your friends are, how hopelessly dominated the world is by you and your type.

"She's like a little water nymph, isn't she?" you say to no one in particular. I stop and face you, standing in a pile of needles and shells to brace myself.

"What are you talking about, Dave?" I ask.

You hesitate. Maybe because I left off the *uncle*. "Barefoot, skinny, with all that wavy hair down to your butt," you answer.

I don't know what to say, or whether to be flattered or offended. I put a hand on my hip. John Trathen quietly lights another cigarette. I try staring you down.

"What are you going to study in college?" you finally ask, to distract me from dismantling you with my eyes.

"English."

"What, are you gonna be a teacher?" says Dick O'Brien.

"No. I want to write."

"Oh boy." O'Brien does that awful laugh of his. "You better find a rich husband, honey." But I'm not scared this time, mostly because you don't laugh with him.

"Good for you," you say. "This family has some great stories, we need a historian."

I nod, waiting for you to tell the story about that time in 1971 when you and your buddies snuck a Swedish girl, naked except for her fur coat, and a fifth of vodka into your honor class at Valpo. I work myself up to telling you to write about it yourself.

"You can write about nights like tonight," you say instead. "when your good old Uncle Dave had a few too many and made a fool of himself."

"Oh, I will," I tell you, and, eyes twinkling, forgive you.



JUNK, HIGHWAY 31 | KELSEY HOWARD



GIN AND TONIC | AMANDA GARTMAN

A CHRISTENING

LAUREN NELSON

two found yellow roadside chairs
something about horns
and thoughts on a Persian rug
carpet dated in infancy
fiber sprouting in stain pool,
low yellow light, tin
can perspiring on the counter

smoke shroud reveals
mad smiles cracking mad faces
imagined shovel splintered beside
umbrella, damp and dangling
shuddering on the cusp of communion
and finally sniff the inevitable
scent of home, wherever
we are for the moment



FROM AN IVORY TOWER

LAUREN NELSON

Driving through the mad streets
of El Magnouna, the fortress,
hypnotized by light and the movement of night.
On a quest for Thoth's magic Book,
I trace the veins of an ancient empire

Trapped dumbly grinning in the glow of neon
and thousands of years of civilization;
a pilgrim seeking the maddening world
from the vantage point of my ivory tower.¹

I'm wandering between the layers of a civilization
where the relic is resurrected with nothing wasted--
like the Great Macedonian who built Alexandria
where once they fished in old Rhakotis,
and Ptolemy's lighthouse fell into the sea
leaving footprints for Qaitbay to fill.

The Scavengers defiled their tombs in the name of science
and Anubis hung his jackal head, stripped of his ceremony
then, finished pillaging the remnants of their history,
left Tut naked and alone in the Valley of the Kings.

My wanderings never stray from my ivory tower,
even now before Karnak on the eastern shore,
whose temples, parallel to the Nile,
watched Cleopatra float her titanic obelisks
and now no one knows what Karnak really meant.

Straddled the Sahara in the Land of the Dead,
racing the sands toward the midnight glow of Giza
where, under the Hunter's belt, Kufu's pyramid beckons
Tasted the heat,
climbed the stone,
stared into the sun,
sat in the sarcophagus of a king saying,
"We have found the Real!"
and thought it was enough.

Where once the sunset was death,
an empire lives on in the shadow of former glory,
remembering when the cult of Isis extended to Rome
and a voice told Pachomius to quit his wandering.

But nothing can touch us,
and still I'm waiting for the Ibis and his tome
to free me from this tower and unveil the face of Mistr
whose fate is a silent prophet
alone at the end of the world.



DRESS STUDY | SAMANTHA KAMPERSAL



THE SCULPTURE ROOM | CALEB KORTOKRAX



BROKEN | DAN LUND

WHEN YOU SPEAK

JAZMINE ROSE REYES

I cower in your presence
Like a bashful sea
retracting her wings
from the shore
and hiding
beneath dark shadows of blue
and tumid cold-white tunnels



SILK

LAUREN NELSON

Sun too bright for mid-afternoon, painted a warped reflection of reality on the mirrored metropolis. Easier, perhaps, to gaze at the weathered skeleton of once-imperial Gyeongbok, *shining happiness*. Air warm despite a violent wind wrestling threadbare, flailing crimson and gold from their posts. Boarding the bus, murmurs rated the changing of the guards an exceptional photo op.

The capital city vibrated, cradling us in its gut. Streets teemed with strangers going about their Sunday business in what seemed to us bitterly cold conditions, having forgotten the sub-zero winters of home. Five months. We were running on fumes. We carried the weight of bazaars in Delhi, snake charmers, and tombs of ancient kings. We carried thousands of vertical feet in mountains, planes and skyscrapers. We carried the weight of memory, but more importantly guilt. We struggled to forget the things we hadn't done.

Sidewalks lined with stalls peddling papier-mâché, silk ware, slingshots. An endless variety of local cuisine enveloped the road in steam. Stomachs groaned at the pungent aromas of things pickled and frying, wafting across lanes of traffic.

Beside the bus, an elderly vendor scooping chunks of something roasted into white paper envelopes. Streams of pea coat children and potato sack men popping the brown bulbs between their lips like popcorn.

A familiar stench permeated chipping yellow paint and steel. One of our own, football player with backbone, descended rubber protected steps. Closed eyes, single gulp, strained smile then offered the steaming sack to the uncertain vinyl rows. Spontaneous bursts of daring raised few others from their seats and plunged timid hands in the bag without looking back. Nauseating odor penetrated the bus sanctuary, windows cracked to accommodate cameras. I couldn't remember standing up. Then I was walking.

The gritty, smoked skeleton seeped earth and spoilage. Tongue shrieked in protest. I darted to the window, sputtering thrust my head into the January air. Brown flakes of worm guts rained down on the cobblestone as passing strangers inclined heads toward the spectacle. Nothing left to spit, decay lingering in throat. I sank into the peeling vinyl, facing an empty thermos.

ON THE OTHER SIDE

EMILY K. BAHR

Icy water lapping at my toes, stay on top
Cool slate, smooth beneath my heels
Comforting so I might stay forever, but wait-
Get to the other side, he is there, one hand raised
Not waving, but shielding the sunlight from his eyes.
To him I am a silhouette, poised on the water's surface.
Get to the other side and wrap yourself in his flannel shirt
Raise one foot and tilt dangerously horizontal
Almost sliding into the icy depths, you plant your foot again
Get to the other side and feel his rough hands scrape your smooth ones
Inhale till your lungs may burst, and blow it all out
Then leap, sailing through the air until your feet splash onto smooth stone
Get to the other side and feel his breath in your ear whispering safety
You smile, triumph owning your face, you made it
Leap again, flying is so easy. Don't fall-
Get to the other side, dry grass tickles his feet, yours too, soon
Two more rocks lie between you and the shore
If the current wasn't so strong, the water so cold-
Get to the other side, a smile starts to pull at his lips
Flying across the rocks, so swiftly,
Your feet barely taste the water
On the other side, his eyes caress you slowly.



METRO.GOV | HASHEM RIHAI



COMPOUND TRACING 1 | DILLON CARTER

CHOKE. BREATHE.

CHRIS LENTZ

She calls at three in the morning; the sound of the phone ringing rips my consciousness out of my chest, pulling and tugging, until I wake up and manage to grab the cell, killing the electronic scream with the press of a button.

"Hello?"

"Hey what's up?"

I look at the clock, in disbelief at the time.

"Is everything ok?"

"Yeah, you wanna go to Chicago?"

I say yes before I really think about it. She says that she is coming to pick me up now and will be there in fifteen minutes.

When the phone clicks off I almost fall asleep against my pillow. The room - quiet, bathed in the soft purple glow of blacklights. A fan hums along, blowing cool air against my face, almost drowning out the sound of Mark's snoring on the opposite side of the room. I haul myself out of bed and put on some clothes - Adidas sweatpants and a yellow Valpo hoodie. Snow cascades to the ground outside.

What the hell are we going to do in Chicago? Granted, being a freshman just a couple weeks into the school year, I have very little knowledge of Chicago. I have seen the Field Museum once and the Shedd Aquarium twice - the extent of my familiarity with the Windy City. For all I know, Chicago comes

alive after the hour of three in the morning, but I doubt you could have much fun under the age of twenty-one. I think about waking Mark up, letting him know I am leaving, but his snoring announces his contentment with sleep, so I just walk out the door.

She pulls up outside my dormitory - Lankenau Hall - in her red Plymouth Laser. Before I open the passenger side door I can already smell - and see - the cigarette smoke, great clouds of it pouring out of the cracked windows, the angel of death betraying its existence with a cloud. I inhale deeply and sit down.

She calls around eleven in the morning. The sun is streaming through the blinds of my window, illuminating dust particles floating in space. I pick up the phone, open it up. The ringing stops.

"Hello?"

"Hey, you wanna help me move stuff out to my grandparents?"

I say yes without thinking about it at all. She says to meet her over at her dormitory - a short walk from mine. I throw shorts and a t-shirt on, step into some sandals, and walk across campus. The sky is clear, the sun warm and inviting. A good day.

She's almost at her white Wrangler when I see her, adjusting the removable top of the vehicle to let the interior of the vehicle breathe the

beautiful weather. She smiles, says hi, and I smile back – how could I not? I get into the jeep.

She drops a cigarette out her window onto the pavement and pulls out a box of Camels, offering me a stick. I decline, wondering how she could have forgotten that I don't smoke. Then I remember we had met all of once a couple weeks ago. How had I ever been attracted to her? In another life she might have been attractive – short athletic build, long silky brown hair, Hershey chocolate brown eyes, soft skin – but she always smokes. Within a few minutes everything on me smells like Camel cigarettes. My shirt smells like smoke, my pants smell like smoke, even my skin smells like smoke.

We sit in silence for fifteen minutes, listening to her Story of the Year album. She smokes a few more cigarettes and sings a couple lines every so often. The yellow and white lines of the road run together and under the car, the silent skeletal shadows of lifeless tree limbs at the side of the road meshing to a blur; everything else is black and hazy. I close my eyes and lean my head against the glass of the door, pull my hood over my head, and try to sleep. I am getting an uncomfortable feeling with every passing moment. I hardly know this girl. We had met once, talked online a couple times, and now she is driving me to Chicago? If we make record speed, we could get there at four in the morning – maybe. And that's pushing it.

Suddenly we pass an exit that reads in bright white letters "Chicago." My heart drops into my stomach. We aren't going to Chicago.

We drive for what seems like hours, for what seems like a brief spark in time as well. We drop off her belongings at her grandparents'. We munch on cookies her grandmother left her on their kitchen countertop. We get in and start driving again. The air smells fresh – so clean – I can almost taste the leaves, the dirt, the wind as it blows into my mouth through the gaps in my lips.

When I turn my head slightly to look at her, she's singing – I can't hear her over the sound of the wing. I don't have to. Her hair flows behind her tan face like a model, her skin glowing with otherworldly luminescence. For all purposes, I am riding in a vehicle of perfection incarnate. Some dreams come true...then there are the dreams you don't bother dreaming because deep down inside you feel that they will never come true. I am living one of those dreams – spending a lifetime with perfection.

I don't recognize the surroundings. The forest and fields that make up the road on the drive out look nothing like the skeletons of factories and railroad tracks that are in view now. We aren't heading back to Valpo.

"Where are we going? What are we doing?"

She inhales deeply, clenching her teeth together. Her eyes are wide, gazing off at some unknown point in the distance. "We're being bad."

"Pot?"

Silence.

"Pot?"

Silence.

More silence.

"We're not getting crack are we."

"Mayyyyyybe."

I don't react. I don't get upset. I don't laugh in disbelief. I don't do anything. I just stare at the lines of the road. She has been arrested before for possession of drugs, done a couple months in jail. I don't want to be any part of that. We are a good thirty minutes from Valpo by now, maybe more. I can tell from the look in her eyes that she is going to get the drugs tonight and everyone else could be damned for all she cares. *The world fall away into oblivion...I'm getting my damn crack.* My interest in having her drop me off decreases with every mile we travel and before long we are driving down a dark alley in Chicago Heights.

"Where are we going," I ask.

"Just come on," she says. "It's a surprise."

I try to relax. I can feel the warm breeze against my body, the sun gently beating down upon my skin. This is going to be a good day, I think to myself. I reiterate this thought when it becomes apparent to me that we aren't going to Chicago Heights.

Trash and sticks everywhere – bare trees, trash cans, and garages lining the sides of the alley as far as the eye can see. At the limits of my optical abilities I am able to make out three figures in black standing across the gravel alley in the distance, like guardians of the great black abyss behind them.

"Now when I get out," she says, "get into the driver's seat. I might need you to drive as the getaway man, and if anything happens to me you're going to want to gun it out of here." Then she is gone, walking towards the three, fading into the darkness. I let out a long, deep sigh and try to subside the throbbing in my head by focusing on breathing. *I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her.* Five minutes later I am in the driver's seat and she is sprinting out of the black towards the car, a shiny plastic bag dangling in her hand.

"GO GO GO!" She slams the passenger-side door shut and I slam on the gas. The car loses traction as we emerge from the alley, sliding across the slick pavement of the highway, then we rocket off down the road.

"AHHHHHHH!" she screams, opening the plastic bag and putting a rock into one of three different colored pipes she keeps hidden inside a sunglasses holder, which in turn sits out of view in the glove compartment. The orange of the flame from her lighter, the crackling sound of crack cocaine heating up, and then a long exhale on her part. "I'm a weekend warrior with this shit! Want a shotgun?"

"What the hell is that?" I ask in monotone, keeping my eyes on the road.

"It's when I exhale the smoke and you breathe it in – it's not as strong, you should try it."

"No thanks. How do we get home?"

The world turns from farm to forest, Valpo to Ogden Dunes, the road carrying us through the landscape of northwest Indiana. I lean my head back against the seat, letting the wind caress my face. When we stop, my eyes open up to a world of green and yellow and blue – of forest and sand and water. The dunes. Lake Michigan. I have never been here like this – once somewhere down the beach on a school field trip – but never just to be there, to soak it all in on an empty, private strip of beach.

"I know you said you haven't been here in a while," she says. I turn to her and smile. *Wow...someone who actually cares. She gets out of the Jeep and I follow suit, leaving my sandals behind.*

For a short stretch, we walk on asphalt, hard and cracked. My feet roll awkwardly with every step, trying to avoid exerting full force on the sharp, tiny pebbles beneath my feet, but I fail miserably. By the time we reach the sand, my feet are numb. It takes me a minute or two before I feel the heat of the sand soaking up through my toes, my legs, my abdomen. I let each step sink into the sand as far as it will go. God, it feels good.

"Um...turn right onto the next exit."

Five to ten minutes later, we're driving down a road that lies between huge empty fields that grow corn and soybeans in the warmer months. We're nowhere near home, and not going to be near home for a good long time.

"Here, turn here."

I turn into the driveway of a huge black form that is three-story house. It's four-thirty in the morning. I'm cold, tired, smell like smoke, and just want to take a shower and fall asleep. I wouldn't mind it if she stopped smoking, too – cigarettes or crack. But I can tell that it is hoping against hope – futile. A tall man – I can't make out his appearance in the dark of the early morning – walks out of a side door to meet us.

"Hi there. You got it?" She holds the zip-lock baggie in

the air and shakes it, the little white rocks bouncing against each other. "Sweet. Come on inside."

"Who is this guy," I whisper as he guides us through his garage.

"Tony. He's a friend of mine. We're at his parents."

"So Tony, how old are you, bud? What do you do?"

"Twenty-five and unemployed." He smiles as if proud. "I hear you're a creative writer. Would you like to look at some of my poems?"

"I'm a freshman in my first year of college. I haven't even taken any major classes yet."

I don't have any interest in reading poetry right now, but we walk inside – instantly the smell of baking cookies hits me – strange at first, being mixed with cigarette and crack smoke, then pure and sweet. I let out a pleased sigh.

"Oh, that's okay, man. You know more about it than I do. I value other's critiques."

I sigh – whatever. Might as well humor him in his house, even if I have little or no interest in being anywhere but my room at the moment. We follow Tony, weaving among cabinets and tables of oak, huge leather chairs and couches. Dead stuffed animals are everywhere – a great blue heron, an adult coyote, a rabbit – I don't bother asking whether or not they were hunted. Tony's mother walks up to me holding a tray of cookies. I check my cell phone's clock – no one should be smiling like this at this hour.

"Here hun, have one! They're fresh out of the oven."

I regard Tony's mother – a woman letting her twenty-five-year-old son have friends over this early in the morning. She looks sweet, like a grandmother on a television commercial that bakes her family cookies with an enormous smile: a floral-printed apron, overweight, gray hair, pudgy hands. This woman's smile looks like it's been imprinted on her face permanently, a real-life, jolly, loving version of Batman's Joker. I take a cookie, bite into it; a perfect sugar cookie by anyone's

standards, but I am concerned for a while that it might be laced with marijuana – or arsenic. Anything is possible now. A coyote walks up to me and starts sniffing my knees. *I in the middle of a sober LSD trip?*

"Isn't he adorable?" Tony's mom asks. "We take care of injured wild animals and release them. We've just decided to keep this one." The "dog" turns around and walks away like a domesticated canine – a lab. Man's best friend. A coyote. *the hell is going on?*

Tony sits at his computer reading one of his poems about teen angst – or it would have been teen angst if Tony were anyone younger than twenty. But he isn't. He is a twenty-five-year-old man lamenting over lost loves in high school and reading me the poems he has penned on said subject over the years. My head is pounding. The sugar of cookies sits dissolving on my tongue, and the sound of Tony's father – if that's who the old man sitting on a couch in front of the television is – snoring reverberates in my ears. I mutter something about the poems being great and how he should try to get them published. Tony smiles, nods in satisfaction at the honor bestowed upon him by a renown critic, and guides us to his bedroom.

He must be a minimalist, or just lazy, or with no taste in decoration, but Tony's room consists of a bed, a television, an X-Box (both sitting on the floor), cream carpet stained all the colors of the rainbow in various spots, and a digital clock that sits on the floor next to his bed. I pass on asking what the time is. I don't want to know.

Tony hands her a couple of bills, digs his hand into a baggie, and takes his own pipe out of a box from beneath his bed. Again, the smell of crack smoke overwhelms all the other smells in existence around me. I close my eyes – *I want to sleep*. They talk for a good long time, and I just sit there in the corner of the room while they get high. I stare at Tony while he explains his taste in music – "old school industrial," he ca

it. I hate whatever is playing – someone screaming in German while space-age machinery plays in the background, guttural grunts with bells and whistles. Tony looks like a bird – long thin nose, short blonde hair. He wears Kurt Cobain flannel and a constant expression that is similar to the smile of a child, emblazoned on his face like the smile of his mother is branded on her own.

Around five o'clock, Tony shuffles us out of his house, citing his parent's eventual frustration as a reason. I don't care. I am the first one out the building. Tony is high, his eyes nothing more than black holes of pupils, but I let him drive. I don't care. I don't care. I don't care. I'm tired. I'm weak. I have no argument in me. Just get me home safe.

While Tony drives, he reaches back towards her; she is already smoking a cigarette, and Andy asked for one of his own. She hands him the stick and the lighter, and he rolls down the driver's side window and smokes.

"Do you smoke?" he asks.

"No," I reply.

"Good! Never start smoking. It's a terrible habit."

The Anthem of Our Dying Day is playing on the radio:

*For a second I wish the tide
Would swallow every inch of this city
And you gasp for air tonight!!*

We pull up to Lankenau and she tells me I need to go, because it's late and she needs to get home, I am more than happy to oblige her. I get out of the car, move up the seat so she can get into the passenger's side, and walk towards the front door.

"When I lived here," she says, "I used to go up and down the beach for hours looking for Indian beads." She bends over and picks up a few rocks, sifts them through her long, elegant fingers, then drops them. When I

was young, I'd spend hours in my driveway looking for fossils of crinoids in the gravel. Crinoids and Indian beads – same things, different words. Same actions, different lives. She walks off down the beach and I walk towards the gently lapping water of the lake.

My toes touch the freezing water, sinking into the pebbly mud. For a moment the extremities of my feet sting and burn like waking limbs – then all is cool and refreshing.

"Have a good night, man!" Tony shouts. I wave a hand in the air, not turning around, genuinely wishing him the same because I don't feel he is a bad person at all. I have no animosity towards him. I just never want to see him – either of them – ever again.

I sit down on the table right outside the front door of my dormitory usually reserved for smokers. There is a pile of cigarettes around me, brown and soggy, but no one is out at this hour. On the horizon, the first hints of the oncoming day – gentle pastel colors of blue and yellow on the horizon. I take in a deep breath of crisp, clean air, hold it in, and exhale, long and slow. A dog barks somewhere in the distance, I find myself wondering whether or not it is a coyote.

Here, at the shore, the water is clear. I can see pebbles, even a few small fish. A short ways out the water turns opaque, a green-brown, and even further out it becomes the color of the sky, the only dividing line between the liquid and the air a thin dark line in the distance. A breeze rides the waves to my face, kissing my face with a sweetness that you can only find at Lake Michigan.

There isn't a cloud in the sky – only a great sapphire blue dome above me. A wave, larger than the others, rushes up against my legs past my knees, catching the bottom of my shorts. The water rides up the cloth, pressing the shorts against my legs – cold but refreshing. Goosebumps crawl across my body. I hear the crunching of footsteps off to my left – she's walking down the shoreline in the opposite direction, scouring the beach for Indian beads. I watch her for a moment, a perfect person in a

perfect beach in an imperfect world. I smile, and I want to kiss her so bad my throat burns, but I'm content to remain here in the water. I take a step back and sit, sinking into the wet sand a bit. Water rushes up over my feet and stops just in front of my shorts.

I let my hands feel deeper and deeper into the sand and rocks, and pull out a few flat stones from their grainy prison. One by one I chuck them across the surface of the water. Some skip, some don't – it's a little bit uncomfortable going through the throwing motion while I'm sitting down, but I do it anyway out of ritual. My mind goes back to when my father and I would throw flat stones across ponds near my home back in Terre Haute, and I chuck a few more in memory of those days before standing up.

The sun continues to beat down on my face – I regret forgetting to bring sunglasses – and a breeze comes riding the water to meet me. I step back from the cold embrace of the lake and feel the sand sticking to my feet. I try to brush it off at first, but give up after a few strokes of the hand – too many grains to worry about it. I close my eyes. First I hear the sound of the lapping water against the shore, the sand singing as it blows over the beach, the rush of wind in my ear, a water bird somewhere in the distance, footsteps as she continues to look for Indian beads...and then I can feel eternity – the glaciers moving through the area, carving out the lake, grinding boulders into pebbles, the advancing and receding of the water over the centuries, the singing of the dunes as they move across the shore in their never-ending journey through the years – my feet in the sun-baked sand below me.





MARTY'S PLACE | SARAH GARCIA



HANDS (#4) | CALEB KORTOKRAX

SMELLS LIKE YOU

ELLEN ORNER

squirrel chewed seed husk dust, engine heat,
sandy dry leaves on shelves, leaves on sheets.

basement forest potted ferns hanging brown,
sour brass on bare bulb strings, hanging down.

tramp the cat, fur on lap, leather back,
lilty gray, body-warm pocket yours.

my own skin under-shirt salty scone,
paper brown, basement-deep, smells like you.



OF CURTAINS

R. JAMES ONOFREY

I left the gas station with Service Engine Soon burning. Passing houses, stores, a man and woman taking wedding pictures at the old courthouse.

Turning corners, driving the wrong direction on one way streets. The boat trailer behind me rattled with every bump and turn. The chains scraped the bottom of the boat.

I pulled up to the curb in front of a house that had a fading 721 near the door. It matched the number scribbled on the scrap of paper on my dash. The horn doesn't work, so I revved the engine. A couple shouts left the screen windows, gibberish. And out he walks. The patient.

I've been in this business for three years now. People call me, tell me they want to die. I'm kind of like their savior. Who am I to say that they shouldn't? I don't know who any of these people are.

Nobody knows what I do for a living. The only people I tell are my clients, and they will definitely keep a secret. When people ask me what I do, I tell them I'm in waste management. A garbage man.

Hell, if I told them what I really do, they would think I'm a murderer. And I'm not a killer, I'm merely Dr. Kevor. Without a Ph.D.

They tell me how they want it done, and I make sure it happens. My flat fee is \$1000. The price can raise depending on the complexity of their suicide.

So this guy, he wants to drown. He tells me, "I want to be buried in Michigan to be my killer and my grave."

Fine.

\$1000.

An extra \$150 for the boat rental.

Up front. Of course.

I pulled away from the house. "You have an I.D. on you?"

"Uh, yeah."

I grabbed the knife from my pocket and gave it to him. "Take it out and use this to scratch your name off. Put it in the glove box."

He took out his driver's license and scratched off the name. Opening the glove box, he was shocked to see so many cards. Some spilled out onto the floor. He slid his in and closed it.

"Put the money under the seat."

"Do you mind if I shoot up?" The guy whispers, putting an envelope under his seat.

"I don't give a fuck." I said, not even looking at him.

Lighter. Spoon. Syringe. As I turned at a stop sign, he was pushing the plunger. I hoped that would shut him up. These people, they always want to chit-chat on the way there. I don't. The more I know about these people, the harder the job gets.

We drove between dense forests, signs directing us towards the lake. Beside me, the guy was leaned against the door, staring out the window. In his heroin haze. At least he hadn't said a word since squeezing that shit into his veins.

Finally, the lake began to make its appearance. As I suspected, being mid-October, nobody was around. The beach was deserted. Just the me, the water, and a suicidal addict.

I backed the trailer into the water, and got out of the car. Loosened the straps on the boat.

"Hey junky! Get out and help me push this fucking thing into the water."

He stumbled out of the car, careful with his steps. His eyes were glazed over as he shoved the boat into the lake.

I told him to get in as I got some fishing equipment out of the trunk.

The motor was roaring, the car on the shore getting smaller every second. Far past the safety buoys, I killed the engine when I could no longer see the shore.

"You ready to get this over with?"

He paused, looking into the horizon. "Um, yeah, but can I—"

"Great, wrap these around you." I handed him the chains. I lit a cigarette, making sure his chains were tight. Snapping a padlock through them. "Stand up, and when you're ready, jump. But make it snappy, I don't have all fucking day."

He stood up, the chains jingling with his every shake. I wasn't sure if it was because of the heroin or nerves.

"Before I go, I want to tell you something. My name is Charlie. And I want to thank you."

I was in shock as he jumped into the blue. Nobody has ever told me their name, I never wanted to know any of their names. Also, nobody has ever thanked me.

I realized then that I was responsible for Charlie's death. Sure, he wanted to fall off the cliff, but I pushed him. The person screaming at him when I pulled up to his house would be devastated.

I pulled out my fishing pole. I baited the hook and casted the line. Tears slid off my face and pooled at the bottom of the boat. Just me, the water, and a dead addict beneath it.



DECORATION FOR A BOOK | NICHOLAS BURRUS



UNTITLED | TIM STRIDE

THE BURNT LANDS

JOHN LINSTROM

There are certain times in a person's life when everyone else demands of the person an answer to the question, "who do you see yourself becoming?" This proceeds from the assumption that a human's identity is not static, that it is in fact changing if not evolving, possibly all the time. "What grad schools are you looking at? What do you want to do with English? Imagine yourself twenty years down the road — who do you want to be then?"

I wonder if I would ask these questions of myself if I were left to myself. But I'm not; I log into Gmail to check the day's messages, and Karl Aho who graduated three years ago sends a chat message asking how the grad school search is going. What I say is "moan," what I type is "I'm working on it," what is true is I feel irresponsible.

Of everyone you've met, twenty years from now, who do you see yourself most resembling? (Why always twenty? God, will I be alive?) Perhaps one day I will reply with a new dodge, mention that I feel most conscious of my continual identity slippage when leaving a movie theater. I am not alone

in this. Tell me that you left the theater, after seeing *The Dark Knight* for the first time, and didn't feel dark yourself. It was a night showing, and you walked out of the air conditioned half world of cushy seats and cold bathrooms, of intentionally manipulated (but unalterably determined) light and dark, of the smell of popcorn and the nonsmell of soda, and a bright waxing moon met you outside. You were walking across the parking lot, but you were also leaning over the gothic corner of an antiquated skyscraper, emotionally set and gritted against the very community which you were bent on serving. Police Sergeant Gordon's philosophic musings ring in your mind as you prepare to jump down. You process this information as you glance at the waxing moon, and when you turn to see the family members or friends walking next to you, you comprehend a massive space between your mind and theirs, they who once were so familiar. Who are they? You? And will you be someone different when you wake up tomorrow?

I know I am not alone in this experience. Sitting in a theater, anyone who is invested in the production before him

loses himself in the faces of people he never knew. In the masked faces of characters created serially, of two-dimensional avatars which project the "real" identity of some writer who might as well not possess one of her own. There is another distance, one which helps isolate the individual mentally at the same time that the experience is to some extent shared by a tiered colosseum full of equally isolated bodies. Together, they form a network, a solar system revolving around the bright image before them and the secret emanated personality of a hundred planets employed to produce a Hollywood flick. An avatar of many referents, a signifier pointing nebulously backward through an opaque screen.

Maybe you, like me, saw the movie with an individual whose relationship with you had you spinning like an earth already. Maybe your friend, like mine, was reduced by a glowing screen to a single illumined wristed hand and the sound of popping gum, and the paradoxical code left you ciphering. At the back of a theater, you're both undetectable even by those not participating in the screened drama, and the hand seems like an invitation to contact (for what is more jarringly wonderfully real than hand flesh in a theater?) but you can't get over the gum, the popping insistent damnably innocuous gum that says "I am stuffed with this only and no more; I am full; there is no room at the inn; I'm rather busy popping, thanks." But there is the hand; perhaps you have simply overestimated its meaning and are not yet abandoned. Explain yourself, other! Where do you see us in twenty years? I'll tell if you tell me now.

Static, sticking — stuck. Pop.

This disembodied experience is as much a part of my life as the part I will experience when I walk across the dark summer parking lot desert to the simmering silent car. But trapped in a cushioned seat, how can I flee it? Try sometime—close your eyes in a theater when you know your friend is watching the screen, and you'll realize it as clearly

as I did. Even if I escape life, slip into the universe like a wet watermelon seed, the spinning of the planets would destroy me. And the collision of two stars roars like the popping of gum in a theater of galaxies, each one differently perceived, but somehow the same. I suddenly feel we are all the same galaxies rushing along a gravitational track and static on the path. Some once believed that the universe would one day begin to contract, that we would be reunited once again in the ultimate primeval bright hot mass. Now we believe in an infinitely expanding cosmos, never to end or tire, and we can just go hang. So we are static and think ourselves stuck.

Pop.

After watching *The Matrix* I felt like a liberated cyber ninja. I felt impressive and certain, and I was. I have entirely been so before. That part of me is a child and plays with a child's abandon, leaping up stairs and high-kicking the air. Power Ranger Go. When I became an adult (which truly happened; why else would I be so hard pressed by questions?) I did not put an end to childish things, nor forget them. Nor lose them, if maybe I did forget them in part. We each harbor a spirit pocked by craters of past encounters. Here's a question: does that cause us to diminish or expand? With each experience or encounter, every second, we are each blasted with new material, gathering some but losing some into space. The change is so gradual that it is impossible to empirically measure, but one may have a feel for it. Still, the more immediate fact — that we are made of soft rock and shifting — may be the more devastating when comprehended.

Thoreau's identity crisis struck him when climbing down a mountain through a charred area which his guide introduced as the Burnt Lands. The everyday elemental matter of trees and life suddenly spread out in a scene of unsettling openness, of hard unnatural existence.

...here not even the surface had been scarred by man, but it was a specimen of what God saw fit to make the world. What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, – *that* my body might, – but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the actual world! the *common sense!* *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we?

Welcome, Henry, to the desert of the real. Morpheus smiles, Baudrillard stares at you deadpan. What myth will you adopt in order either to proceed with intention or to let go and drift? Are you the Chosen One or a dangling node in a net? And if you're a node only, is the net owned by a spider, or did you yourself help to spin it?

Before the net is an illuminated screen showing cyber trained ninjas gliding across a flat opaque room. You swivel your eyes to the left and see the node hanging next to you. It is dark, but there is a white wristed hand that appears, at least peripherally, so close. It leads you to the overwhelming question.

Will you ask? What is it? Can you move — do you dare?

Imagine yourself twenty years down the road. What do you wish you had asked?

Meanwhile, are you really working on it? You can still hear the screened sounds, the human screams. What will you do with an English major? Those are your screams, too. (*Contact! Contact!*)

Are you behind a screen?

Pop.





UNTITLED | CAROLYN MAYNARD

SCIENTISTS DISCOVER THAT HONEY MAKES BEES AS OPPOSED TO THE BEES MAKING IT.

JAMES IDDINS

I went to the window, watered my cash, and there I noticed the underpinnings of the skies calling me up out of my mistakes. The lines of cloud pleaded that I climb higher. Then I saw Earth Oranges, that is a place inside my mind where knotty trees line the warm green waterfront of eternity, dipping their roots in the water, where one can only see from above these trees that cast no shadows. From their branches dangle in rich blue and green clusters earths of all shapes and sizes, which seem as though they could be picked. I say seem because I have never seen one picked...no. I have only tasted one earth and it tasted so sweet and smelled so fragrant I have yet to move. The texture of it in my hand is the very essence of human sexuality, begging for me to peel it, to taste it, to break its nectar free upon my tongue.



SUMMER SKIN | ELLEN ORNER



THE JAGUAR | ABBEY HOUX

DANCING WITH FAYNE INA

EMERALD DAVIS

Eighty-five, grandma,
and you're still in the mood
to boogie with the bugle boy?

And why not? You grab
my hands and we sway
on the living room carpet.

Your cheeks brighten,
catching up to the tinge
of your lips. Red,

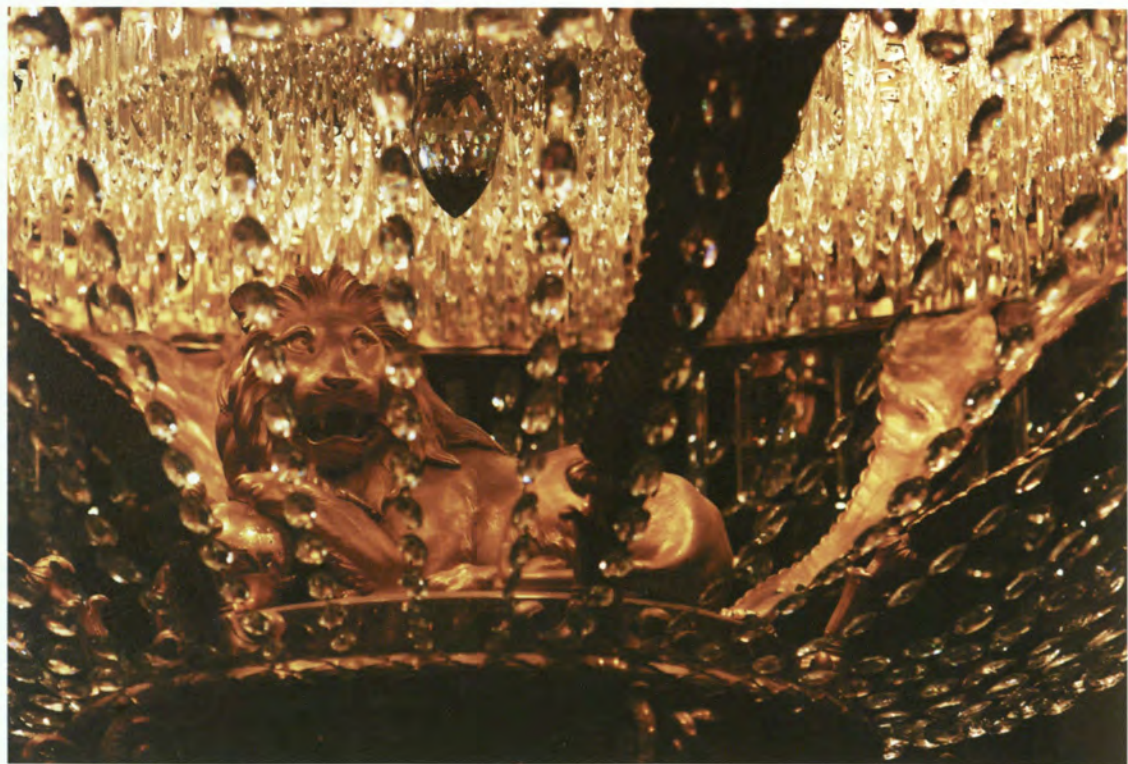
just like back in '45. I bet
you were the beauty
of the Black Hills. Curls

bursting from their pins,
bouncing in syncopation
to the trumpet solo. Feet

barely touching
the floor. Your skin
may not be as smooth

today and your joints
may have stiffened,
but those Irish genes

keep the music pulsing
through your blood,
and the jitterbug lives.



ENTHRONED | REBECCA BARNES



HOPES | ABBEY MEYER



THE ONGOING ADVENTURES OF HERMY THE HAND #7 | ABBEY HOUX

GRANDMA, ON THE TABLE

LILIA DELBOSQUE OAKLEY

Mi Abuelita:

A mess of pelo cuyo extremos are always clasped,
praying
Fingernails so brillante, they reflect the glance of
God
Skin that is always taut around the codo, a tram-
poline for freckles

Abuelita está sobre la mesa

She is not for dinner

But we place our meal at her hip

Arroz at her oreja

Frijoles at her right sanar

I place lavender en la axial

And cinnamon between her toes

But she still smells like a stranger

I place a pair of heavy sandals on her feet

So they won't tear on the tasks of heaven's road

And her toes caer hacia adelante

Into an point that would make a ballerina jealous

Mi madre covers all the mirrors

So she won't get lost

But I sit next to mi abuelita

With a compact starring her right in the eyes

Showing what she is

Poking her with a cinnamon stick

Asking her nicely,

Por favor,

despierte



THE RAIN COMES IN WAVES

JEREMY REED

To Whom It May Concern:

It's raining tonight. It started around 8 o'clock. Suddenly darker than it needed to be, for the hour. It's mid-July, after all. The TV was on, attention was devoted, and I thought I heard something small. It was really barely noticeable at first. I saw next to the concrete driveway, the Japanese Maple's leaves start to tremble, spasm, one by one.

I woke up this morning at 11:15. It's Saturday. I work during the week in the basement of a church for a small private lesson school. The rosters are mostly filled by young children with whom I don't usually speak because we have so little in common. I sit and read and think and mess around on the internet. There's a radio there, but I don't usually let it play. I like to hear the beginners start and stop, faltering their ways through those first pieces and first lessons. The violin bow scraping across the strings, an electric amp issuing power chords, a trumpet far off down the hall, piano keys hitting the strings deep within the box, and the voice lesson fading

in and out over them all. On Thursday nights, by the end of the evening, the guitar teacher is left strumming, picking and sometimes singing over everything else. When all is said and done, the computer off, payments made, and instructor gone, I have to lock the doors to all the rooms. Most of the instructors lock them when they leave, but I walk down the hall checking the doorknobs, before I hit the lights, lock the door, and walk home. But today was Saturday, so I was left to myself.

I started my internet browser and checked the headlines on CNN. Nothing much but commentaries. Walked into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Just cold and empty, products of the times (and my paycheck). I'm not even that hungry anyway, I thought. I grabbed the book on the table, *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, eternally dog-eared. I kept returning to it, no matter how worn it's become between the covers and pages of my mind. With each return it becomes more loved. Today, I read from my couch, unfed but not looking it,

Who goes there? Hankering, gross, mystical, nude;
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,
Else it were time lost listening to me.

And at once, I'm walking with him through the fields and meadows of the world, partners in this life, not some imaginary one nor his but this one, *my* life. And I read and read. The rhythm itself in time with my heart and my mind and my breath. Every thought I have where I question him, for I can and he even desires me to, he steps that way as well. It's a dance, between he and I, and we move with the rhythm of each other and all else.

I woke up with the book splayed open with pages bent against my chest. I'd lost my place and found my hunger. I walked to the pan on the stove, left there from the day before, and made a grilled cheese while microwaving some tomato soup. But when I sat at the table to eat it, it didn't satisfy. It was warm, edible, but it's a calming food. I didn't want to be calmed. For those few hours I dreamt, I felt alive. I wasn't another man in another apartment in another city. I was me. But that's ebbing away with the anesthetically creamy soup, watered down by the lack of money for milk. I can't provide for it. I finished the sandwich in three more bites; they hurt going down, but that was fine with me. I didn't even stop to think at the time about leaving the soup in the bowl on the table; I just left it there.

It was at this point that I noticed it was darker outside than it normally was. I didn't really think much of it. I turned on the TV and as I flipped through the channels I began to think about why I was sitting there, having done nothing. I used to be invited to things, included in them. What happened to that? I knew there were times when everyone had fun and

hung out, laughed and played. But there were other times when I didn't fit in, when I could feel the harsh distance establishing itself, irrevocably. Maybe I was too quiet or too removed. Too caught up in what was going on in my head instead of in front of my eyes. Maybe. It could be their fault too. I don't know which is better.

I decided on a history of hip hop special. I had gotten into some MCs lately, although I was too embarrassed to say anything to my friends. I am white after all, and unquestionably so. But there was just something to it, to the beats and the rhymes and the rhythm of it all. It just grabbed you sometimes like nothing else would. It really is an art form. The special was on battling, the back and forth of a feud on the mic. You can sense the flow when the good ones get going. It's like water down a drainpipe, going going going until it can't hold anymore, but all the same still natural, organic. An act of word and mouth and spit and teeth and all the beauty owed those things. I think Walt would have been good at that. I think I can call him that, regardless of all the warnings from past teachers to not get too close to those you read. They are valid warnings. But sometimes you just have to learn from living. Walt. I like it. We're partners after all.

After the special was over, I went to my room and started writing a letter to a friend but couldn't pay attention to what I was saying because of all the thoughts in my head. And that's what I'm writing right now, or trying to, to you. The rain has picked up as I sit here and I feel battered in a bedroom with outside walls. Walls; I feel hemmed in by them but also a kinship to them. I can hear the rain hitting this building and the gutters above my windows. The lashes strike against the stone. I can hear the water running down the street, down the hill to whatever lays below. And I'm with it in this moment, rushing forward. It's scary, but so very vital.

I'm here in this room. I've been stuck in this place all day. My whole life has been here. In the small town. The

classroom. The college campus. The apartment. They've all had difficulties and treasures, but I can barely figure them out with so much trouble distinguishing one from the other, even within myself. And yet as I sit in this room, the rain has found its pace. It's become white noise behind everything else in the street. It's steady, ignored yet present. I heard someone out there a moment ago and rushed to the window and it was a couple, splashing through it all. It struck me for some reason. The rain is such a funny thing. It's one encompassment, it's a collective word, but made of millions if not billions of tiny pieces, tiny parts to the whole. If you listen closely, you can hear each one pounding away, but together it's more beautiful than a symphony of first graders. There's a back and forth, a push and splash, a spit and hit. There's a rhythm to things; this, at least, I know. Even though I may not be able to see very much from this window sill looking out at things, I can at least see *that*, because the rain, no matter how harsh or how whipping it may be on any given night, always comes to *my* window; it seeks me out in the storm. That's something, isn't it? It leaves marks for the morning, like fingertips on a car window lovingly pulled away, or the writings of one of the kids in the backseat that you don't find until the next winter when you can read "HI MY NAME IS TOMMY" and you can only wish that you could express yourself as clearly.

The rain bears down hard and pounds the pavement beneath it that it could barely spot from the clouds, but now it's one on one passing the spotlight back and forth in that battle, raindrop and concrete. Then it will soften for a while and lightly brush the sidewalk, coaxing the earthworms from their dens. Then it will come again and the process will repeat again. There may be lightning and thunder to send the birds and the rabbits and the people into their homes in fright. It may stir a problem in an individual mind or it may stir a

sleepover in Mom and Dad's bed. It began by plucking out of the day one leaf by one leaf of a small, red-tinged tree.

If you're reading this now, we are partners in this, until the end. We share some common bond in this reading and writing. This letter making and sending, postage-sticking and envelope-licking, sorting and delivering, receiving and beginning again. Thank you for that back and forth, for that rhythm that you help me with, and that I need, not desire or wish for or want but Need with a capital n, *so* badly. Everyone needs from time to time to be reminded that the rhythm moves quickly and then slowly. In one's darkest moments, everyone deserves that reminder. And in the brightest, they need to remember to brace themselves as they revel in it. I suppose, in the end, it's all dirt and it's all grass and it's all trees, and it's all Walt and it's all you and it's all me, and it's *all* rain. I can't pretend to know what any of this mess means, but I just had to let you see it the best I could.

To my *dear* friend upon the writing of this incomprehensible letter, know that I am well, though I may not seem it. These may be ramblings and they may not; your judgment. However, know tonight that it is raining, raining in waves.

Yours truly,

Your Friend and Fellow Rhythm-Maker, Trouble-Maker, and MC in the Making after the Style of Walt Whitman



ALL FLIGHTS DEPARTING DUBLIN HAVE BEEN DELAYED | ELLEN ORNER



RADIOACTIVE CABBAGE | SARAH GARCIA

EXPOSED

MICHAELENE JEWETT

They attack you -
each little white organism
bites, scratches the pink lining
until you scream red,

but no one helps you, especially
that small woman in town
who used to call you fat.
“You need to eat less, be skinny

like your sisters.” Now,
she mumbles about sunken
hazel eyes, hollow cheeks,
but only hands you pills,

large and pink, with a prescription
for special milk that should cleanse
your system, but empties
it instead, leaving you

struggling to walk, to keep upright
at the age of eleven. Not even
bustling men with formal-looking
papers know you

or your case, clasping your hand
but calling you another’s name,
diagnosing your illness
for theirs.

Instead, I watch your skin cling
to bones, chipped and jutting
when you bend over. Just deal
with the pain, they say, ignore

the kids who run their fingers
up and down your spine
as if playing the piano, their hands
roaming over stark white keys.

FROM THE LAKESHORE

JOHN LINSTROM

8/1/09 – 10:35 AM – North Beach Parking Lot

Windy and overcast. I sit in the parked Taurus, windows rolled up as beach sand pits itself against the side of the car, flung unwitting by the lake storm. The wind surfers are out this morning; I count nine of their sails, one kite. The sails slice and pull in the ruffled gray sky; they frown massively at Lake Michigan's waves skidding below them. They are flower petals on gray wool, surreal color flecked across soft indifference.

Later. Now there are thirteen sails. An ambulance on South. A couple kids pulled under who were too far out. The bright red lights stand out so much that it looks like I'm seeing through gray-tinted glasses, admitting only that one other color—the effect of a broiling sky.

Afternoon. The wind surfers are back down to nine, sliding easily over the cascading Lake, impervious to the waves which slam the pier and blast the beach front. I don't hold it against them, although I want to—just last week a father died, you know. Shouldn't there be some code for

respect? The sails glide like images on a dark computer screen. Where did the other four go—did they grow bored? Bored in this heavy lunacy? I have never seen one drop; I imagine that they simply log out when they're done, tired, want a sandwich.

But this is the dream that I want now. Pull on, wind surfers. peace vision.

There is a vital beauty in summer, in the demanding nature of light and heat, especially on good beach days. We must see those things placed before us, because the light admits no excuses. And indeed, there is more to see this time of year. Hummingbirds visit the backyard, dandelions pop through the sidewalk, and monarchs crowd the milkweed on the dunes. Spring has left streaks of color on the green and tan land like wind surfer sails on gray clouds.

It can be dry and straight like that, but not always. You pull yourself from the doorway of billowing A/C down the heat-blasted stoop and your eyelids see half-squinting and already tired of it. Sweat. It is a gritty pulling of the self, it is no surfing game. We strip down

the necessities, admitting our own physical limitations in the process. I walk down the pier to find a place to sit and eat lunch, passing bodybuilder men and bikini girls, all there because they are the ones who actively seek these beaches as vacation spots. I am a local with tan lines. It's humbling, it's a reality check—but once you get over yourself, it's okay. Head up, eyes forward, meet the eyes of the people you pass and nod. Grit your mind to the challenge; you almost have no choice. Someone throws an unexpected joke your way, and you laugh; you sway; it is just like any other day. Everyone around you is awake and seeing and self-aware, and they know it's hot, too.

Accepting this challenge, humbling oneself to the imposition of the heat, must be virtuous—but do I really admit to sin when I profess to love the other seasons more? Fake today: it's late June, but it feels like October. It's not so much that I am transported forward a season as back three. It has already been summer so long, it seems, but now I'm under a gray-blue and white sky, and wind—wind, not a breeze: I had forgotten it!—heaving and tossing the broiling waves together continuously, tirelessly, violently. At a distance. I'm excited as a kid.

I admit the comfort. Is this self-gratification? I walk the sidewalk along the beach, hands in the pocket of my six-year-old favorite sweatshirt with hood up, the sound of the waves in a riot altogether childish in its ambivalent noise and harmless in its distance, picturesque, and the beloved wind leans against me and I against it, not like enemies, but like teammates in wrestling, like brothers—thus I walk, leaning my way, to a naked bathroom of cold, concrete floor, public but abandoned in this weather. The hand dryer barely works, but my sweatshirt dries well. My skin is cold and fresh: clean. I slip right into the atmosphere.

Walking back, I do not lean into the wind because I must, but because I can. The self-doubt of summer is not in me now; I do not worry about posture. I am comfortable and

cool, a local, in the weather of home; the slouch is somehow absolutely suitable, matches my jacket. This is my town, my land, my turf. And the pocketfuls of people on the beach are jacketed too, and seem so much more real than the bikini girls and shouting men of the summer. All I can hear is the Lake—my lake. And I will return to summer and society soon enough, but right now I am alone, and well, enjoying my midsummer fall and storm.

6/17/09— Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Sleeping Bear Point Trail—4:45 PM

The dunes present both distance and strikingly honest contour. From the dune top where I sit, in any direction there are a dozen or more different slopes, onto which I project myself, running. A million of me are running, and always down—for who runs up a dune? My eyes run down the slopes like the pages of a romance. This one grassy, this one sand, and the next is forested and hidden, but always running down them, kicking high, and always to the Lake, stretching flat and ribbed, unending, the terminus and the trailhead to infinity. Green, grey, beige, white, blue; the Tao of gravity; Newton's rollercoaster; rivulets of the imagination's overflow;—and all of me ache to race down the sand-soft curves of Gaia's body, to be a lover's stroke, a tingle. To raise goosebumps from the dune grass in a fast and gentle, kicking and prickling sprint of an embrace—but would she be a dormant lover, body only? Hardly. Or would all of me gather up and glance to see a great maw of landscape close over all of me in total and gracious utterance?

Would I enjoy thus being unapologetically annihilated in the dune's sandy spray? Or do I merely find pleasure in entertaining the thought? Perhaps I only think it because I know that the dumb sand is too thoughtless to rise in action. Yet this cannot be true—I know that I did come here to be overwhelmed. In lieu of physicality, this perverse, self-

destructive imagination morphs nature to suit desire. I look up from the notebook where I write to see dune grass swaying in a gentle breeze, unresponsive. Reality. I dig my fingers into the gritty sand, lifeless.

Check.

Later I am sitting on the beach near the campsite, watching tiny whitecaps hiss on the sand while the sun sets in a huge lava lamp of clouds. Off to the right are more college students from a neighboring site, four of them. Two couples in sweatshirts, hoods up. One girl is wearing shorts; a guy steps up behind her and wraps his arms around her torso, his chin over her shoulder, and rocks her. I am sitting with a pen and a blank notebook next to me. I pull up my hood.

The Lake keeps tugging back grains of sand, whispering in tiny whitecaps. In such waves as these, Whitman translated the word "death." I hear something more desperate — the grating rub of fabric, the shuffle of morning feet. We are out of the cradle, but who doesn't want back in sometimes? We have left endless rocking for this desperate, grainy, sweaty pulling. If Whitman's Atlantic said "death," in Michigan I hear "life," and shudder.

On the one hand, I envy that sweatshirted couple. On the other, I remind myself not to romanticize, that they are seeing two different sunsets. The illusion of perfectly "sharing a moment" is comfortable, but an illusion. The exposed page of my spiral notebook glows pink, an unnatural and even sinister pink, like the clouds.

At least the grating Lake seems to be on my side. If tomorrow were eighty she'd still be cold. What comfort when they don't make jackets to fit your size? when one is forever wet, but full of dry sand? Actually, if the whole summer were in the nineties, starting tomorrow, and we suffered a severe drought, old Michigan would keep to her lot, rising for twenty years and then falling for twenty years, all along whispering

and tugging at sand, relentless, trying to gain a foothold on the sifting, shiftless earth. I admire her persistence, but who could emulate it, or want to?

Tired and cold, gripping my metallic pen and blank-eyed evil notebook in my front pocket, I stand and turn to head back. I dig my heels, push and lift, into the sifting earth, walk.

I understand, Michigan. I'm a local, too. These are the dunes that the tourists seek, the same old, everyday mounds of crushed rock (which you crushed, Oh Michigan, I know that tourists spend thirty minutes climbing at a time: dig toes in, push and lift, pull on. Pull on, tourists. Sand in teeth, they sweat, turn red, begin to complain—summit and take pictures—turn back. They don't understand the exertion, or what renders it pointless—that it comes from walking on a deaf and dumb pile of sand, stepping through the primitive indifference of matter which stupidly seeps into your soles and pockets and nose and eyes without any animosity or loathing at all, while it turns cheeks and ears and the sides of the neck beat red in exertion and sets the breathing to a feverish frequency. And always, on a beach day, we are left exposed to the sun.

I crest the first minor fore dune, and stop. The sound of the waves is gone. Taking a few steps back, peering up over the small hill at the lake, the sound is immediately reactivated, but a few steps away again and the hoarse whisper is reduced to a distant murmur, and the air is still.

The sand is deep here, and I had forgotten. I have crawled over this surface too long...

(Oh Michigan, how could I forget? Dear lake, poor creature. Life—)

The Land speaks. Lake, as you claw at my pebbles, forget not the cheek on which you rest, and the limitless dense churning beneath! The surface is seventy-five parts water and flitting, but the world is ninety-nine parts terra and firm. It is my life you speak each day, and my silence which masks your stillness. So shall you pull each day and gain nothing until the

day I spill your waters forth. You feel me; you know this.

And who is this small creature next to you?

Late May. The day is unnaturally cool, and the sky is a deep bluish overcast—softer and more comforting, but also deeper, than a gray or whitish overcast. I have not been to the state park in years; the picnic area is smaller than I remember, and has been filled with the contents of two busloads of third graders on an end-of-the-year state park field trip. I am an overstuffed, awkward voyeur, so once I find the trailhead I head out.

The woods feel lush in the soft green light, and everything smells damp and healthy after last night's rain. And I smell the Lake.

I crest the final dune near some more third graders and a parent, so I keep moving, let the massive breadth of the lake seep over me in spurts as I occasionally glance up from my tripping feet. If I were to merely pause to take it in, the parent would eye me suspiciously. What's a twenty-something kid doing alone on the dunes? Well, why can't I feel comfortable in the park where I was once a third grader? Palisades Nuclear Plant looms on the left, and I walk up to the Armed Security sign, follow the fence back up the dune. My breath comes hard—one step back for every two forward, they say.

Near the top, I pause at a little bowled depression. The dune grass is thick in the base of the dip, but a sandy patch lies against the slope facing away from the lake. A few trees line the edges. Standing up, I can see Palisades and much of the beach and grassy dune slope below, and the Lake yawns and laps like the ocean as far as I can see, the ancient and persistent legacy of the furious old Glacier.

I notice something in the sand—it looks like some kind of old, elastic fabric, maybe some kind of cord. Lifting it from the sand, however, it is a pair of women's underwear, pale pink and frilly.

Someone lay here, maybe someone my age, in the shelter of the sandy embankment, relieved by it from the chilly lake wind. She was not alone. I don't think I am, either.

I lie down in the depression, back to the Lake. I suppose she lay here, too, hair in the sand, beneath this same softly abysmal sky. Several blades of dune grass would have curled over her head, the canopy of this cottonwood tree providing a lattice for half the sky, the terrible clouds moving noiselessly overhead, the waves eating at the shore in constant hoarse whispers. The dune was a support, lifting up and holding her, protection from the lake wind.

There is safety in this cold sand, this land which offers not only a beach and dunes but layers—miles and miles—of sand, rock, molten heat. And here I am, a grain of warmth finding shelter in the cold.

And this pink relic lay in the sand next to her, her warmth fading into the moist cold air, sucked into the murmuring sands. I feel it, too. These same ants scrambled around their hills, wondering at the warmth.

She fell asleep here. Waking from chilly dreams, I imagine that she was frightened when she opened her eyes to a nearly imperceptible dark sheet of sky overhead. The darkness had swallowed up the woods, the dune, the lake, and the bodies, hers and her partner's (and mine), and as the tree above her faded into space in a darkness void of stars or moon, one thing remained which enveloped even her, even his, breath.

The hoarse voice of the greedy old lake kept whispering, asked her what the silent breaths and heartbeats beside her meant, swallowed as they were by the wet whispering of a crone. Sweetly, endlessly, she asked the girl (and me) if the ants had their own heartbeats too, and if life so spent is worth carrying farther into the night.

Sandy and frill, we drop pieces into the land, and roll down the dunes.

8/1/09 – 2:55 PM – North Beach Parking Lot

With the storm, all but three of the wind surfers have packed up. Some have left; others sit under trunk doors and chat. It starts sprinkling, and a few drops muss the surface of my open journal, so I roll up the car windows.

It's impossible to say just where we fit in this world. Just when you're convinced you've found the teacher, the lover, the Lake, slipped into the atmosphere and fit there, you realize that you have only dug up the smallest part or particle of the Grand Scheme, the Mix. It doesn't matter if you've found Lake Michigan or a raindrop sliding down a windshield; it's just tiny, dry matter, subatomic spinning.

But really, when you hit bottom, isn't all matter, Matter? And what else does?

Sirens, lights. Another couple kids caught too far out. Swim; please, tourist, swim. You know better than I do from here. And when you hit solid, wet beach again, maybe you'll have the better grasp of how we proceed on sand. The windsurfers glide masterfully in their game, but when we forget how to walk, we'll be more likely to ask you. It is curious how firm wet sand feels after the riptide.

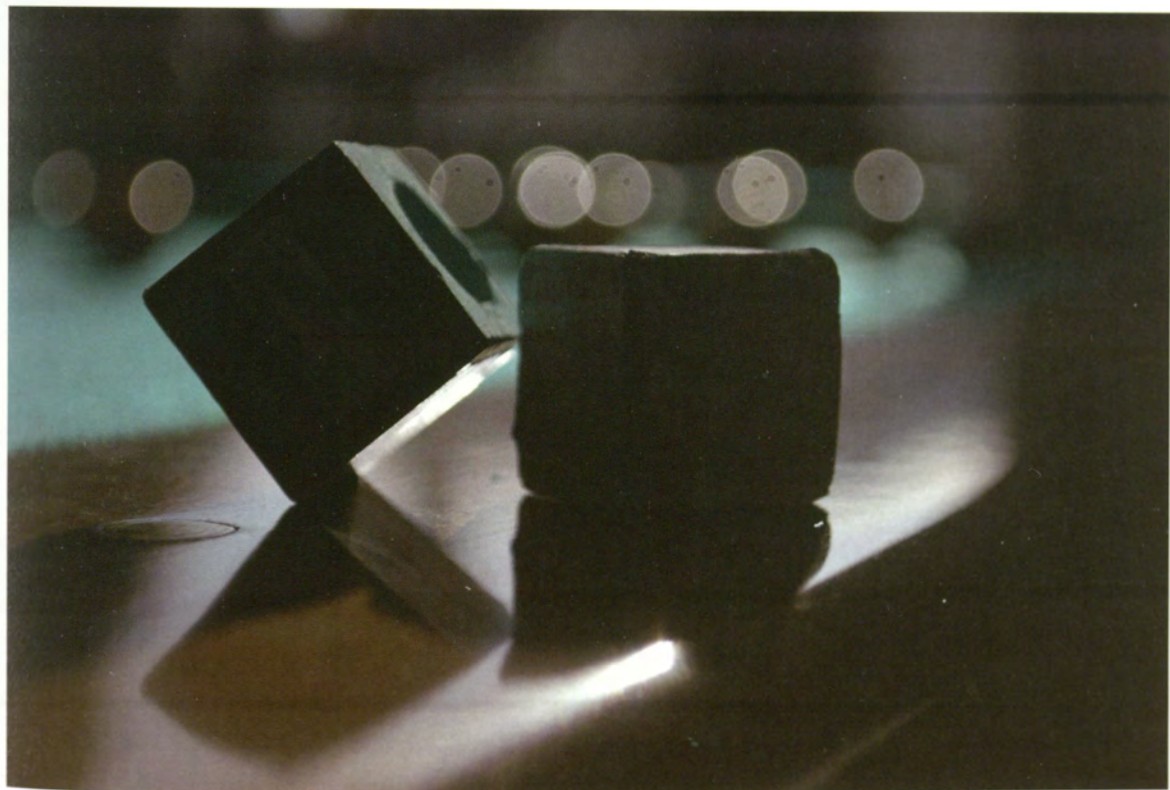




SEE THINGS FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE | DAVID SCHROEDER



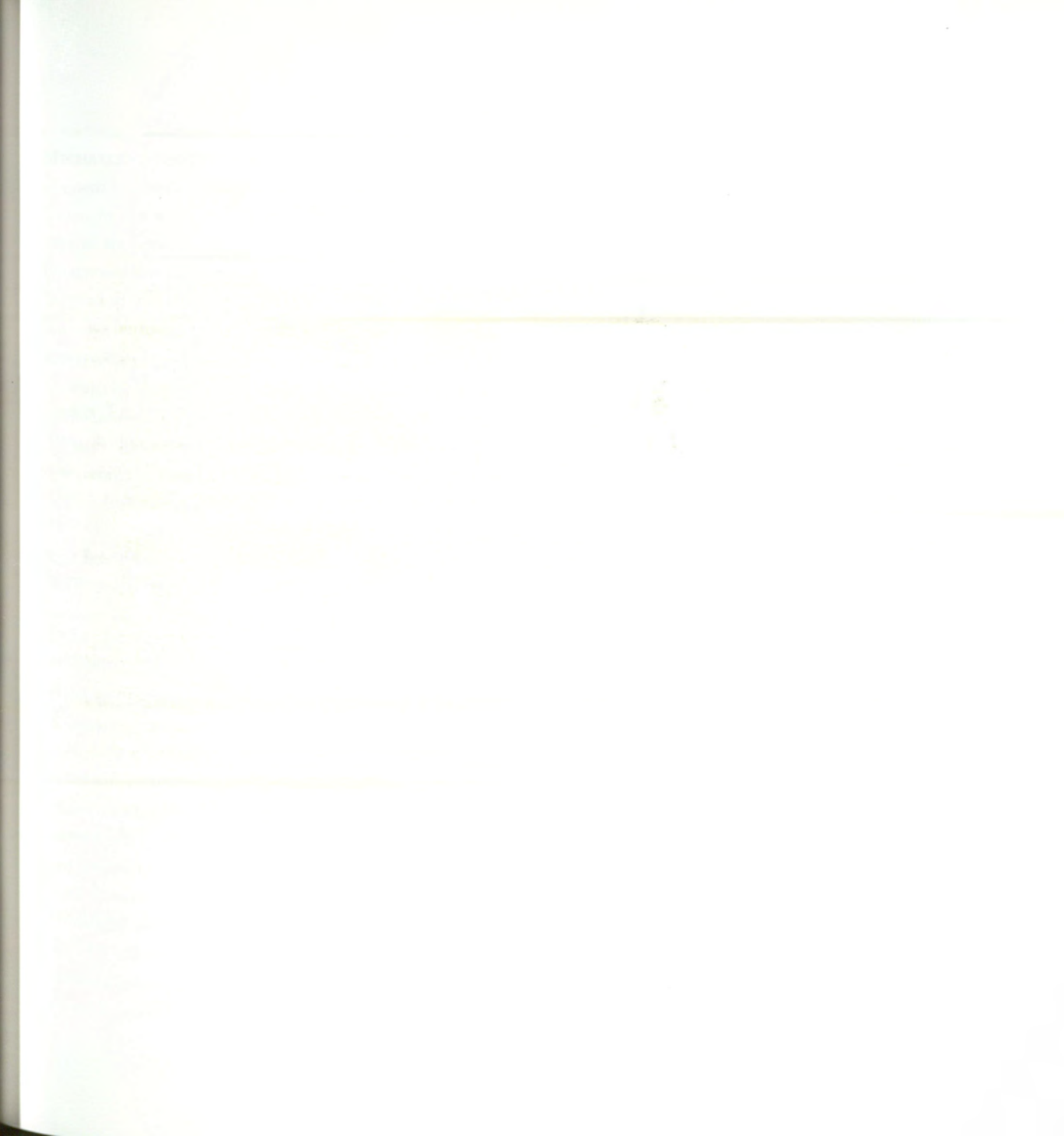
SELF-PORTRAIT | DILLON CARTER



CHALK IT | DAN LUND



UNDER THE GREEN BLANKET | CALEB KORTOKRAN





CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES



{ **EMILY BAHR** } is a sophomore English major from Bronxville, New York. She is quite grateful to her friends who convinced her that submitting something to the Lighter was a good idea :)

{ **DILLON CARTER** } is most famously known for his various dances, including but not limited to Disturbia and the Snoopy dance. He is a senior art student who considers himself lucky enough to be surrounded by the most interesting and talented distractions he has ever known.

{ **EMERALD DAVIS** } is a senior English, Classics, and Humanities major. She has tap danced twice to "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" and would like to thank her grandma for passing on those magic dancing genes. She would also like to thank her parents for all the lessons over the years and VU Ballroom for teaching her how to swing with the best of them.

{ **SARAH GARCIA** } is a junior nursing major. Both of these photographs she took in the photography class she took at VU as an elective. She loves to take pictures in her spare time to get away from the stress of nursing school.

{ **AMANDA GARTMAN** } is a senior art student who is trying to prove to grad schools that she's a pretty good catch. Her trunk currently holds a complete change of clothes, one pair of sneakers, one guitar, one ukulele, windshield wiper fluid, five paintings, twenty photographs, one pair of cowboy boots, two hats, one scarf, and a partridge in a pear tree.

{ **ABBEY HOUX** } wishes to thank her family and friends for all the good times, past, present, and future. Thanks to all the people who aspire to create art in all its strange, wonderful forms. (S)He not busy being born is busy dying.

{ **KELSEY HOWARD** } is a senior political science and humanities major who hopes to figure out soon where she'll be living six months from now.

{ **JAMES MICHAEL IDDINS** } is a Master's student, independent scholar of American Culture at the Valparaiso University. Thus far his research has focused mainly on the relationship between the state, society, technology/media, and the individual. His work is so cutting-edge that as of late it has only been published by fringe journals like the Lighter. He expects that the world will come around though and that upon his death he will instantly become a household name.

{ **MICHAELENE JEWETT** } is a Senior Creative Writing major. Her poem is dedicated to her youngest sister, Gracie Hope, who taught her what strength is. Having suffered through a year of mysterious stomach pains, Gracie was tested and misdiagnosed several times by various doctors. Currently, she is believed to suffer from Celiac Disease. Michaelene's heart will always be with Gracie — the person who has given her the motivation to live life to the fullest (and write about it too!)

{ **CHRIS LENTZ** }, a proud Hoosier from Terre Haute, Indiana, is a creative writing major with a specific interest in science fiction. His major influences are Cormac McCarthy, Michael Crichton, and James Gurney, as well as the absurdities of life. This is the first publication his work has appeared in since the Core Reader from his freshman year. He lives in Valparaiso, IN, for obvious reasons.

{ **JOHN LINSTROM** }, a regular simulacrum doggedly determined to rip himself up and taste the dirt, is just celebrating the fourth year in his relationship with coffee at Valparaiso University. (Don't make me go.) Family and friends, dune grass and ticks, starlight and sunburn, and at least five great professors are largely at fault for the work he presents herein. Also this semester, a shout out to a couple particularly formative ladybugs, the black one and the half one. Thanx.

{ **DAN LUND** } doesn't quite know where life is taking him, but he'll take photos along the ride.

{ **ABBEY MEYER** } is a sophomore new-media journalism and art major from Kendallville, Indiana. She always tries to take photos at angles and perspectives that most people may never see, and then show it to them!

{ **LAUREN NELSON** } is a senior English major from the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Her work here was inspired by a loyal clan of ruffians, a month spent in the cradle of civilization, and the single time she tried Asian street food and hated it.

{ **R. JAMES ONOFREY** } is a Creative Writing and Journalism major. The writers who influence him are Deb Olin Unferth, Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, Amy Hempel, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Joey Comeau. He writes on a typewriter to escape the bowels of the internet.

{ **LILIA DELBOSQUE OAKEY** } is a senior Creative Writing, TV/Radio Broadcasting, and Humanities major from Burbank, IL. She enjoys dancing and cats.

{ **ELLEN ORNER** } has a theory that people's big toes often resemble their faces.

{ **JEREMY REED** } is a sophomore who spends his time studying English, Spanish, and taking CG classes. He spends a lot of time in the library, specifically on the fourth floor. It may all be fiction up there, but he finds that comforting for some reason or another. He wrote his piece in the Lighter this past summer at home in Michigan.

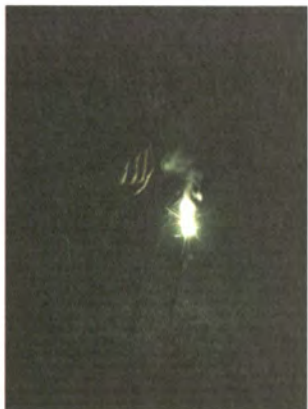
{ **JAZMINE ROSE REYES** } is a freshman American Studies major. She is a proud devotee of Jane Austen's work and enjoys reading and writing poems and short stories. One of her most beloved hobbies is playing the ukulele, while singing ridiculous Tiny Tim songs to herself or in public. :) In her spare time, she also enjoys watching classic films from the 1940s and creating spontaneous melodies to the sound of her guitar. She aspires to be an author one day and write about her daily adventures in college.

{ **HASHEM RIFAI** } is a senior biology major. The big blue couch at Designer Desserts with a Triple Mousse sweet is his playground.

{ **TIM STRIDE** } wants you to know that you can see this fort for yourself for \$3, open daily until 6pm, closed on Sundays. Take a right as you enter Old San Juan on PR-25, it'll be on the right.

{ **DIANA STUTZMAN** } is a junior Biochemistry major, Creative Writing minor, and enjoys both very much, thank you. She has a tendency to jump and grab the leaves of trees overhead when she's walking, just to say hi.

{ **MEGAN TELLIGMAN** } is a senior Biology/English/Humanities major who is feeling the tensions. Tension 1: Being a Biology/English/Humanities major. Tension 2: Subsequently, feeling a pressure between art and life, and trying to characterize the symbiosis (the living together of two-dissimilar organisms) of the two. Tension 3: Losing her student ID for the 7th time. Unrelated, but nonetheless, tense.



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