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acknowledgements

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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter is an award-winning university journal of literature and art that 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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Stephanie Sepiol
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an interview with sharon bryan

Jeremy Reed

Sharon Bryan was the first author to begin the Wordfest series of writers this fall semester at Valparaiso. She has taught around the country in multiple programs and has published four books of poetry: *Salt Air*, *Objects of Affection*, *Flying Blind*, and *Sharp Stars*, the last of which won the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award. She has been awarded two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, and has degrees in philosophy, anthropology, and poetry writing. A group of three, Kristine Clay, Ian Roseen, and Jeremy Reed, interviewed her the day after she gave a reading in Mueller Commons.

SB: I was here once before a long time ago. I liked the students a lot, and there is something... I was trying to describe it last night to John and Gloria [Ruff]... there's a kind of seriousness about the students here, or what they're interested in, the kinds of questions they think about – it's stuff that I really like.

JR: Well, that's related to another of my questions. I've just been interested in the relationship between teaching and writing, because a lot of the people in our class have been talking about “where to go from here.”

SB: Yeah, I was just going to ask you.

JR: Yeah, and so, I don't know, I was just interested in what you thought about that relationship. How has teaching shaped you as a writer, or vice versa?

SB: For me, they're totally bound up, and I didn't expect that. I didn't plan to teach. I was working for a publisher – a textbook publisher in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was a good enough job. I did copy-editing and actually worked for a really small publisher so we got to do everything, or assign a freelancer. We oversaw the whole process. It was interesting enough, but, you know, it was only nine to five. The best part about that is the five; you go home and you're done.

Then, a couple of years later, I went to graduate school at Iowa and at that point all of the graduate students who were teaching assistants taught literature, not composition. I probably wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be teaching now maybe if we'd had to teach composition [laughter]. But we taught literature. I had literally never thought about teaching as what I was going to do, and it wasn't sort of the standard thing for people to do. Fifteen minutes into the first class that I was teaching – I just felt like I was on fire. It was just, you know, some sophomore, junior, probably narrative fiction class, and it was just so thrilling. Really, from that minute I knew I would teach.

I think teaching, for me at least, I think it's different for everybody, but for me the teaching and the writing are really part of the same loop. It's the same conversation. It's just a question of who am I having it with. Am I having it with students? Am I having it with writer friends? Am I thinking about it myself in my study? It's really exciting to me. Teaching is the only thing that feels as interesting as writing. It's as demanding and it's varied. All my classes are discussion classes and you have to be right there, the way you do when you're writing. You know, you can't just be sort of spaced out. Or even, when I was working as an editor, a part of my brain really had to concentrate, but not my whole brain. You know? Part of it. Or the times I was proofreading. Part of your brain is really doing this laser kind of work, and the other part of your brain is just off on vacation or just thinking about something else. I like the stuff where you really feel like everything's coming together.

Do you expect to teach? Or do you not know yet?

KC: I've actually been thinking about it recently. I always thought I never would, but I don't know lately.

SB: It depends. You know, if you're a writer, I've always felt that you know from the beginning that you're going to have two jobs, two full-time jobs. I really push my students to think about everything they love.

I think any job would work with being a writer. It just depends on your personality. One downside of teaching, especially if you're doing it full time, there is no five o'clock. I mean, I got a lot of writing done when I had a nine to five job, because it wasn't a job where I took it home with me at all. Especially when you start out teaching and in university life, you don't have a five o'clock. [S chuckles.] You have a

five a.m.

JR: Another thing that we've all been talking about, or at least my friends, is that we all have pretty varied interests. We've spent our time, here especially, trying out all of these different things and finding the things that we like. When I was reading about you, I found out that you have three different degrees [SB begins to chuckle] in three extremely different things. Can you talk about that and how they've influenced you, or how they've influenced each other, if you think they do?

SB: Oh, absolutely they do. I said to somebody last night that there was a point after I started to write and had finished graduate work in anthropology and had started to write poems that I thought, "Okay, now I've written my anthropology poem." [laughter] It's in the first book of poems and I thought, "Okay, now I wrote about that."

It colors every poem I write. All my best writing students have other interests and disciplines. They come in from the sciences or something. You know there weren't creative writing majors, and I'm not sure how helpful that is. I mean, it's just a different place to start. When I was in school, I felt like I was the only person who did what I did. I felt like a freak. And the first time I sat in on a creative writing workshop at Cornell, I almost cried the first day when I realized, "I'm in a room full of people like me!" It was just so incredible. That's the good side of all these creative writing classes and majors. It's something you do have much faster than I had. I didn't see a living writer until I was in my twenties at Cornell and people came to visit. Then what I wanted to do became a real thing to me. Before that it was like... poems by dead people in books... and my wretched stuff.

You know, I'd never seen a draft of a poem by Robert Frost so I really did think they just started that way. It was so thrilling to me when I first saw... there's this Robert Frost poem called "Design" and it's really dark and it's a perfect poem. And then I saw the drafts for it, and it didn't start out as... you know, there are some really bad lines in there. I didn't have a clue that it could work like that.

One of the best students I ever had was actually an anthropology student at Memphis. I don't even think it matters what it is, but then you've got that sense of discipline from another field. You've got all that imagery and terminology and a way of looking at the world. I just think it's very important.

I think the crookeder the path the better in some ways. There's a poet named Albert Goldbarth. He lives in Wichita, Kansas for reasons I don't – they must pay him a lot of money [laughter]. He just keeps saying over and over to his students, "Creative writing is not a career path. Creative writing is not a career path. It's a calling." And I think certainly those of us in my generation feel like that. All of my teachers said, "Don't write if you can do anything else." It's not something you want to do... adequately. A couple of times when I've been teaching different places I've handed out a little questionnaire and one of the things on it, it's multiple choice, and one of the things on it is:

I want to be a good poet.

I want to be a great poet.

I want to teach but I want to know more about poetry.

And I'm disappointed if they don't put down that they want to be a great poet. Why would you want to be a good poet? Why would you want to be a good ballerina? You know? [laughter] You might end up there, but you're not even going to be a good poet if you don't aim for higher. Did I? I talk so much, I can't remember..

[laughter]

JR: So, with all of that, when did you begin writing poetry?

SB: When I got to Cornell, I was actually accepted there into the philosophy department, because I'd gotten really interested in Ordinary Language Theory when I was in philosophy as an undergraduate because I had a professor who specialized in that. And I'm obsessed with language. I had also my senior year totally fallen in love with anthropology at [University of] Utah. You know, at Utah, archaeology was very big and still is. There was an anthropology lab and I got hired when I was a senior to work in the lab and my job was that I numbered stuff that they brought back from digs. I was the one who wrote on the pieces of pots and the pieces of bones and stuff. It was one of the happiest times in my life. It was such a wonderful group of people and there was no hierarchy. It was faculty, grad students, undergrads. We'd go out every Friday night for pizza and beer. It was just, it was fantastic.

It was like we had our clubhouse. The buildings were really old from World War II. I had a temporary office in fact in one of the, there was a fragile stuff stored in an old meat locker, and it had to be kept in all these special circumstances and the chemicals were poisonous. So I'd go in the morning and it had this big handle that was high up

and I'd jump up and swing on the handle to open my office door. Go in there, run in there to turn on the heater, and then go back out and have coffee with somebody while the poison aired out and the heater warmed up and then I'd go in and I was classifying the stuff that was stored in there. It was just so much fun I could hardly stand it.

I would have switched to anthropology but I would have had to stay for another year and I just wasn't ready to do that. So I walk into Cornell and sort of the day I walked into the philosophy department I thought, "Ugh, what am I doing?" I took two philosophy classes and then an ethnolinguistics class. They don't like that in graduate school. They're training professionals and they don't like that. And I almost flunked the philosophy classes. And then I switched to anthropology. And, boy, it was mind-blowing. And, actually, at Ithaca College, there was a woman who taught primate anthropology, and had an accidental and miscellaneous collection of monkeys, live monkeys. And so I studied their communication some and hung out with them a lot and that was amazing. But the whole time I was there, I couldn't see myself – I did two years of classes and then I was going to leave and start writing poems – because I knew I couldn't see myself as a professional anthropologist. I just wanted to study all that stuff. I could imagine watching chimps all day. I would be really happy. But then I would want to go back to my tent and write poems.

One reason I didn't want to stay was that at the end of your third year you had to take your PhD exams. Oh no! But the best thing I ever did was stay in that third year, one of the best things, because I just studied the whole year. That was essentially the work, and it just brought

everything together in a way that I never would have otherwise. I passed the exams, much to my amazement. So I didn't leave with unfinished business, or a bad feeling. And they couldn't believe it. They were sure that at that point I would decide to stay, but I was like, "Oh, great, bye!" And then I started sitting in on classes at workshops at Cornell. And that's where I cried in the first class, but nobody saw it.

Then as it turned out, I never left anthropology or the philosophy behind. All that stuff comes with you. It's stuff you care about.

IR: I could ask my last one.

SB: Go ahead! Ask me anything you want. I'll tell you if I don't want to answer it.

IR: Would you say that writing is a career that you, personally, can ever retire from?

SB: Absolutely not, and I don't think it should ever be called a career. I mean, I certainly don't think of it as a career.

IR: Do you think that it could be something that you could see any true writer ever giving up permanently?

SB: No! I mean, I certainly gave up writing poetry for a while, or stopped writing poetry. Well, I think of it as I had a tantrum. I got distracted by the wrong stuff. I got distracted by the public parts of it and not being what I

thought was successful enough. But that's our culture. Doesn't value poetry much at all. I mean, I have Polish poet friends who have 12,000 people show up at a reading. But actually that's changing there too, since the fall of Communism. It's really interesting. I mean, poetry plays a whole different role when it's something secret and hidden and subversive. It's the only way, you know in Russia, after the revolution, Mandelstam and Annenkov would meet in his apartment. They would sneak out after dark. They weren't supposed to be out. They would read each other's poems. They would read them. Memorize each other's poems and then burn them because if they were caught with them, and he eventually was caught with one of his about Stalin, they were killed. That's high stakes. So here are American poets. What are we going to write about? Our Jacuzzi's? So how do you make poetry matter if it's not a matter of life and death. But I think most poets do think it's a matter of life and death, even if it's their own life. I mean, I certainly do. My life wouldn't have any meaning. I might as well be dead if I didn't write. I don't think of it as a career and I don't think of it as anything... it's your life. It's totally how you live your life. You're a writer.

What about you? What would you like to do with your life?

JR: I think I would really like to teach, but the question for me is what.

[laughter]

SB: What are the possibilities?

JR: Well, I guess, it's more a question of, I would really like to have some time to write, and so in that sense...

SB: You won't have time to write. You have to make time.

JR: Right, so I've been thinking about maybe teaching literature. It's one of my big passions. And then I've been teaching for the first time this fall with college students and it just catches in a different way.

SB: Yeah, that's wonderful. I mean, your whole face lights up when you talk about it.

JR: The only thing for me is that, I mean, I know there are some things I know I want to write about in an academic way, but the kind of writing that just kind of opens out right before me is creative writing, and so it's trying to figure out how to do that.

SB: Yeah. Well, you know, John Ruff writes poems, terrific poems, really terrific, and also is, as far as I can tell, a great teacher. You just have to figure out the balance. I have friends, a couple friends, who when they were young were into jazz. One plays sax. One plays trumpet. Both decided at some point, "Well, you know, I obviously can't keep doing this, because I want a family." One became a college literature professor and the other one's a lawyer. The one in Seattle who's a lawyer has a jazz quartet. It came back into his life maybe in his forties and then he started working with teachers. And the other one's in a small jazz group in a small town who plays every weekend. It's the proportions.

[John Ruff walks in]

SB: God, these are the most interesting guys.

Ruff: These guys?

SB: Yeah, these guys.

Ruff: They're convicts. They're out on work release.

[laughter]

SB: They faked it really well. They did ask really good questions.

Ruff: You guys finished? Good to go?

JR and IR: Yeah.

SB: What do you think about place? Do you think about place when you write poems?

Ruff: Um, yeah, I mean there are places for me. Richard Tillinghast writes a lot of "I'm on the road as a tourist. I'm going to settle into a place."

SB: That's right.

Ruff: Whereas I think I have to kind of settle into a place before I can. I mean, the muse has to sort of catch up to me, find my new address.

[laughter]

Ruff: You know, I'm starting to write Chinese. Well, they're not Chinese poems. They're poems that try to ape some of

the gestures in Chinese poems. Works of reverence.

SB: Do you work on them in China or here?

Ruff: I work on them there, but also some here. Northern Minnesota is a place where I know that landscape. I only have a few poems that are really Valparaiso poems. I mean, Joyce wrote his whole lifetime about Ireland. They said if they destroyed Dublin they could rebuild it from his works.

SB: I just think it's easier for me to write about places when you're not in them. And my great example, have you heard of a book called *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen? I've taught that book a lot. It's one of my favorite books in English. It's just gorgeous. I always think about it because she's Danish and she grows up in this little country feeling really cramped. Then she gets to Africa and it fits her. She can live this dramatic, large life without feeling like a freak. While she's in Africa, she writes but she writes fiction. Then she loses everything. Loses the man she loves, the farm she loves, the people she loves. She goes back to Denmark to her childhood room in the house she grew up in, the place she was so happy to get out of, and she looks out the window and she starts to write *Out of Africa*. And the first line is, "I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills." Isn't that just – when I read that first sentence – it's what she can see. It's so much more vivid when she has to imagine it.

burgundy velvet

Stephanie Sepiol

Stepping into the practice hall late in the afternoon,
years of someone else's memories precede me. A sparkling beam glitters unto stained, ivory keys; I live the legacy. Clothed in velvet robes, I hear them. I feel them. I can feel the music—the moments in the touch of silken sleeves, the weight of stitching on my shoulders, in the echo of artistic passion as it dances through my mind. I am home.





Waiting at the Centre Pompidou | Emily Royer

meat



Juliana Kapetanov

Quartered, cornered
Slicing slivers
Juicy reds
And rotting flesh
On cutting boards
Dripping plastic
Homestyle homicide
On stainless, silver
Counter tops.

Goosebumped shoulders,
Breasts and thighs
Raw and meaty centers
Tinged with salmonella
Sticky, stinky
Coursing veins
With stringy white
And messy tendon
Massacres.

Picnic-patterned cloth
Graces vinyl boards
On metal, folding legs
Where bite-size bits
Of freshly churned,
Freshly grilled
Ground beef rests,
Seducing tongues
Of shopping passers-by.



Enganchado | Jacob M. Just

long dream of the fisherman's son

Ethan Grant

—At midnight then, we started down the hillside. We had traveled for miles and miles through endless midnights and unrisen dawns and had seen our campfires glaze the black skies gold brown and had watched the smoke twist away into darkness. We had come so far, and now, at midnight, at last, we were starting down the hill.

She ran somewhere ahead of me, down there in the shadows. There was darkness everywhere save right where I was, and where I was there was a soft sort of light, a dim torchlight which followed me. The lightness and the darkness were perfectly divided. I could see through the night the green hillgrass—it looked brown and gold in the light. It rustled fiercely in the wind, bending back and scratching at my legs as I ran. The black sky seemed painted on, the grass seemed planted and artificial. I felt as though I ran over a museum display: suspended forever in a perfect, temperate midnight.

The hill unrolled before me, so far—I had never known before how impossibly far. In all directions it stretched, grass everywhere and darkness everywhere, and her running down ahead of me. She was shrouded in darkness and silhouetted by darkness, but I knew her darkness from the darkness all around. I could see her moving, running

toward that which neither she nor I could know.

And soon we came to the sea. The sea was a sound at first, an indistinct rumbling in the distance. Then the winds took on the sea's mist and there was sea-salt on the air. The wind was rushing in harder then, determined to drive me back, to force me into the ground, to bury me in the grass. I felt so heavy and full, but I kept on my feet. And soon I heard myself crying out to her:

“Mae! Mae!” But the cry was engulfed by the wind. Downward I flew, she flew, we flew—we flew, we floated, we floated like two young gulls caught in an updraft. And I cried out again:

“Mae! Maebell!” Then she came to a ledge where the hill dropped away to a rocky cliff overlooking the seashore and the rippling sea-shoals. I was aware of these things, though I could see little and truly know little. I ran on through the museum-lighted grass, beneath the painted, starless sky, and at last I was with her on the ledge. Without hesitation or pause, I dropped down beside her, as easily as a migrant bird returns to its nest. The grass here had shortened and scattered in the sand, and we sat there in the sand, among the moss-slicked sea-rocks.

She rested her glistening white feet on the mossy rocks, her toes spread out wide like a lizard's toes. And I looked at her toes, and I found it beautiful, the way the moss pushed up between them. I thought I might love her.

We sat facing the sea. The waters were nearly visible, but I didn't need to see them: I could feel the waves, could know their texture from where we perched. Heavy and warm, they slid to the shore, warm, hollow like a cave, dripping, a cavepool. They crashed against the sea-rocks and flattened down the earth.

Her hair fluttered as my hair fluttered. I could see her in the low torchlight, her black hair whipping like madness, the tips of her ears poking through. She stared straight ahead to the space above the waters. Shapes moved out there. I could feel them too, but I did not know them. They circled and shifted and twisted around in the vast untouchable nothingness from which blew the wind.

I looked at her for a long time in silence.

At last I spoke: "Where are you going?"

She turned her head indifferently toward me, and then turned back. "I'm just going."

"I know. But where," I said, "where are you going?"

There were white lines in the distance. The ripples had gained a texture, a form. There was light coming into the waters: hollow, ancient.

"Have you seen them turning?" she asked.

"What?" I heard myself demand. "What do you mean?"
"I can see them out in the darkness, turning. They're turning in the darkness."

She stared dreamily out at the waters. Her toes gripped tighter on the mossy rock. Her skirt flapped in the wind as she rested her chin in her soft white hands. I was sure then that I loved her.

"Do you love me?" I asked.

"I don't know." She said listlessly, still staring off at the empty turnings.

"Will you ever love me?"

"I don't know," she sighed, "yes, no, I don't know."

She looked at the waters as I looked at her.

"What do you want me to do for you? What do you want? I'll do anything, go anywhere for you."

She turned to me again. A shadow of a smile haunted the corners of her mouth. I loved her for it.

"Will you go to the ends of the earth for me?"

"Yes! Yes, I already have. We're already there."

She was silent for a moment. "Yes, but will you sew for me a seamless shirt?"

“Will I what?” The wind had fallen. It blew in softly now, and I could hear the waves. They crashed just the same. Pulled back, crashed. There was shifting in the darkness. But light was coming in, I was sure of it.

“Will you sow for me an acre of land between the sea-surf and the sea-strand?”

“What? No . . . no, I don’t understand you. Why are you asking me this?”

Laughing, she stood, and idly prodded a rock over the ledge with her foot. “In time,” she said. “Just give it time.”

“Where are you going?” I asked again, but she was already gone. I turned around to see her leaving, but she was nowhere anymore. She was not moving back up the hill, not parting the grass in her wake. There was no more grass for her to part. The hill was gone. Only sharp, rocky outcroppings remained in its place, leveled, stretching for miles to the horizon, to nowhere at all.

The footprints she had embossed in the sea-moss began to fade. They were already gone. I thought of them, but they made me think of love, and it made me tired to think of love.

Then I thought I felt a turning—

And I was down on the beach, spread out on the sand. There was indeed a light come into the waters. It was not the gaslight, the museum-soft light of before: This light was ethereal and silver, like starlight, but there were no stars in this sky of painted blackness. The silver light gilded

the wet sand and sea-rocks and danced like lightning over the tops of the cresting waves. Peace. I felt its peace. The warm waves washed over me, and rolled back. The shapes in the distance were gone. Fleeting. As if I had never known them.

A gathering of sea-lions ambled about a little ways down the strand. They moved senselessly, aimlessly, like blindfolded initiates in a candlelit sanctuary. And yet, there came a pattern into their movement. They circled in the sand, revolved in the sand, in orbit, in equilibrium. But one sea-lion broke off and made for the waters. He seemed almost to fly as he dug his flippers through the sand and plunged into the billows, pushing off for nowhere, his head bobbing through the water before disappearing under the waves. I wished to follow him into the deep, the eternal, receiving warmth. But I knew, somehow, that I was in my place, and in my place I was meant to stay.

There was forever a beach now. The cliffs had washed away and the rocks had been ground into sand. The sea-lions had hobbled and danced and had circled and turned, but now they were gone. Their tribes had risen and fallen, had thrived and perished, and now sea-lions were no more. Now I was alone in the silversoft light. And though I lay there for ages and ages, the light never grew, never rose over the sea to drive back the night and bring in the dawn. It was as midnight now as it had ever been before.

Memories. We had traveled once. We? I thought of footprints in moss, but it made me tired, inexpressibly, inhumanly tired to think of footprints in moss. We. We had traveled: all the midnights, all the broken hours of sleep, of waking, of campfires glowing and smoking coolly in

darkness, the nightgrass bowing and crackling in the wind:
We had traveled. We traveled.

The waves moved in slower now. They flooded over me and tugged at my hair and washed down my face in clean salty streams. So much warmth, such peace. I was so tired. I was wearied to my marrow, but there was no sleep deep enough to get at my weariness. I would not succumb to it. Now was not the time for sleep.

Turning, turning.

Sleep, no. Sleep. No.

Where is left to go. Got to go somewhere. Midnight's long. I must go. Must I go.

They are turning. Where.

Once we rode the hill. Give me sanctuary. O. Give me hill.

Parsley, sage. Time. On to Western waters.

Where. Why.

Dance the Maypole.

Sage, dance.

Time, dance.

Turning, dance.

Dance, May,
dance.

Rose-May.

Onward

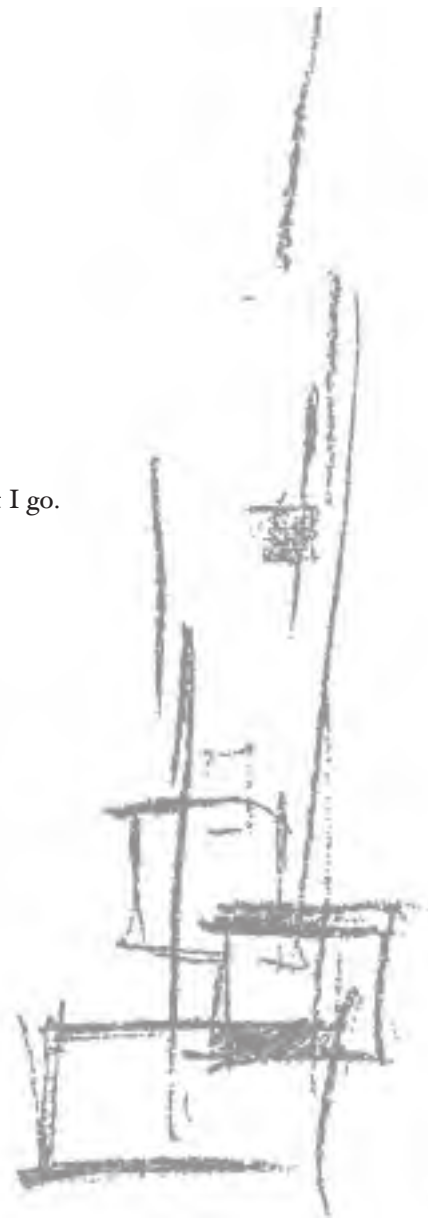
Western

waters.

Nightwind.

Nightwaters.

Sleep.





Encroaching | Adam Jackson



Sidwell | Ashley Roll



Untitled | Mallory Swisher

rhadamanthys,


Gregory Maher

he, of realm
embroil't
dark wall and stone and coal

ash,
misery, and fume,
fetid, 'neath cimmerician
clemency

languorous souls, their eyes
frozen coals, in dread
wait.
wait.

wait, and
Who
this figure lone
lofty rising

that smould'ring dark
quivers; whose
lips
unspeaking
portend
fate

dealt each
wasted wraith,
scattering midst
nebulous
mists

to each their
own
abyss

dandelions

Aubree Zdanovec

Dandelions are just weeds that infest the yard with sunshine, spots of gold and yellow perched on a pedestal of bulky filth. My eyes are addicted to yellow like my body craves coffee. Every time I see a dandelion while I stroll along the pavement I can't help but be fooled by the beauty of the petals, layers upon layers of yellow triangles angled so majestically. It's all a lie though. Dandelions aren't actual flowers that are supposed to capture hearts with awe and seduce the nose with magical scents that dance through the air. No. Dandelions are just weeds, but perhaps I'm just attracted to ugly things. Perhaps I am gullible as a child. Perhaps, but it is complete nonsense to live in a tense other than the present so here I sit in a pile of dirt gazing at dandelions scattered throughout this patch of grass.

Piece by piece, I begin to pluck the blades of emerald grass from their roots, sliding it out of the ground as easily as it got there. Thoughts drift through my mind wandering about like the clouds in the clear sky. Today I can feel the pull of gravity. I inhale the freedom of being in the now. My body struggles at forgetting the forgiven as my thoughts dangle from the ledge of happiness into the darkness.

As a little girl, I didn't understand my surroundings, what was happening or why. I knew there were days where the storm struck inside the sealed window and I would feel

like I was drowning in sorrow and tears. Pain soaked my mother's face as droplets of rouge rolled down amongst the purple patches that began to invade her body. I used to think my father was helping her from the ground before his hand clasped her neck rather than her hand. I was too weak to be a savior and too old to cry. I witnessed my father grab his bags, and without a word brushed past me in haste and out the door. I never got a chance to say good-bye. I stood there like a statue paralyzed with fear.

The strings of my heart were pulled in various directions between expectations and reality. I couldn't understand why my dad would abandon me like I was filth on the bottom of his shoe. I was his daughter, his little girl, and without a second thought he left me with the broken and unfixable. I was a child comforting my mother now crying on the floor of our kitchen begging for him to return. I didn't understand. I couldn't understand. However, he returned a few days later, smiling as if the sun couldn't shine any brighter. It was as if all was a distant memory that no one remembered. Even my mom pretended all was okay, and so it became a game.

When I was thirteen everything seemed clearer. I learned the repetitive cycle and became numb to the violence that hit my life on a regular basis. I grew angry; my smile faded

fast, as the eggshells began to crumble faster the worse the tension grew. My father's temper struck like a snake devouring its prey. It was almost as if he transformed into someone else, someone unrecognizable as he smashed plates against the pale walls previously indented. It was here I began to transform into the shelter from the storm. I became the wall between her face and his fist. What cut me to the core was the fact that I could forgive a man for such treachery that shook my foundation while knowing that no matter how many times he apologizes he will hurt even more. Every time I would forgive him, produce excuses; I blamed my mother for causing his temper to flare, but really, I was trapped in the middle defending the helpless, loving the hurtful and being the hopeless.

I am seventeen now. I've been wounded in fire. I've been the broken and the bruised. Now I'm just the scarred. I've seen the shadows lurking in my mind, paranoid and afraid. I may have escaped from his grasps, from the flames of a family long extinct, but he forever stole my trust and broke my heart. I spent my life sweeping shattered pieces of life

beneath a rug; I've always been the healer and never the healed. Today the clouds began to darken. I could feel a chill race down my spine as tension began to brew. Without thinking, I ran out the front door before my father could even think of leaving me, and I kept running, my soles smashing each pavement square with anger, an anger I was never allowed to express. I could hardly breathe, and as I raced through my life, I began to discover the root to my anger, bulky filthy that turned me into a weed.

However, once I stopped, an emotion of freedom flooded my being. I could finally express anger. I could feel it, and it was feasting on the numb state of mind that caged me like an exotic bird. Then I sat down in a patch of dirt gazing at the weeds that lied realizing it was only the roots that held it back from true beauty, and I smiled realizing anger was not a solution against violence, I would only reincarnate into the problem. After all, the petals can be plucked from the stem and eventually can be blown in the wind upon a child making a wish if only the seasons would change.





Crooked Teeth | Olivia Stemwell



Door | Ashley Roll

the light bucket

Ethan Grant

“Bradford and I had out the telescope.
We spread our two legs as we spread its three,
Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it,
And standing at our leisure till the day broke,
Said some of the best things we ever said.”

—Robert Frost, “The Star-Splitter”

There is something to be said for the eclipse,
the sky the night of February twentieth,
a school night nevertheless spent
late at the eye of a telescope, a gift
from Darren’s teacher, propped up
by the back porch steps, pointing up
some thirty-five degrees of southeast,
its aperture wide, trained on the sky
behind the shed, the shadows of the moon.
It was called a light bucket, scooping up
hungrily the colors of the cosmos, condensing
the galaxy into a single golden beam.

In his hunger, Galileo had gone blind
staring at the sun. Carl Sagan, when young,
was blinded by the Brooklyn lights
nightly washing out his swath of sky.
So New Market was our Florence,
our New York, Darren’s backyard
our terrazza all’aperto by starlight.
Small towns sleep early, and in such
magnificent desolation we watched—
past the antennas and power-lines
and the steam wafting off rooftops
and snow-covered cornfields—something
new to our world, something beyond
our lives, beyond even the bronze shadows
scorching and shading the white face
stamped in weak stars. We wore gloves
that night, but our fingers felt frozen.
Our breath rose up in vaporous ghosts
and Darren’s glasses were glazed with fog
when the light bucket swallowed the moon.

Carl Sagan knew the music of the spheres.
Galileo first heard the songs, learned the art,
and gave his sight to see the stars.
If life were somehow more like art,
I think my life would have ended
a thousand times over. Or not really
ended, but abandoned, left off
at moments of supreme affirmation,
like a film, fading slowly into black.
And I would still be out there
with Darren, in the cold and dark,
peering through a mechanical
eye, in quiet reverence of the sky,
of the void and its silence, shivering,
freezing, all the while thinking
how warm we could be to leave
the cold for the kitchen, but staying
all the same, content with the night,
with the numbness, and the bite
of an icy metal tube pointed
propitiously skyward at the shape
passing into white penumbra,
not sinking, not really rising,
but biding with us, hung in stasis
in the roving, airy spaces
over all the quiet housetops
slipping silently into shadow
like stars setting in the night,
like another end to another life.





Graced | Emily Royer



Pieces of Eight | Olivia Stemwell

the seaside waltz

Stephanie Sepiol

In the moment where the stillness seems to start,
Where the cool breeze flows calmly from the sea,
The flutter of the blossoms meets my heart,
As the springtime wind draws both your eyes to me.

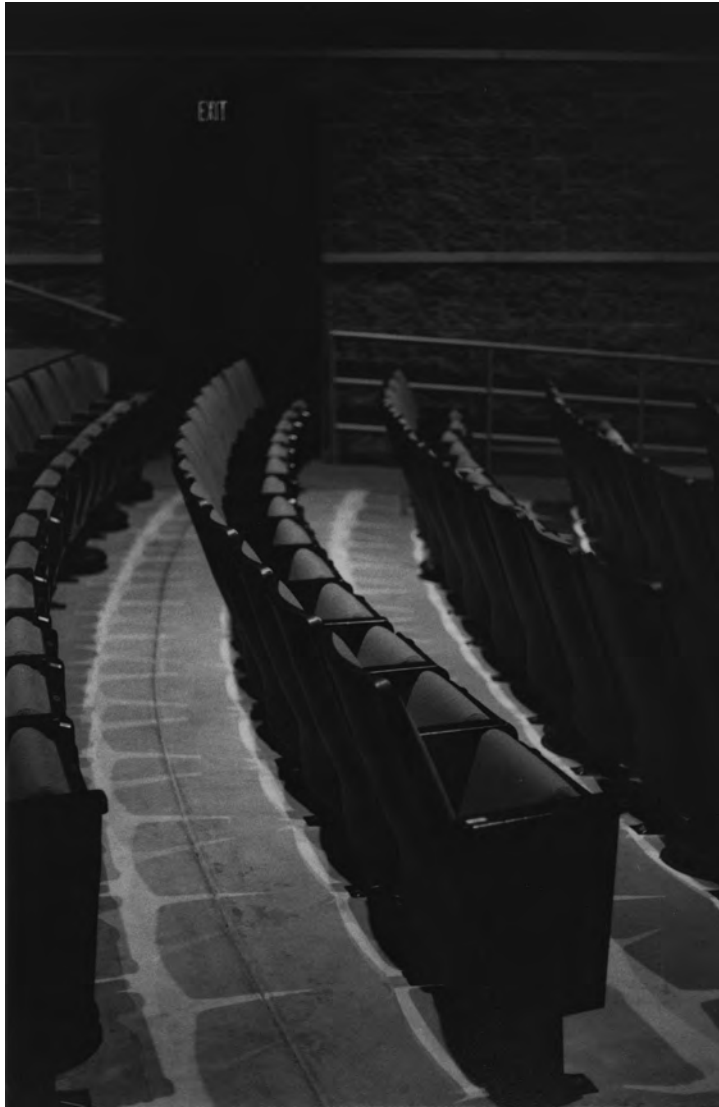
As the seasons change I feel you dance away
As the sun's rays prance closer to the Earth.
Yet once and a while, when I ask you to, you stay,
And your eyes are locked with mine as all make mirth.

But now as you step away and don't come home,
As a dream escapes the grasp when eyes grow wide,
Then I am left heartbroken by the foam
As the summer sea draws hope back with the tide.

Goodbye to one who still grows deep within,
A worthy love killed by a life of sin.



Chapel View | Maggie Rivera



Exit | Maggie Rivera



Sanctuary | Emily Royer



Scene Inspired by 'Danse des Lutins,' a harp solo by Renié | Nicholas Burrus

needle clusters

Jeremy Reed

I look through the pine needle clusters
looking like galaxies of scented seeds stretched
like a canvas, like a skin
waiting to be treated, waiting patiently
to be touched.

The needled cluster hangs above my head,
colors my view with shades of concordant green,
acts like oil-riddled puddles in streets,
fingers collecting space,
watching over, caressing,
cross-stretched against my body, blue,
walking with wine-purpled lips,
clouds grounding skin prints of oil
before my body twitches back its soft-spoken reply:
Do not leave me with this unbordered expanse.



? | Maggie Rivera



Blue 84-134-141 | Adam Jackson

ode to talita

Juliana Kapetanov

Pushing the boundaries of accepted speech:
I, you, we, see, is, to, they, why?
Letters slip through fingertips, moist from licks,
Glossy pages turn and lips kiss portraits
Of unattainable love, issued monthly, never read—

The pages cut and ripped and pasted
Pictures propose foul engagements:
Friends and lovers, strangers, neighbors,
But never two of the same, never two lovers
With eyes of gold and precious thoughts
Which mold their worlds to senseless dreams.

I will never know true love—
You, the knight who guards my door,
We have set you aside so slightly.
See, you never mattered to him,
To me, you were everything
. . . It was so obvious that it burned
They never planned this road for me,
Why do we keep crossing paths?

I speak to you through little words,
 You know,
We ruminates together blindly,
 See,
Is there a reason for your sadness?
To blame the moon is to blame the sun.
They never wanted us to be, yet,
Why do we attract like rusty magnets?

Horacio y La Maga, siempre y para siempre.



Correspondance | Emily Royer



Resurrection | Abbey Meyer



Die Mauer | Aaron Bueltmann

a house of trees

Ethan Grant

Those trees were good to me as no trees are anymore good. Those were the trees of shelter, of doomless good will for me, the child in midsummer tramping through the creekside paths in the fallow dirt and fable-sepiaed sun, moving toward nothing, toward a field, toward idleness, silver and absolute. The Journey of the Fox I called it, and I called it *Le voyage de renart*, and fancied I knew something of French in knowing the word *renart*. And I was then Reynard, scuttling wily in the brush in my endless wandering ways, as no Chanticleer crew forth a sullen day, and no Bruin suffered at the farmers' loom.

Those were the times when legends were woven on the wind and birds drizzled their lyrics in the heart of the air. All the rest was a silence; just the air-conditioner rattled around the corner of the house, out-of-sightly a phantom droning his midday tom. Headless horsemen bounded all afternoon through the distant backwood thickets. And the trees bowed overhead, sieving the summerlight into glassy shards; it was a sunburst, a radiance walking from each moment into moment, as each tree tried his turn at the light and worked his sleight-of-hand to explode the sun. Always there, always wagging: the maples, chestnuts, white oak and red oak, the walnut, the beech, the pin oak and bur oak, the pine like a mountain: like a mead-hall:

tented in shadow its thatched beams overhead. Always good, always there . . . a frozen curio on the mantelpiece, a brass bell, a frayed candlestick, a sundimmed portrait of some long-forgotten person at some time-forgotten hour . . . Those were trees of the always, and always the sentinels and audience to all and to me.

Never since has time seemed so separate, and never since so self-contained, as if the life of me then was little more than a prologue, the swelling and easing of an overture, the dominant drifting comfortably into tonic . . . and curtain. Only echoes remain, trickling in the rafters of the ears of those who once sat before the stage. Loudly it rings, deafening at times. Reprise back to entr'acte and back, nebulous motions rising out of the din: My grandpa, straw-hatted and freshly-shaven, walks out in the crisp June morning. He is going to the garden again. He is to plow and prepare the earth for corn, for beans, for strawberries, all as he must, as the cycle demands. My grandma, seated at the kitchen table, her short hair curled and white, her blue-veined hand lifting a second cup of coffee to her lips, watches as a hummingbird dances with himself in the windowglass. The floor registers stream cool air into my world. There is an order here, an order I cannot, and should not, strive to know. All I know now is how all life moves from the

center, and there are networks, all things converging. And here I move. And here I begin—I am young, I smell new things. What dying star sheds his glory on this time . . . Sunbursts. I will follow my grandpa outside today. I will till through the weeds and the scratching leaves in the sacred plots of old wooden fence-posts, gnarled and smothered with lichen and rot. Order is not yet fled from here. Order runs a fence in square about the garden, a great sureness through the thorny wilderness and man-tamed land. The trees arrange themselves at all sides. They sway in the wind airily, they watch, they save for me the mysteries beyond their boughs. Dreamy white clouds pool behind the trees; the trees obscure the setting of the wan morning moon.

Those were the times when night was unknown to me. When all the world would ebb at my beck and curl to rest at the foot of my bed. When a swirl-patterned ceiling saved me from the knowledge of the depth of the night, the stars in their divisions, the black chill, the void, the whole of the galaxy streamed in thin milk beyond the eaves. But neither roof nor walls nor windows kept the crickets from my ears. Nightly I heard the haunted chorus of their tireless throngs, and I knew of the night which set stage for such songs. And yet I slept away my childhood. I slept, and the trees swayed overhead . . . Here. Now. . . Still they sway, these prophets, these sages (and I thought I knew French!), such worldless old counselors in rede above my head. In shadows they move, in whispered candlequiet secrecy while the feverish skies whirl with trivial stars. So June has come again. The orchard is cool tonight, as passion long spent is cool. Moonlight bides in shadow beyond the trees, beyond the grave immensity of earth. I cannot cling to it, its knowledge: It slips through my grasp as sunlight once slipped through brambles, this moment,

this time, the steady machinery in the processes of my life. And I wish so badly to know something, I don't know what, but something, just to know more than the moment before: That tonight the moon will rise and assure me of my standing: That a fox will bark in the woodland broom: That his eyes will flash at me from the dark. I am pointless and I am thoughtless, and the trees break their silence for neither boy nor man. They still stand the same, and whisper the same, but I am not the same—I am utterly at odds with the self of myself who hurtles through the meaningless stagecraft of my place in this world in this time in this act of this cycle of the song. But the trees utter not a word, not one ancient, titanic sigh to relieve me of my questioning. There is only a wind. A phantom tom lost in the drone of a soft, chimney-whispered night. And yet to these trees I am still grateful. These trees have been good to me.





Office of Zachovich | Abbey Meyer



Venetian Morning Light | Alison DeVries



JFB | Natalie McCorriston

old long since

Ian Roseen

For whatever reason, a Billy Ocean song was running through Paul Huntley's mind as he held his glass above his head and weaved around the other guests in the hallway. Which was très bizarre he supposed, considering the party was French-themed, with echoey, music hall-ish French music lilting out of the speakers behind the potted plants, the furniture, the decorations on the mantelpiece. Isolated lyrics stood out to him, coming back from when his wife attempted to learn the language before the family trip to Europe several years ago—*Cette brunette aux yeux de paradis, Oh ça sent si bon la France*—but none of them stuck. Not a single melody could get past Billy Ocean, of all people. An artist dug up from—oh, it would have been twenty years now since the last time Paul had really given him a good listen. What even was the name of the song? If only it was “Caribbean Queen,” he would've had it, for that title just naturally followed “Billy Ocean.” But it seemed to be just out of reach.

Of course, the party itself was anything but disappointing. A New Year's Eve celebration hosted by one of Melinda's friends from the office downtown. There were just a few people here whom Paul actually knew, and even then they were only faces attached to memorable personality traits

that he remembered from previous parties (add Brad and Nancy, the young pregnant couple he had just spoken with, to that list). But he liked that, liked it almost more than when one of his own work acquaintances hosted a get-together. Those didn't have the potential that events like this had; they were too set in stone. But here things were as easy going and vibrant as they were when he was a young man just starting out. He could down a few drinks, stumble through a maze of laughing strangers, and perhaps end up leaning against an unfamiliar credenza in the hallway, carrying on a conversation with a slightly tipsy high school guidance counselor about the appeal of cigar smoking. Which was something he'd done last time.

Ended up embarrassing his wife that night. Melinda had come up directly behind him, took the beer from his hand, and whispered in his ear: “Time to go. Let's get into the car.” She needn't have done that. He hadn't been doing anything wrong, made no inappropriate advances, was not even engaging in any harmless flirting. But he complied; always did. He didn't mind being an easy husband to live with. Even this morning when she was badgering him about not making any stops on his way home from work, he had taken it in stride, even though there wasn't anywhere he

had been thinking of stopping in the first place. She was angry today for some reason or another. She had been angry lately. It was important that she enjoy herself at this party tonight, more so than it was for him to do the same.

Tonight he was stumbling. Thankfully he was not the only one. Turning an especially noisy corner into the living room, he tripped and held onto the nearest thing within reach, which was the arm of a drunk blonde in a white dress. They went down, hovered close to the ground before veering back up again. The woman found it hilarious, howling in his face while laying a hand on his shoulder and taking another swig from her glass of champagne. Paul found it less funny, but he was laughing anyway, possibly out of politeness, although he could not be sure.

“I’m sorry!” he explained. “I’m looking for my wife. Have you seen her?”

A fine thing to ask a stranger. But even so, when the woman asked, “Is that her?” and pointed toward the fireplace, Paul saw that it was, indeed, his wife, and she was glaring at him. Her fingers clutched her thin little hip, and he could envision the words forming on her lips once again: “Let’s get into the car.”

Which was the answer, after all! The title of the song—“Get Outta My Dreams (Get Into My Car).” Last heard at their wedding in 1988, a whirl of rice confetti and tenuous friends from college and Kenny G. A day he had actually enjoyed thoroughly, but why should it come rushing back to him tonight?

“Honey!” he said, sidling up to his wife. “I’ve been looking

all over for you! Can you believe her?” This he directed to a man and woman whom he did not know; possibly the hosts? The man was stodgily dressed in a suit, and his wife had the sort of feathered reddish-blond hair that was obviously part of her laundry list of things to do during the week of preparation for the party. Still, they seemed more amused than Melinda did.

“Paul, I like your costume,” the man said, slapping him on the back. “Suzanne, don’t you get a kick out of that?”

The woman touched her own chest, nodding in such an exaggerated way that it made Paul want to laugh, and perhaps he did just a bit. “Oh, yes,” she said, “I was noticing that all night, and I thought it was just *hysterical*.”

“Well, what can I say?” Paul said, glancing at Melinda (for what? another compliment?), who surprisingly offered him a cautionary smile. The “costume” in question was not so much a costume as it was a French stereotype—black and white striped boating shirt, floppy beret, a twirly painted-on mustache. Alright, maybe the mustache qualified the outfit as a costume. But he had just been having a little fun this afternoon while watching Melinda dress. Melinda, who truly did look as though she could be French, in her black dress with the feathers, the pearls, the foggy eye makeup.

“We were just saying how strange it is to find our kids halfway done with their senior year of high school,” Suzanne said. “After breakfast last Monday, I told our Rachel as I was heading out the door, ‘Enjoy your break! One more semester to go!’ Then I got in my car and I just had to sit there and think for a minute. I thought, ‘*Already?*’ It just hit me.”

“Ahh, yes,” Paul replied, for there was another connection: whoever these people were, their daughter went to school with his son. Or rather, she used to. He couldn’t place the name, though. Rachel. Had Andrew ever mentioned a Rachel? Rachel... well, he wouldn’t know her last name, even if he would drink plenty of her parents’ champagne and stand here yammering on as if he did. He imagined her light-haired, like her mother, but tall like her father; she would dress conservatively, study hard during the week, smile at her parents as she came in the door from a party on the weekends, having only drank a modest amount because she was tremendously capable. Probably, she wouldn’t have been somebody that Andrew would associate with after all.

“It certainly is strange...” he offered.

“Paul, are you feeling alright?” Melinda asked him. “I’m thinking of heading home—”

The man in the suit piped up. “No, don’t go just yet! Stay.”

“Oh, I don’t know...”

“Come, sit,” Suzanne said, leading them to the nearby couch, fresh and white. Uncomfortable, too, it turned out. “How *is* Andrew these days?”

“He’s doing just fine, I think,” Paul said, even though she had been looking at his wife when she asked.

“Really, Suzanne, I’m getting tired—” Melinda said, but it was haphazard, weak, and Suzanne wasn’t hearing any of it.

“We never see him around anymore!”

“Neither do we,” Paul said. Amazing how uncomfortable this couch was.

“Paul...”

The man shrugged, commiserating. “Well, I suppose we’d really have to say the same about Rachel. Hell, we’d have to say the same about *ourselves*, wouldn’t we? I mean, I was never home when I was that age. Too many friends to see, too much trouble to get into before I moved onto college. Gosh, that doesn’t seem so very long ago at all.”

“Has Andrew decided where he wants to go to college yet?” Suzanne wanted to know.

And this was what set Paul off laughing. He put his palm to his knee, and hunched over on top of himself; the corners of his eyes, he could feel, were moist. Next to him, Melinda sat stiffly, locking her jaw into place. Oh, he would hear about this later, in the car ride home and underneath the comforter in bed, when all he would want to do would be to sleep. But what could he do?

“No,” Melinda said, which was good because Suzanne and her husband were beginning to send sidelong glances to each other. “That part is still in transit. For us.”

“You don’t suppose a good college would accept your kid if he dropped out his senior year of high school, do you?”

“*Paul!*”

That was bad. Bad bad bad of him.

The other man leaned forward, very thoughtful with his chin on his fist. “What are you saying there, Paul? Is Andrew having trouble in school?”

“Of course not!” Melinda interrupted. She was running her fingers through her hair. “Andrew is a very smart boy. Very smart.”

“She’s right,” Paul added. “He just decided to drop out this year. Is it called dropping out if you’re choosing to do it?”

“Well, but why would he do that?” Suzanne asked.

“Oh, well, we’re trying to think of other options, you know,” Melinda said. “But due to some extenuating circumstances—”

But here the words just began falling out of Paul’s mouth. “I think he thinks it would be weird to try and raise a family while he’s still in high school like all the other kids. Plus he’s just moved into his new apartment downtown, and it’s pretty nice. Or not nice, but *cool*, you know? Gritty. You probably drive right past the area on your way to work there, uhh...” Whatever his name was.

“Hold on a minute, Paul,” the man said. “Did you— What did you say about a family?”

Which caused Melinda to bolt right out of her seat, knocking over her glass of champagne in the process, though she pretended not to notice. “Oh, for *god’s* sake!” Perhaps she really hadn’t noticed.

“Yeah,” Paul said, standing up himself. “He and his

girlfriend are having a baby. Not necessarily what I would have chosen... but hey. It is what it is.”

And then he was gone, tugged along by something, some powerful force. His wife, gripping his elbow, leading him into the hallway. They stopped beneath a dimly lit chandelier, white crêpe paper streamers snaking around their feet, so that Paul had to kick them away. It was like wading through the remains of the forts he built and destroyed with his brothers when he was a boy—cushions, pillows, sheets.

“Stop it. Would you stop kicking?” Melinda smacked him on the shoulder, and he stopped. She was looking at him with the face again, that sharp, needling face, contorted to resemble an angry squirrel. Or no... a shark? A shark, with those intense eyes and set, determined jaw. That was it. She was determined not to enjoy herself tonight, and that was a shame. Because it was such a nice party. It really was.

“You know what song I’ve had in my head all night?” he asked her. “That Billy Ocean song. ‘Get out of *my* dreams! Get into my car-ar...’ Remember that?”

“Remember what?”

“Remember dancing to that at our wedding? And the girl from your high school—the one who married the stockbroker with no ear lobes—got dizzy from spinning around so much and fell down, but we all kept dancing anyway?”

“Judy. Her name was Judy. And I didn’t appreciate you telling Frank and Suzanne all of that about our son.”

“Frank!”

“What? Listen: you just officialized this situation we’re in by running your mouth back there. All the work we’re doing trying to fix this isn’t going to account for *anything* in the long run if everybody knows.”

Paul frowned. “Don’t you think they would have heard one way or another, from what’s-her-name? From Rachel?”

“Well, they didn’t, Paul. They heard it from you. From his own father.”

There was a moment she let pass in which Paul felt himself rock back-and-forth. He tried to think of something he could say, but another moment passed and Melinda had already walked away. To the bathroom? To the car? Who could say. He sat down on the staircase and tore the beret off his head.

Here was the thing: when Andrew had told them the news about this kid he was fathering at age eighteen, Paul had actually not been that upset. (Although he was pretty sure that out of shock he’d stopped chewing the steak he had been eating, letting it grow soggy and flavorless in his mouth for a good minute until he realized he hadn’t swallowed.) Meanwhile, Andrew—spiky and resilient in his dirty hooded sweatshirt, all angular limbs and flyaway hair—sat there next to his sister Molly at the dinner table, spelling out his grand plan detail by detail, as if this was, oh, on the same level as quitting the school lacrosse team. Which was something he had done two years ago, actually, much to his mother’s disappointment.

“Granted, I didn’t mean for this to happen,” he explained. “But I think it’ll be alright. Liz talked to her boss at the dentist’s office, and he said she can keep her job for as long as she likes; it’s just answering phones two days a week anyway, so we figure it’s not like she’ll be exerting herself that much, right? Otherwise, I’ve been making good money—I mean some *good* money—performing down at the Salty Dog, so I’ll keep that up. And so far as living goes, one of my buddies is moving out of his apartment near the city and the landlord owes him a favor for something. We’ll probably get married eventually, although one thing at a time is my thinking. Annd I’m quitting high school; I don’t see there being much point in sticking with it if I’m not gonna be going to college. Mom, could you crack open that window behind you?”

Of course, all Melinda had done was sit there, clenching her teeth and letting her eyelids flutter in that terribly *tolerating* way she had about her sometimes. She gripped the table with her hands and arms both. Molly looked back and forth between Andrew and Melinda in a panic, seeming almost to play catch up, as though she had misheard and this really was not as big of a deal as it came across. (She did not once cast her eye towards Paul, he noticed, as if she understood that he played virtually no part in what potentially could unfold.)

Finally, Melinda spoke up. “I don’t know what... the hell...” she said, and she threw her napkin down on the table before marching outside to her car. The headlights glared through the windows as they spun around into the street; she was off on one of her drives, and she would not come home until 5:30 in the morning this time.

Andrew flinched, forgetting about his dinner for a moment. Paul remained in his seat, reading his son's face, the flash of worry that skated across it just briefly—he was thinking, “Maybe I’ve gotten myself into deeper shit than I thought.” Not that he *bad* planned on it, of course; he was a boy (or young man, rather; a father, after all), who stumbled through life with absolutely no troublesome intent. Things just happened to him, that was all, and if he was considered by some to be a “bad kid,” well, Paul knew better, knew that deep down he was actually a good kid who sometimes ended up doing bad things, such that in the end you couldn’t even really call them “bad” so much as you’d call them “unplanned.” This pregnancy, aside from being the final nail in the coffin in which any lingering hopes Paul and Melinda had for their son’s education rested, was basically the same thing as when he had painted his room in metallic green, on impulse three days before their previous house went on the market. Or when he was banned from his friend Kenny’s house after Kenny’s mom came home from work early and found them smoking some of Andrew’s pot behind the shed. (Who did he know that sold him the pot in the first place? It seemed that Paul had never in his life had friends with that kind of capability.) Even as a child, he had been walking home from school alone for the very first time, and what did he do but hitch a ride with a complete stranger. This just a few hours after they’d warned him over and over again not to do exactly that.

He fell into things. It was just that usually, before, he was also able to climb back out of them.

Melinda, no doubt, hadn’t stopped planning on how to backtrack out of this one ever since that evening. Which was noble of her. Proactive. One of her strong points. But

looking at Andrew from across the table that night, with his jet-black hair bristling beneath the lamp light, and his eyebrows—those same eyebrows he’d carried with him all the way from childhood—twisted and throbbing together in concern, it was all Paul could do not to lay a hand on the boy’s shoulder and tell him things were going to be okay. Instead, Molly came around and hugged Andrew tightly, soldiering through his slack-jawed gaze at the wall. Paul coughed into his napkin before getting up to clear the dishes.

It struck him as odd, all of a sudden, to be sitting here in the midst of a celebration, watching all of the festivities happening along the periphery. The hallway itself was fairly empty, but he peered into the main living room where the mass of people seemed to have grown, and he got that sensation of being enveloped by a wall of sound. The tinkling glasses, and the flutter of laughter, the *music*—which didn’t even sound as though it was French anymore, but selections from *Gigi*, that old movie whose soundtrack his mother was always playing while he was growing up. He became lost in trying to get the exact lyrics right in his head as they came up, but it was difficult to focus.

“We’re heading out, Paul,” someone said. “It was good to meet you.”

Then, “Where’s your wife, Paul? You didn’t make her up or anything, did you?”

Now, who—? But, oh: it was the couple he’d met earlier in the night, back when the Billy Ocean song first lodged itself in his head. Brad and Nancy, the newlyweds who already were expecting their first baby. Good Lord, talk

about a wake-up call. Barely finished working off their own college beer bellies before stretching Nancy's out to its limit again, responsible now not even for a child but for an actual, miniature human, one that will emerge from the womb with all of these ready-made, momentous decisions waiting for it, choices to make, hairstyles to experiment with, ways of speaking to settle on. That kid was going to turn out nothing like what they were expecting.

"Maybe I did," Paul replied, doing his best to keep his eyes locked on them as they shrugged into their jackets. "I'm starting to wonder if I came here alone after all."

"Oh, ho ho," Nancy said.

"We'll see y'at the next one, Paul." Brad raised a single hand manfully as he ushered his wife out the door. "Peace." A click of the door sliding into place, and they were gone.

Peace? As in, what? On earth?

Paul got up to stretch his legs, leaning on the credenza and massaging his painted-on mustache probably into a smudge. He ended up examining a small, glazed ceramic jug of some sort sitting beside him. He ran his fingers over its smooth ribbing and then, just like that, dumped the remainder of his drink inside.

Peace on earth, he hummed to himself. *Can it be?*

Well, yes, why not? When it got right down to it, why couldn't his son and his budding family (for Paul was *going* to call it that from now on, for better or worse) be sitting cozily in each other's arms right now, beneath the light of

the Christmas tree they bought at Dollar General? Why did they—why did Melinda—have to think of it as being so dark and bleak? Where was the optimism? The faith. Or whatever it was she had so long ago in their son, that little boy tottering around the backyard with a Super Soaker, chasing his grandmother. They'd laughed, then, blowing bubbles into their beverages to conceal their amusement. But he supposed that had been a long time ago, a different age, a completely different situation; he wasn't even sure why he seemed to equate the two.

"I went to see him this morning, after all."

This coming not from Paul's mouth, but Melinda's. She stood behind him, squaring her shoulders and clutching her little gold handbag. There was an attractive coolness to her face, such that Paul wanted to reach out and touch it. But he didn't; he knew enough not to push any more boundaries tonight.

"And I know you've been there, too," she went on. "I knew even before you mentioned it for the first time this evening."

"Well, Melinda, I mean—"

"But I wanted to see for myself what it was like. I wanted to see how Andrew was doing, if he was at least *happy*, you know?" A sad little smirk developed in the corner of her mouth. "But I seemed to think that by visiting him and actually going to that dumpy little ground-floor apartment I would be letting the cat out of the bag. People would see me getting out of the car, carrying a bag of groceries as a peace offering and, 'Oh,' they'd say, 'look at Melinda Huntley

going to check up on that son of hers. No wonder he's such a failure, the way she coddles him.' Which obviously makes no sense. But I realize that's kind of what I thought, and I was mad, about *it* and about *him*... And then today, I just couldn't help myself. After you left, I finished my orange juice and I found that I was unable to go to work, and so I skipped. Before I knew it, there I was parked in front of a trash can, staring at myself in the rearview mirror, mustering up the courage to go in and see my son."

Paul licked his lips and swallowed; his mouth was awfully dry. "Do you really think people talk about it? You think they care about our business or our son's business, how he's chosen to live his life?" And then, though he knew the words were wrong even as he formed them and let them fall out: "Anyway, should it even matter? Have some faith in them, Melinda, I think there's a chance at least that—"

But she shook her head and cut him off. "No, Paul. They're not going to stay together, I'm telling you that right now."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I can just tell! I walk in the door and she's standing there, big as a house in her flannel pants—nice quality, I suppose, but *sloppy*—frying up grilled cheese in the middle of the day for herself and this young skinny guy in a t-shirt whom I've never seen before. There's *another guy* over there, Paul, flopped on the couch and watching TV all day; probably one of Andrew's friends if I had to guess." She sighed. "People talk. They always do. You cannot just slip by through life expecting to do your own thing, to have everything just adapt more or less to another, happy version of what you imagine it to be."

And there—there was the fundamental difference between the two of them. It had always been there, noticeable even when they were dating in those muttering sort of lists she used to make for around-the-apartment improvements, divided straight down the middle, one side for herself and one side to show the landlord. Or in the way she veered a conversation back towards a safer, less revealing topic whenever it left her control for a moment at a party. Hadn't she done that tonight? Hadn't she requested a week to think about it when he'd asked her to marry him twenty-one years ago, while he had grinned the whole evening in dumb bliss that she was even considering it?

Hadn't that been why, perhaps, the memory of dancing to the Billy Ocean song so long ago stayed with him even now? For all day he'd watched a faint line form above her brow while she flashed determined smiles and glanced over her shoulder, keeping an eye out for any possible kinks in the reception. Then the song came on, and it was like something cracked; there had been a newfound looseness, a pliability in her expression. And she didn't even like Billy Ocean. But he'd looked at her as he wrapped his arms around her, realizing that for the first time all day she was his. This capable woman he'd chosen to marry, with whom he'd buy a house and raise a family, and with whom, one way or another, he'd never stop having fun. Yes, their guests crowded the dance floor during that song as well, and yes, he and Melinda had laughed openly at her high school friend Judy falling down halfway through. But the memory—the reason it had remained a memory, lodged deep inside for so long—it had really been about Melinda all this time, hadn't it?

Yes, he believed it had.

“Was Andrew glad to see you?” he asked her now, blinking, pushing through the fog to get to the moment at hand. “What did he say?”

Melinda looked down at her shoe. “He wasn’t there.”

“Wasn’t there...”

“He was out getting a new amplifier for his guitar. Or a cord or something, I don’t know. According to Liz, one of their friends owns an old van and wasn’t doing anything better today, so Andrew hitched a ride...” She looked in on the party, at the people just beginning to mill around the clock on the mantle. It was fifteen minutes until midnight.

“I felt like screaming at her,” she said. “At her *and* the kid on the couch. For not being Andrew, I guess. But instead I helped her reach the plates in the back of the cabinet, and poured her a glass of milk. The other kid I let fend for himself.”

Which made Paul laugh a little, and maybe she did, too. It was hard to tell in this light, with her face angled downward and the noise from the other room spilling over. Oh, there always seemed to be so much noise. So many discarded coats and fellow guests, fragile glasses and bric-a-brac cluttering his pathway. He loved it, had always loved it; and yet... Where was his jacket?

“Would you like to leave now?” he asked.

“Now?” she said, even as she reached for the jacket she’d left on the banister. “But it’s almost midnight.”

“Yeah, we’ll beat the rush and skip out before Dan Fogelberg starts up. I promised you we’d leave before we had to listen to Dan Fogelberg, didn’t I?”

“You did... You did say that.”

“So let’s go,” he said, helping her into her jacket. She didn’t argue, nor did he think she would. They stepped outside onto the landing, feeling warm still, even in the midst of all the snow, and he waited a moment to collect his bearings while she headed down the driveway.

But then, “Wait!” she said, and turned around to face him. “Your jacket. You forgot your jacket in Frank and Suzanne’s room, Paul.”

He could hear her clearly now, and see her face clearly, too; the celebration inside was a faint murmur behind him. But even so, with the snow coming down like rain all around her, he could have sworn just for a second that people were throwing rice confetti.

Probably it was the champagne, or maybe he was more tired than he thought. Either way, he figured he was warm enough and bounded down the steps to their car.



Abbey Who | Natalie McCorrison



Untitled | Natalie McCorrison

juice & tar

Gregory Maher

her mouth, a just-picked
peach -- one bite taken
dripping
blood-orange from her lips
soft, pulpy
sweet
-- oh, sweet

black, black cherry
her eyes
sable
flowing out, dark, resin
pitch
two gleaming round
olives
plum burnt to onyx,
reflecting
little white flecks
obsidian

charred black like
her vicious
tongue

-- the tar-soaked tears
fall softly down the dark grooves
of her face
great, ebony drops falling over
her lips, staining
black, stained sticky,
tarred shut,
her lips, now
blue, bruised
like the flesh of a jilted
peach



Sister | Katie Mattmiller



On Your Person Personae | Abbey Meyer



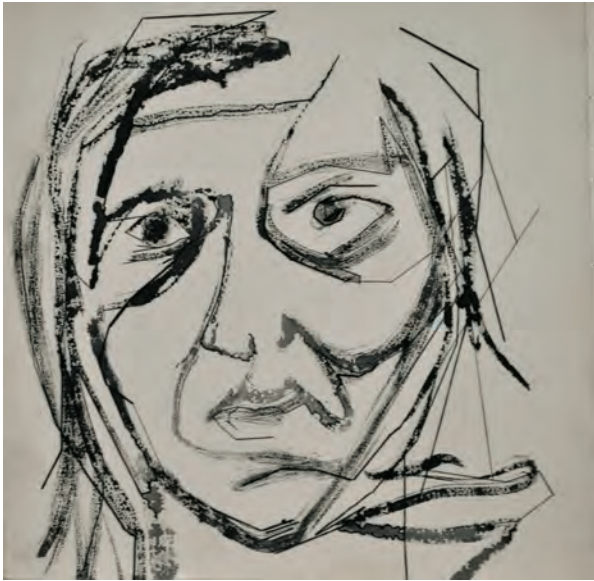
Dancing Barware | Maggie Rivera

a separate harvest

Juliana Kapetanov

Smoky ladder rises
with curling rungs,
distant and fading
patchouli smells like home
lessens the hurt,
the pain, and tears
of a split mind—
two sides of a grape
cut down the center,
clear and conscious
dripping reds
and white wine stains
upon the carpet
weaved with gray
and tiny ashes
spread across the floor.
While you swing
on a porch seat
remembering a hurtful past

which summer sunset
ignites in flames
bonfire colors the shutters,
sours your sweater,
sweetens brown curls
drops from your eyes
solitude and sadness
in your country house
no one hears quiet tears
stinging, salt lips
never tasted as good
as they do, on this night,
in your shaded room.



Self-Portrait | Natalie McCorrison



Cape of Good Hope | Katie Mattmiller



Rest in the Rain | Alison DeVries



Inspired by Janet Fish | Maggie Rivera

pierced

Rebecca Werner

Five minutes till curtain;
actors waiting in the wings—
their cues will never come.

Green eyes opened wide pierce
mine — we are Greek Muses
Melpomene and Thalia.

I ask again. She nods.
Hero-worship is heady
but hollow like cast plaster.

She's learnt my lines by heart.
Curtain rises, needle plunges;
pierces ear, pierces near

my heart. Cartilage knits
and weaves the body's seams.
She frayed the edges merely

to follow my pattern,
to try on my style.
She is Oedipus, blindly

trusting in my oracles,
heedless of my fault line.
As we leave, two silver hoops

bite with wolfish teeth. She trots
after her idol, unaware
this stone sculpture is cracked.





Law and Prophets | Aaron Buelmann



Midnight Drums | Abbey Meyer

camel blues

Ethan Grant

—Sleep. No. Sleep—no, this was a zoo. Or an aquarium. Walking through, brown light, warm smell of salt and cleaning chemicals. Brown lights, water tanks green. Light rays shimmering on the greenstreaked glass. Manta rays; moray eels, electric eels. Wide eyes: elongated faces—Trip.

His foot kicked, and suddenly he felt the stiffness of the boards beneath him. He gasped harshly, as if he had been holding his breath underwater for too long. Stiff: all around the world felt like solid wood. Pale moths clicked their bodies into a light-bulb by the door, their shadows heavy and sharp, gliding through the dim pool of amber light.

Yes, the porch. And he could smell the ocean, feel the grind of sand beneath the blanket: the beach house, yes.

He sat up and let the sheet slide off. The night was far from cold, and his body felt sticky, choleric. Rachel hadn't moved. She was facing away from him, curled up on their makeshift bed, breathing faintly, her sheet twisted in a nautilus shell around her calves.

Rigidly, he rose up, dull pain throbbing in his lower back, and he walked over to the porch railing over which draped his shorts. Left pocket: no, house keys . . . Right pocket:

smokes, yes. Lighter, too. He plucked from the blue-labeled pack a cigarette. He automatically tilted his head to the side as he lit the end, in learned imitation of his father. Quick snap of his head, sleigh-bell snap of the Zippo, a short burst of white smoke from his nose threading little tendrils in his graying beard. Fishing boats. Fish hooks. Aquarium.

He stood half-clothed and smoking with his elbows casually leaned on the railing. It was a misty night, and looking out into the yard he could see little. An orange utility light made the darkness look glassy, somehow infinite. A few lights ranged down the road, sand and sedge grass in the yard, the fence and mailbox, mostly in shadow. Cicadas and crickets were chirping in the air, in everything—

“Can't sleep?” Rachel muttered, still facing away. A bolt shot down his spine when she spoke: the guilty feeling when one's assumed solitude is shattered. She was awake.

“I think I slept some,” he said, feeling a plume of white smoke billow from his lips. “But then I had one of those tripping dreams.”

She turned over and yawned like a cat, catching a glint of

the utility light in her nose stud. “You were tripping in your dream?” The words were stretched out wide with her yawn.

“I mean, a stumble. My foot caught something and I started to fall.” He turned to her. Tired eyes looking up at him, brown hair hung in curls over her tan shoulders. Skin sunburnt, life-jacket wet and chilly against the peeling skin. Dad picking me up, pulling me away from hooked teeth. “And then I woke up.”

“I couldn’t sleep at all. I didn’t think it got so hot this far north. I can never sleep in heat like this. Even as a kid, I always had to take a cold bath before bed in the summer or I’d lie awake for hours.” Her eyes followed his hand as it brought the half-smoked cigarette to his lips. “Do you think I could have one of those?”

“Since when do you smoke?” he asked, extending the open pack to her.

“I don’t really. They just sound sort of good now and then. And now’s one of those times.” For a moment she appeared cross-eyed as she poked the cigarette tip in the oily Zippo flame at the end of his outstretched arm. No tilt. Once the tip glowed red, she sat back and stoically blew smoke up at the haint-blue beadboard. She smiled in satisfaction. “I promise I don’t usually do this.”

He turned back to the railing. “Neither do I.”

“Are you serious?”

He took a deep drag. “Nope.”

She smiled. “I didn’t think so. You’ve smoked just about every day since I met you.” He shrugged, still looking out at the glass-glazed blackness. After taking another long pull, Rachel closed her eyes. “God, my head’s swimming right now. Everything feels blue . . . do you still get this kind of buzz?”

He ashed over the side of the porch. “Not really, no. Long time ago I did, but those days don’t last long. To be honest, smoking’s not even really that fun anymore. Now it’s sort of routine, just going through the motions.”

He pulled a patio chair to the edge of the outspread blanket and sat down. She sat across from him, on the blanket still, her arms cradling her updrawn knees. Her brow was wrinkled pensively as she stared at a knothole in the floorboards. A few wisps of smoke drifted from her lips.

“It’s like,” he continued, studying her wrist, her hand, the graceless way she gripped the cigarette. “It’s like, instead of smoking for the pleasure of it, you smoke so you can stop thinking about smoking. Just like you eat to stop thinking about hunger.”

She let out a curt chuckle. “You know, you’re really not selling me on this right now. I’m not even sure if I want this anymore.”

He picked up an empty beer can from the base of the porch column and dropped his spent filter inside. He offered the can to her. “Well, I mean, I’m going to finish it first,” she said. “It feels pretty goddamn nice right now.” She took one last drag and tried to suppress a cough, but succeeded only in redirecting it violently through her nose. “Just don’t

let me do this again.” She dropped it in the can. It fizzled metallically within. “I don’t need to make this a habit.”

“Will you return the favor?” he asked. “Keep me from smoking anymore?”

“Really? Are you quitting for good, or is this another joke?”

“No joke. I mean, why not? Tonight’s as good a night as any to quit. I started one August, may as well stop in August.”

“Just like that?” Her voice had an incredulous drop in it.

“Sure, just like that.”

“And you really think you can do it?”

“No, probably not. Sorry to say, but I quit all the time. Doesn’t mean I’ll stick with it. It’s the easiest thing in the world to quit when you’ve just stubbed out a cigarette. Everything’s good and leveled with the universe. Just give it a few hours. Let the nicotine get out of my system and then see what I say.”

“Okay, I’m serious: Don’t let me smoke anymore. I don’t want to get into that.”

“Deal.”

She stood up and stretched her arms above her head, yawning again. “I’m going to get dressed.”

“You leaving?” he asked, standing up in response.

“Thinking about it. I need a shower. And I’ve got air-conditioning at home, thank God. And it’s already . . .” she checked the wristwatch lying out on the railing. “It’s already almost half past four. Jesus, I guess I did sleep a little while.”

“Well, you can leave if you like,” he said. “Or, you can stay and take a walk with me.”

“Right now?”

He shrugged. “Do you actually feel like going back to sleep at this point?”

“I mean, I was completely exhausted earlier. But now I’m wired; it’s strange. Is nicotine a stimulant or something?”

“I have no idea. Stimulant, depressant, nicotine’s a bitch either way.” He reached down for his shirt, crumpled in a mass by the door.

“Why did you start?” she asked, shaking the sand out of her tank top.

“Why did I start what? Smoking?”

“Yeah. You obviously know it’s terrible for you. So why’d you ever let yourself pick it up?”

“Pretty much the same reason you just smoked that cigarette I gave you. People offered them to me, they felt good, I started getting my own, and there you go. Addiction. Cheap comfort I guess.” Carton in Dad’s drawer—he’s out at sea—Mom at work, lazy afternoon, sunlight streaming

through the bedroom window. Dust floating in the air, smell of red cedarwood. Take a few, won't notice a few.

"That simple, huh? I guess it just doesn't seem worth it to me."

He pulled the shirt over his head and ran a hand through his hair: sand there too. "There are worse things for you. My lungs are shit, but at least I'm not a drug addict. Or obese."

"Well, yes, I guess that's one way of looking at it."

"Come on," he said, starting down the steps. "Let's get walking before the sun comes up. There's a place by the water I'd like us to see." Barefoot, they wandered off through the sand and slumped grass and out into the humid night air.

The asphalt road ran toward town, parallel to the sea. It was bordered by a long row of telephone poles, their lamps casting orange spheres of light in the mist, growing smaller and fainter as they stretched off in the distance. The stillness pulsed with cicada songs. He thought of painting, of the palette of a seaside night, as they walked down the road, their forms waxing and waning when passing beneath the streetlight halos. Cadmium orange, Indian yellow. Obsidian black.

Eventually they left the road and started over the smooth sea-rocks, which gave way slowly to sand. He led her in the fog and half-darkness toward the beach. Soon, a shape

materialized out of the mist: A pier, blurred and ill-defined, extending some thirty feet into the shallows before the planks ended, and only a twin row of piling continued on into the darkness. "I've lived here for almost three years now," Rachel remarked, "and I've never seen this before." In the mist, the pier looked ancient, like the sea-weathered skeleton of some great leviathan, long forgotten to time.

"We've been vacationing at this beach all my life," he said, "and I don't remember a time when this pier was still standing. We always thought they would tear it down, but it never happened. Guess they just forgot about it." He placed his palm flat against the post by the stairs. The wood was old, split and warped at many places. Gray day, foggy like this. Water black and harsh, the pilings clumped with algae and barnacles. Seagulls, one landed on this post. First time seeing one. Stared at me with its black-orange eye, like that marble eye, those hooked teeth.

He tried to take her hand and lead her up the shadowed steps, but she started off ahead of him. When he reached her, she was standing at the edge of the pier, looking into the water, her left hand clutching the tethered post, her right brushing hair out of her face. She turned to look at him. "All the fog's over the water. You can't see a thing."

As she leaned over the edge, one of the planks shifted, and she flinched away from it. He grabbed her hand. There, he thought. There. Her sunburned hand in his, so small and warm.

"Are these boards sturdy?" she asked, bobbing up and down cautiously.

“Sturdy enough. It’s always held me, my dad, and my uncles when we’d fish. And that’s a lot of weight.” He squeezed her hand, and they sat down with their calves hanging over the black fog, above invisible old boards buried in silt on the floor of the sea. He thought of people drowning in water like that, black water: He thought of Charybdis sucking whirlpools down into its cavernous belly. Then, her warm hand in his.

“So does your family own a boat out here?” She was peering off to the left, north along the shoreline. Even through the fog and mist, the lights of the fishing boats at the wharves were clearly visible. He could almost see the masts rocking, almost feel the lurching decks and hear the halyards and rigging clinking in the wet emptiness.

“Yeah, we used to have one. When I was younger.” White boat, blue sky, clouds like cream, sunlight white and yellow and flashing on the waves, my towel with the sea-stars, Dad and Uncle

Jake angling that blue shark, so excited, and the time that fishhook went through my finger, didn’t bleed at first, didn’t cry at first. “But we sold it a few years ago. Upkeep just got too expensive. I told you what my dad does for a living, right?”

She stared off for a while at the boats before answering. “He fishes, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah. He’s a lobster man up north. Commercial fisherman. Used to be he’d only have to work about half the year and have the summer off, and we’d all come out here and fish on our own. Take the boat out, spend all day on the water when the weather was nice. We actually caught a blue shark

one time. A big one, almost nine feet long, three hundred pounds. We made the news. Such exciting times. Fishing still had meaning to it, beauty. Those were the good days.”

“Why did those days end?”

“A lot of reasons, I guess. And lobster-fishing’s not all that lucrative anymore. It’s come to the point where they’re fishing year-round just to keep getting the hauls they used to get fishing only half that time.” He looked down at his sandy feet kicking in the moist air, and her feet next to his, threaded bracelets on each ankle. Warm. “It’s not a big deal, but I would’ve liked for us to come out once more before school starts up. Maybe go fishing one last time before it’s too late. I feel like I’m getting old so fast.”

She smiled. He couldn’t see her face, but he could hear that she was smiling as she spoke. “So now you’re just out here by yourself, doing your own thing, painting all summer?”

“More or less. I just didn’t want to be at home—it’s tense these days. So I came out here to the beach house, good quiet place for painting. And we’ve got some family not too far off.” He laughed anxiously. “I don’t know . . . sometimes I feel like a deadbeat.”

His hand reached for the familiar rectangular shape in his left pocket. “So,” he proceeded, changing the subject. “What would you say if I were to smoke again? Given what I said earlier?”

“I’d say, do what you have to do. It’s your life. But I still don’t want one.”

“I’ve only got four left. I figure I might as well.” A sleigh-bell clink, and he could see her face briefly in the spectral glow of his lighter. His head tilted, and things were quiet as he blew the first satisfying lungful of smoke into the mist. They could hear the waves splashing at the pilings, and the rumble of thunder caroming in off the sea.

“So,” she said. “You really just smoke because you feel like you have to? Is it really that hard to just say ‘fuck feeling good right now,’ and forcing yourself to stop?”

He stared into the dark water. He could see little beyond the red speck smoking at the end of his fingertips, but the darkness seemed paler now. He wondered what time it was, if dawn had begun to wheel in over the horizon. “I’ve actually been thinking about that since we left the house. I think I know why I smoke.” He paused for a moment, continuing when she stayed silent. “It sounds strange, but I think I smoke for art.”

“Art.” She thought for a second. “Okay, I don’t follow. What do you mean by ‘art’?”

“I mean, when I try to quit, yeah, it’s rough, but I could power through it if I only had to deal with the cravings, you know? Just the habit of it. But there’s something more to it. I feel . . . well, I guess I feel like I’m a part of some larger tradition when I smoke, something I would neglect by not smoking. It’s something generational maybe.” Dad tilting his head, smoke tendrils. “Something part of our generation.”

She shook her head. “How is smoking part of our generation? We were raised being told how awful it is. All

those anti-smoking commercials. We were kids when they killed off Joe Camel.”

“It’s not so much us individually.” He struggled to formulate his words. Below them, the fog was breaking. The humidity had died down. “It’s more this collective idea of art. Impressions of art: Van Gogh and a green bottle of absinthe, those crooked cobblestone streets in Paris, hidden shops, back alleys, and those sidewalk cafes with the greenish iron tables, and gas lamps, and wine bottles and cappuccinos . . . and smoking. There’s always this idea of smoking. Those old black and white photos of writers at their desks, a typewriter and a lamp and an ashtray full of smashed cigarette butts. There’s something artistic in smoking. And I’m a painter, and you’re a poet—we’re artists.”

“You know, I’ve seen a lot of my friends’ poetry,” she said. “So many of them try to play into that idea of ‘art’: ‘The smoke of my cigarette curls up into starlight,’ and shit like that. Like they think inserting cigarettes into poetry makes them more credible as artists.”

“That’s the hell of it though: It makes you feel like an artist. And feeling like an artist is halfway to being an artist.”

“Or at least halfway to playing the role of an artist, yes. It’s all so fake these days. All these excuses for destructive behavior and complacency.”

Thunder again rolled in off the ocean, foreboding, the black summer god, dread scatterer of antelope. “My parents,” he said slowly, “were not at all happy about me coming out here. They wanted me home. Dad wanted me

there, working. But I left anyway. I couldn't deal with it, another idle, useless summer. I needed to create, just to do something creative." He flicked his cigarette-end off into the sea, watching as the somersaulting spark sailed through the darkness. "My dad said something when I was leaving for the summer. I—I don't want to repeat it right now. I don't feel comfortable doing that. . . . But he was disappointed in me. Very disappointed. Like I failed him, his only offspring. Like I was a deadbeat, a drain on society, a waste of life or something." Driving away down St. John Street, afternoon sunlight green and golden on the May leaves, my eyesight fractured with tears, smell of a barbecue, children in a yard playing baseball with a plastic yellow bat, looking at me, crying, me, And I thought I raised up a son.

"Should you have come out here?" she asked, after some time. "Was this all worth it to you?"

"I mean . . . maybe it was. I painted a lot, I certainly managed to create, so yes. But still, what does that really mean? All these artistic struggles and birth-pangs—who honestly gives a shit? It's all personal. It means nothing to anyone else. Sometimes I just want to leave it all, you know? Art, academics, privileged living—leave it and go work on an orchard somewhere. Just grow apples and pears and peaches, and tend to them all day in the sunlight. Simple living. Living life as it should be lived."

"I'm going to be honest," she broke in. "I really hate that sentiment, 'live life as it should be lived.' I was almost with you until you said that. So many people our age try to play that card. They think we're the enlightened generation, that we see something our parents didn't. But the truth is that our parents all grew up not that long ago. Sixties or

seventies. They were just like us, full of progressive, artistic ideas. Honestly, every generation's essentially the same. Just different clothing and hair-styles. Even your Dad. He was young once, and he probably said the same thing about his generation, about his father. We're barely in our twenties. We don't know life."

"My dad wanted to be an architect when he was younger." Younger, he thought, he wanted to be an architect: an architect building, making changes, making art. He had the tools once, an easel, drafting board, paints, pencils, inks, crayons, straightedge—sold them all. What did he learn in growing up? That life has no room for art? No: that he has to get up early in the darkness to sail out before the sun to trawl lobsters to support his family, his waste of life son doing meaningless nothings on his dollar—is that life, then? My turn coming up, growing up, I feel the turning. "He wanted to create. Now he's out somewhere up north along the Atlantic, catching lobsters, doing work with no beauty in it, no meaning."

"You know what your problem is?" she asked. "You over-analyze everything way too much. Just stop it. Stop trying to figure things about your generation or about life. We're one of a million generations. And each before us managed to get along and keep the species going. Things will be just fine. Life will play out as it needs to play out." Black thunder gods riding in, closer now, sharper: a few chilled drops of rain.

"I just want to make an impact on something or someone. I don't want to be this disappointing waste of life. And more than anything, I want . . ." Say it, he thought, say the words, I want to be a worthy son, say it. Tears were starting to rise

in the channels of his cheeks. He tried to hide them. He couldn't say the words to her. "I guess more than anything, I want Dad to—"

"If you don't mind my asking," she ventured, "does your dad smoke?"

He opened his mouth, then closed it, and looked out toward the lights at the wharves, the fishing boats. He thought of his father tilting his head, lighting up, his Carhardt hood over his head, his beard, the cigarette sticking out, sending smoke foolishly up in the watery snowfall. My own. My own deepdown hunger for it, the screaming of my brain, my hands shaking, craving in the ceiling of my skull, in the ends of each nerve for a pull, the tilt of the head.

"Hey," she said softly, turning his face toward her with her hand. "Stop worrying. You don't need to atone for anything. Your dad understands more than you think. Now, I've only known you for a month, but I can see what a good man you are. You do make an impact on others, you change things. Tonight, for instance—sleeping on the porch, taking this walk—you took that initiative and it's made an impact on me. I'll never forget this night. There's a genuine goodness to you if you'd just stop trying to conform to your generation or to art or your dad. He understands. Everything will work out with time. Just relax. Live your life."

A peal of thunder shook the air, and a downpour swept in off the Atlantic. In that instant the world was alive with noises, the waves washing in, sloshing, the percussion of raindrops on wood. Water streamed off the railings and over the edge of the boards, catching glints of light from the streetlamps, from the fishing boats anchored at the

distant wharves. The sky was turning steel-blue with early morning light. Dense clouds drifted languidly in the lower atmosphere.

They sat for a moment without speaking. He stared up at the sky, as if he hadn't noticed the rain and was now puzzled by the sudden wetness. Then she turned to him, her curled brown hair plastered straight and black on her forehead. "What should we do now?"

A hot blue wire of light sprang through the sky overhead, scorching the air with the phosphorescent glow of spoiled mackerel. Then came a crack, thick and black in the rafters of dawn. Like a movie, he thought. Like the climatic ecstasy of cinema, the thunder the fanfare the tempo—Art imitating life and life conforming to art.

Once more he took her hand and led her back along the slick boards and down the steps to the beach. They stood looking eastward, and he could imagine seeing them both, as if in a film, black and white, two tiny black figures standing on the black-gray shoreline, wet sand reflecting an immense gray sky and the sea black, breaking with white foam and the clouds breaking in places, pouring down weak light, and fishing boats in the sea-sharpened wind clacking and ringing in the harbor, in the hollowness of space—Too much. Art. All too much.

They were both soaked. His shirt stuck to his chest with a heavy cold suction, and her hair glistened like porcelain, and suddenly he ran over to where the waves smoothed the shore, and he called back, "Rachel!" but another clap of thunder drowned his call. He dashed out and threw his feet before him, sliding into the mealy sand like a baseball

player taking home, and he dug his feet into the sand and leaned back in the water, letting the ocean surge against him and the surf-froth pool at his thighs. “Rachel,” he said again, and this time she came to him. She came and sat down with him in the sea, among endless waves and the grinding water, warm with all the hours of summer behind them.

He had no words, and she had no words: seawater and rainwater and windwater engulfed all sound. He pulled from his pocket a sodden mass of blue and white cardboard. Ruined. He squeezed it once and heaved it out into the dark churning brine, watching it cut through a cresting wave: bobbing there, floating slowly back to shore.

So when the storm subsided and just a light drizzle remained, they walked back, their feet slapping on the wet pavement. Exhaustion clawed at the backs of their eyeballs, stinging them with sleep. The few laconic words they exchanged were on the topic of the seasons. He held that the particular time of year—the middle of August—always felt the saddest. Though the weather was still hot and full, summer was past its prime. “In August, summer learns that even he’s mortal” was the phrase he most proudly extemporized. She disagreed: she said that people ascribe too much value to the summer and long hours of daylight and heat. Each day is divided equally, she argued. The only change is in the sun, whether it spends more time risen or set: “I always enjoy life the same,” she said, “long days or short.” Here, their dialogue died.

The yard seemed different in the growing light. Objects looked closer together, more real and confined, so unlike the infinite potential of darkness. He considered saying something to this effect, but he had waited too long before deciding it wasn’t worth it. Back on the porch, they screwed wordlessly, their skin electrified, scented with sea-salt and rain.

As they lay together to sleep on the rain-dampened blanket, he could see the ocean through the porch railings, gray and purple, mystical in the early morning. A heavy red sun oozed between the clouds on the horizon. Rain had cooled the world. He thought of how late an hour they were choosing for bed, as he stared up at the haint-blue beadboard, trying to count the grooved panels.

But it’s not late, he realized. Not anymore. It’s early now. So when did night become morning? Midnight? No, anyone would agree that one, two, three in morning is still nighttime. So when is the deepest, latest point of night? A truly late night would simply have to go on and on forever and ever from sundown on, never to be usurped by the rising sun.

“Rachel,” he whispered. Warm under his arm, she stirred slightly. Then nothing. “Are you awake?”

Her head tilted toward him, eyes still shut: “mmm . . . yes.”

“Did you ever notice that there’s no such thing as a truly late night? Night turns to dawn at its latest point, and . . .” He trailed off. Her breathing. Is it? Yes. Yes, she’s asleep. Let her sleep.

Sleep, he thought. Sleep well. So warm. Sun coming up on the sea, scattered on the waves, rays flashing. Like a painting. With the grass like that and the fence posts, and the driftwood bowed in the sand. Need to paint at dawn sometime. Before summer ends. Day usurped by night. Night like this, wonderful. Wonder what will happen when she leaves. Don't think about it now. Two weeks. Sleep. Two weeks. The boats last night, this morning. Boats in the dark fog like that. Like dry ice, like smoke. No. Don't need to smoke, no. Tobacco smell still on fingertips. Mouth ashy. Fishing boats. Write a poem. Paint. Way they rocked, so peaceful. Dad's out there now. Out in that storm. Cold and wet. Battered and sleepy. Sleep. Watched the sunrise, maybe. Maybe he's happy. Out there with lobsters and buoys and trawls and overalls and gloves and salt spray and hooks and . . . And maybe he is happy. Maybe. Purpose to life. With friends. Friends. This warmth under my arm. Letting me love her like that. So warm. Warmth. And the sun that day. White and gold, and the blues. Sky and sea. Blue shark thrashing on the deck. Slippery, eyes like black marble. Did it see me. Should have gotten closer. Don't touch it, keep him back now, keep him back. Long face, corpse-white gills, teeth hooked like that. Dad yelling, Keep him back, keep him back. And grabbing me with his tanned wet arm so strong, and feeling his beard and I was safe, and he smelled like the ocean and blood and the water so blue that day like cobalt or midnight hued with a touch of titanium white and the wind so warm and yet cool and he picked me up and even if I cried that day when my finger was hooked through I knew he was there so I knew I was safe.





Flight | Abbey Meyer



Thoroughly Modern | Mallory Swisher

autumn do not sigh

Ethan Grant

Autumn, I do not sigh, and not for you,
Though you've ushered sighs from some,
Not for you do I sigh, not here, and not tonight.
Enough are the sounds from the field
Where the children play by firelight,
Where they and the crickets chatter away,
And they do not sigh, autumn, nor do they
Spare one thought to the silence you've brought
To the fields and the yards, to the shocks
Of corn which wither and dry, and without a sigh
For the wind, though it plucks at them so.
They have stood over-long in the standing rain,
And they are still, they are still to the storm
And the gray. Give to the fence-posts their portion,
To the stiles their pay, we cross them the same,
We cross them each day into day into day
And call ourselves keepers of the call and reply,
Though we sing of summer, and autumn the same
We have stood over-long in the standing rain,
We have stood, and wept, and have suffered to sigh.

Autumn, the children play in the fields tonight,
They run through the shadows of planets and stars,
They dance in the lanterns in the dim waning light,
And they are the singers of the song on this night.
Though your wind is steeped in ghosts and rain
And the ring of the moon sinks broken and white,
Do not, sad autumn, come to cherish this cold—
I've seen fire in the fields and the sky tonight.



Late Summer, 7:00 pm | Mallory Swisher



After Hours | Emily Royer



contributors' notes

Aaron Bueltmann is a senior theology major who thinks that all art points to Jesus.

Nicholas Burrus wants a Moroccan courtyard garden for Christmas. If you find one, please tell him.

Ethan Grant is a senior, studying English. (“A way a lone a last a loved a long the . . . riverrun”) And maybe September 4th is not his favorite date. February 19th, April 9th, and October 16th all come to mind. But good things also came to pass those days. (“Isn’t this where . . . we came in?”) Maybe experience can eclipse aesthetics sometimes. Even so, November 2nd’s sunrise was exquisite. Yes. I slept soundly August second; I dreamed on August third.

Adam Jackson: Hey there Lighter gang! Well, another semester has gone by and I’ve managed to get some more photos into The Lighter! This is very exciting, as this may be my last round of submissions to The Lighter. So in saying that I would like to thank the selection committee for picking my work more than once, the crew that organizes The Lighter, and above all, my girlfriend Olivia. Without her I would not have had some of the photos I submitted to this, and the previous Lighter, and some of the titles I used for my work. She is definitely a big part of my creative inspiration and she helps me find my way through the chaos that is life. I love you Liv. Thanks everybody!

Jacob M. Just is “gon’ love you ‘til the wheels come off. Oh yeah.”

Juliana Kapetanov is a junior English major, Creative Writing and Spanish minor. Two of her favorite writers are Julio Cortázar and David Sedaris. She believes the written word is that which cannot be spoken.

Gregory Maher is an English major with an American Studies minor from the town of Zionsville, Indiana. He has just returned from tea with Lady Thyme who assures him that this little avocation will surely lead to an untimely bout of acedia. This writer remarked upon the curiosities of the cucumber sandwich and promptly made his exit. He’d like to someday traverse the ancient city of Petra on camelback.

Natalie McCorrison is a senior art major graduating this December. She is grateful for her work being selected to go into the Lighter on her first and last time submitting. She can’t wait to graduate and go home to Philly but will miss the Art Department and Art/Psych building here at V.U. Also GO PHILLIES!

“I’m **Abbey Meyer**. I’m a photographer. I’m somewhat troubled by the fact that I don’t know how to calculate the shutter speed of my eyes when I blink. The contents of my camera bag are worth more than my car. The image library on my computer contains 230,000 photos of friends, family, and clients... and zero photos of me. When at a car dealership, I translate the price of a car in my head to “six Canon 5D Mark II’s.” I watch the Sports Photographers more than the Sports. I am frequently greeted with “What

are you taking a picture of?!?” instead of “hello.” My carry-on is heavier than your checked bags. Number of lenses > Pairs of shoes I own. When performing daily duties, I adjust the angle of my head or change my line of vision for a more interesting composition. I look at a desk full of homework assignments and wonder how I could photograph the stack. The images taken as a visual memo with my phone have a sophisticated composition. I have a camera strap tan-line. I think in f-stops and iso’s.”

Jeremy Reed is a senior English, Spanish, and Humanities major. In addition to the odd poem here and there, he is also currently working on a longer non-fiction project about his family and memory. After a semester in Mexico this past spring, he’s returned from the sunny sidewalks south of the border to the whirlwind of words and paper that is applying to grad school and trying to finish his bachelor’s degrees at the same time. Given all the humdrum rigamarole which accompanies these endeavors, he frequently resorts to silliness. Last semester he gave you all a funny word, hogwash. Here’s another: brouhaha.

Maggie Rivera is a newbie to the Lighter and a junior Art Education major who, despite being a little clumsy, will never stop making art no matter how many times she drops her paint brushes, runs into the sink or walls of the dark room, or trips over her shadow. Even though the sight of blank canvas or an empty page intimidates her a little bit, she keeps truckin’. Thanks to the Lighter and everyone who voted for these pieces!

Ian Roseen has gone through college so far without using any kind of planner or drinking a drop of coffee. In case you’re wondering, that’s moderately impressive, although he still finds it easy to space out mid-sentence or fall asleep watching *The Big Chill*. Which is a good movie if you haven’t seen it, but honestly, sometimes it’s a lot to ask.

Emily Royer is a senior who has decided that, whatever her major is, she just wants to spend her life talking to people over a good cup of coffee.

Mallory Swisher is a freshman Theatre major from Lowell, IN. She thinks in pictures, and when she sees something particularly beautiful and doesn’t have her camera on her person she mentally kicks herself about it for days. Mallory’s silly and clumsy, and sings along to the songs playing on the radio in department stores. Johnny Depp inspires her, Harry Potter changed her life, and she finds it exceedingly odd referring to herself in the third person... She would like to thank her family for their support, her boyfriend and friends for letting her photograph them (and for being “proud mommas”), and the staff of The Lighter for even considering her photos.

Rebecca Werner is a sophomore English major. She would like to thank Tazo for providing the mass quantities of Earl Grey tea that aided in the writing process and her sister for taking her to get her cartilage pierced, even though it hurt.

the lighter is currently accepting submissions for
the spring 2012 edition at the.lighter@valpo.edu