They say white stones are the water's bones,  
Cast out from the flesh of the green river.

They say the moss fills the stirring body,  
Giving shape to the pools that had none.

They say a pulse beats in the rapids,  
Humming over sand in bubbles.

They say the best fishermen cast in the calm,  
Looking for the lull on the surface.

They say the beat moves the fish,  
Pulsing air through the gills.

They say the best know this,  
Feeling the current for the signs.

They say the worst don't feel at all,  
Hoping only for the bite that might.

They say life flows from a spring,  
Oozing deep under the cliff.

They say like a well witcher,  
Moving a rod up and down.

They say the stones keep the secret,  
Mumbling hints under our feet.

They say it while they wait in the sun,  
Resting on the bank for a rise.
INTO THE WILD

BRYANT WRIGHT
Cloudy with a chance of sunshine

Lyndsey Johnson

Claire Osburn

Shed

Sunshine

Cloudy with a chance of shed
He sighed and let his back slide down along the smooth, wet incline.

He knew he was about to have another one of those moments. They came in waves. Came in waves.

He closed his eyes and yes, it happened. He knew it lasted but half a second, but in his mind a whole minute of sighs passed.

It was raining, but that didn’t matter. He let himself daydream.

For part of that moment, he closed his eyes and knew nothing, and then, a little later, something. He knew of his desire, of which he half-wished was gone because he knew that now he was not going to be happy without it and he knew that now he was not going to get it. But thinking made him hopeful and scared. He knew later he wouldn’t mind being scared, but now it made him hesitate.

She was there, tapping on his toe, dressed nicely, and surrounded by blue. But since it was raining, and he could hear the floor beneath him, she disappeared when he opened his eyes. She kept tapping on his toe, and he moved it so he would not be reminded. She started tapping on the floor.

He lay there for a few more moments, staring at the spot she was tapping on and wanting but not really wanting to close his eyes and return to the blue. To return to the blue and to her. He...

He started to see everything in slow-motion. He started to see the water hitting his skin and his skin deflecting the water in even smaller, sharper droplets. The video of his mind circled around one of the slowed-down drops hitting his leg, and as he watched this, he wondered why he wasn’t this small. The water made a shockwave as it hit his leg and sent liquid shrapnel everywhere. He wished he were there.
He sat up and gathered up his knees in front of him and let the water slide through his toes. He pressed his face against his knees and closed his eyes again, not looking for anything but just wanting to see black. The water slid in streaks down his legs and he imagined that some of it got stuck in hemispheres there. The feeling in his chest became more noticeable.

He heard a bird chirp from the outside and his heart swelled as he remembered, turned his head to the side, and looked through the glass.

“This is fine now,” he whispered to himself.

The rain cleared as he slid open the window and stepped onto the carpet. He became dry and slowly clothed himself.

He saw light under the door and opened it, glad to see the sunlight.

He sighed.

He was glad to see the sunlight.

In Another’s Company

Brett Shaw

We – will live half in the day time
and We – will live half at night
and We – will savor most
in between times
where our – selves are outside of the rest.
and eyes – will tangle gently within us
and hands, will do exactly the same.

moments
infinite love is drawn by our eyes, their liquid complexities – locked here, yours are tremorless pools
and I – can see to their depths.
I know you deeper than forests, know trees – that endure and digress.
at these moments, I know you and I better, than I know myself
but we will save ourselves for
between times,
and through storms
our eyes, each other – at rest.
our roadrunner surfs
in the swimming pool
not purple and blue
like the cartoons
of my youth
but very cold
in the Texas winter
plumed in several
subtle shades
of brown
trying not to drown
as he balances on
the pink pool float
hopping

up
&
down

up
&
down

up
&
down

so I must be
the coyote

watching him here
behind a glass door
framed by curved iron
sitting beside the
swirling copper fire
because
i don’t see
anyone else around

though I hope that
i’m not the
coyote

because i don’t
want to watch
this little
roadrunner
drown.
The steam softly folds me inside of itself, and I begin to melt.
I rest my cheek on my knuckles and my elbow on my knee as I watch... feel the sweat slide down my arm... thigh... leg, onto the tile.
Another drop glides down my nose and leaps off its perch, chasing its predecessors.
My eyes follow every drop and watch them meld into the shapeless puddle on the floor, one after another.
My stomach pulses and I realize just how uncomfortable I am.
“This isn’t working.”
I open the magnetically sealed door and stick my head out, letting the steam drift past my face into the room, where it disappears in the midst of the temperature change. I breathe in the cold air for a few seconds and press the button to turn off my enveloper. I retreat back into my cell and shut the door.
I turn the knob and move out of the way as a stream of cold water cascades onto the tile. I turn another knob and wait for the water to warm.
I sigh and press my back against the wall as I sink down to the floor, leaving one knee up and the other on the ground as I fold my arms across my stomach.
The now lukewarm water splashes against my chest, throat, and face and I feel my expression lapse into an awkward frown.
“This isn’t working either.”
Somehow I manage to hoist myself up again whilst a groan leaks from my lips.
I turn the latter knob one last time and instantly the cascade returns to its semi-frigid state.
I sink back into my former position and sigh as my senses tell me that I have reached my sanctuary, although I can tell my expression would not show any signs of this ecstasy to an observer. I let my eyelids droop.
Slowly... slowly... slowly I feel my back shift to the right and allow my head to touch the ground. I open my eyes and search desperately for a pillow. I resign to let one of my hands take its place and close my eyes again.
I hear a gentle drumming noise and curious, I lift my unused hand to...
cover my stomach. The noise turns out to be coming from the drain, which is allowing my water to find its way out of my sanctuary.

Silently cursing the drain, I imagine what it would be like if the water were to remain in my sanctuary, lifting me up closer to the ceiling, millimeter by millimeter.

I would float upon its surface, the water forever trickling past my ears whilst the light in the middle of the ceiling draws infinitely close to my nose.

However, the water would stop there. It would know that, should it lift me any higher, I would allow myself to stop floating upon the surface and sink down into my sanctuary, inevitably leading to its end.

I awake from my illusion calmly with my hand still hovering above my stomach.

Her visage drifts into my mind and melds back into the water as the result of a careless droplet.

I remember: “Make her feel special.”

What?

...How?

My internal dialogue is interrupted by the sudden awareness that my energy has been leaking out of my pores, leaving me enervated.

I remember where I am and realize: “In a place like this, you can’t tell whether or not you are crying.”

“Am I crying?”

I am interrupted yet again by the sensation of my vacuum being punctured, allowing the greedy air to rush in, evaporating the water from my legs, leaving them to shiver. I realize, for some reason, how welcome the change in temperature is and how I desperately want it to continue fluctuating.

It turns out to be my dad, informing me that I should be ending my stay in ecstasy soon. I moan out an incoherent answer as he shuts the door, allowing my vacuum to reform itself.

The questions start again.

“Where will I be at the end of the year?”

Somewhere else... duh.

“No I mean, what kind of attitude will I have? What kind of people will I be around? Will I miss anybody? Will anybody miss me?”

... Umm... somewhere else? Stop worrying about it.

“You’re not helping.”
Think for a moment, if
Simplicity were an old woman.

She would experience storms firsthand
Walking in them, never with
An umbrella.

She would walk without
Her cane like rain would fall
Without a care.

She would smile at me as
I sit worrying in the rain
About more than catching
A cold.

I’d look up to her smile,
As though it were the dawn.

“The clouds are dark,” I’d comment.

“Clouds part,” I think she’d say,
“Storms pass.”

And on she would walk,
And there I would sit,
And the rain would still rain on us both.

Imagining What They’d Say
Adan Gonzalez
Despite the light, I see your face,
dark from midnight rummaging
through drawers of letters that you wrote
when you were young, and you could say,
any word I choose to use
will soon just fade away.
You rip up pages and toss them to the rain,
but someone always finds a way
to discover the secret you never knew you had.

To a stranger, it doesn’t matter,
but I never trust anyone who talks too much,
and to me, you sound like the twin
of a madman when you tell me that the hole
in the brick wall can have me killed
sooner than I think. Is that how you plan to die?

Before you board the Resurrection and sail
to some distant horizon, please tell the lonely children,
with their eyes transfixed by photo albums
of corpses, that the dead should not
be gawked at. You say you don’t know
what’s happening to you, but look away
and you will find yourself dead
certain of what you did not want to know,
your black eyes staring, and by then,
the children may be looking at you.
We sat on your roof and I discussed
my multiple personalities
while you pretended to smoke
a cigarette. I don’t remember
if it was hot or cold, but I want
to say cold because we loved
the cold hot cocoa
and ice. Never snow.
S’mores with Twix instead of Hershey’s,
Mexican vanilla in our waffles.
You told me about those times
you tried to kill yourself
with ridiculously innocuous items:
thumbtacks and trash bags.
I should’ve laughed
  I should’ve hugged you.
We should’ve run to store
  or kept complaining
about the hermits
across the street.

I never say I love you to the wind
G R I E F
JOHN LUCIANO

There are no words in the English language to convince someone who
loves you that you’re okay.

She sits up with me at night, and when I shuffle out of the sheets and into
the living room, she follows barely a step behind. I can feel her breath on
my neck, I think. She reaches for my hand as we sit down, but I snake it
past her onto the remote and click on the television. The vaguely blue
glow is usually a comfort. Tonight, it only makes me aware that her eyes
are actively seeking mine. I know that if I do not soon meet them, she will
speak.

I look over to her.

Around us, the house creaks like an arthritic hag. The dog is in the next
room, fretfully whining, dreaming of fights, or food, or his missing testicles.
The television had been left on C-SPAN earlier in the evening and a law-
yer is on discussing the tenuous legality of the Guantanamo Bay prisons.
In the corner of my vision, I see a cockroach skittering across our ceiling.
Nothing.

Finally, she breaks my gaze, wraps around my arm, squeezes it. Sweet
gesture.

I have just settled on a favorite show I’ve been unable to find on DVD
when she lifts her head.

“You need to talk to me,” she says. “I won’t let you kill yourself over this.”
Her voice cracks, trails off, and I see that her misstep has bought me si-
lence. After a few minutes, she gets up and walks back into the bedroom.

Any moment, she’s expecting some great breakthrough with me. She
thinks that I’m a victim. She says I like to play the martyr. All I want to
fucking do is watch TV.
Trapped between my first two fingers
My outside knuckles his manacles
He is fresh
Moments before, he stood shoulder to shoulder with nineteen brothers
Snuggly in their perfectly-dimensioned home
Straight and crisp and tall and proud
What must they have thought
When they were turned upside-down, home and all
And slammed head-first
Over and over
Until their insides were packed tightly together

I raise him to my lips
For his intended purpose
And set his empty paper end to flame
A living sacrifice to the god of my addiction
The paper changes from white to red to black in an instant
As the fire races for the treasure inside
My mouth forms a vacuum around his tan spotted end
And I inhale
Now he begins his work in earnest
Now he begins his death in earnest
His other end flares a bright orange-red
The flame begins to transform him into smoke and heat
I feel the familiar, pleasant acridity, so badly needed
As his spirit, his wraithlike essence
Pours down my throat toward my lungs in a billowing cloud
Spreading like tentacles into the branching structure within
Much of it remains there
The next half of my breath expels what is left
In an ethereal, dissipating stream
Now my calm begins in earnest
Slowly he is burned alive
I am from three cups of coffee every Sunday morning
with sweetener, powdered creamer, and donuts.
I am from hot, sticky days spent in drainage ditches,
a wooden rubber-band gun clasped in my hand,
my brothers charging at me from the Confederate South.
I am from don’t eat the dog food, boys,
please eat your corn, do your best.
Don’t play with fire.
I am from steel vibrating strings,
pressed down by my newly calloused fingertips,
singing songs my father wrote.

I am from a decade
that taught me how to live.

I Am From
William Parker

I am from three cups of coffee every Sunday morning
with sweetener, powdered creamer, and donuts.
I am from hot, sticky days spent in drainage ditches,
a wooden rubber-band gun clasped in my hand,
my brothers charging at me from the Confederate South.

I am from don’t eat the dog food, boys,
please eat your corn, do your best.
Don’t play with fire.
I am from steel vibrating strings,
pressed down by my newly calloused fingertips,
singing songs my father wrote.

I am from a decade
that taught me how to live.
michelle & ivan's
eyes calmly swallowed the seven mile beach with wet teeth stopping just short of the iron shores of Hell's gate soaking stoic kimono dragons at the botanical gardens.

flooding the blue parrot's projected beak ignoring screams from farmed turtles seen beaching in the sand near the jobless stingray city fishermen & the branches bent from the treehouse to the devil's grotto reef where the pirate pete fed tarpin from the wharf north to the sea breeze unable to stand these gusts anymore.

& we just drove for the coast headed for rum point past the lighthouse shipwrecked in our Gypsy Queen ragtop jeep with sideways seats, thinking:

haven't we all had just about enough of all these hurricanes.
Fortunate
Megan Peak

Reach for your dreams
Start with the spring rolls
Feathers are sacred messengers
Between heaven and earth
And the lines that we draw
To prevent people from closing in
There was a wooden winged house
With white poetic words
Written in Chinese on the outside
In an abandoned Pittsburgh street
Sampsonia way
Who knows why we are headstrong siblings
Or why we race to find meaning
In old suburban neighborhoods we
Played in, died in
There were chalk paintings of our lives
Lining the concrete
Washed away by sewer water and oceans
I ran after your car when you left and
Woke up the entire street
Because I thought you were gone forever
But you had only just left to grab the newspaper
And some matches
I found a crustacean in the pool later
And wondered where its sailboat was
Since it smelled of salt
And the rains flooded the yard
So that we could see the colors
In the oil
That you left when you left
We stand sheltered
underneath an arch of winding vines,
feeling the sharp droplets
shoot like icy bullets
from way beyond our idea
of clouds
or the sky.

We stand grounded,
barefoot,
the driveway warms
our numbing toes
and we raise our heads
and let the rain fall
so gracefully
in our eyes and
in our mouths.

And you, mom, you
walk around the garden,
tending to the thirsty flowers,
splashing run-off from the
streaming curbsides as nourishment;
so tender you treat them,
like a child.

And dad, hugging
his arms around his waist
stands with me on the warm asphalt.
And now that stream of water along the curb
becomes a weapon,
a means of fighting for the ultimate goal
of laughter.
I run up and down
and up the street;
like a four year old I
stomp in puddles,
kick up dirt,
and wave, hysterically,
at people dry and sane
and laughing with me
because they know it’s ok—
rain is the universal language
of liberation.

And you were both there
when I came running back,
waiting, watching—
we all felt each others smiles.

And we stand together
in the rain,
a family for once,

a moment we will always
see as beautiful
and real—

the day the rain kept pouring
and we kept standing,
smiling, laughing,
living all at once—
tasting, smelling,
being
in the rain.
Sometimes I undress in front of the window
To show that I am okay with others seeing
And Nancy asked if I danced in my room
And if I ever thought to swerve from the road
There were times she said to kiss a tree
Because it would always just go back into the dirt
Where all dead things go
And maybe we run into old places to figure out the new
Suicide on a cloudless day never seems grounded
In a real excuse
But accidents happen
Maybe instead of fires we just need little candles
And maybe she said
Maybe instead of crying for one thing
We should cry for everything
Still screaming for those who jumped from the buildings
The old man at the bus stop
Caribou and the west coast
With that German word on the board
In blue ink
We talked about the tapes inside our heads
About cognitive therapy
And the uselessness of gravity
When all we wanted was to jump
We thought we could change the world
One light switch at a time
But Kinky Freidman never won
And putting bags of rocks in our toilets
Just clogged the drains

I’m going to have my wedding here
I told you
It sounds lovely
Enjoy it for me
Maybe fire is not good to feel
When you are that young
Candles are good
They don’t last forever
I.

avoid it.

hold hands when you cross the street.
if walking with someone
for whom you don’t care,
stay on the right and hope
they slow the coming car.

take a cubicle over an office
with a door,
unless of course the offered office
has a second door.

always have a pathway and
be ready to bolt upright or out.
keep in mind
the consistency of chairs
and the thickness of nearby windows.

know your enemies,
their habits,
their motives, and
their approximate ability
to provide cover from stray bullets.
the last bit goes for anyone.

stay updated
on your immunizations.

alone, listen, but
do not hold your breath to do so.
the pressure in your throat and ears
can distract you and impede
your hearing.
instead,
with slow and metered breath,
investigate the creaking floorboards.

wait ten seconds before
putting your eye to the peephole.

don’t smoke.

carry a gun
or nothing at all.
a knife is just asking for it.

invest
in a bulletproof vest.

stop masturbating
at sixty-five.
II.

never die alone.
hold hands when you cross the street,
attend the theater,
visit her parents
or the corner store.
walk next to her, and
be strong enough to push her away.
these days,
both of you will
probably be working.
so have a household pet.
a cat or at least
a reasonably somber dog.
carpool.
do not let her take the day shift
and you the night.
sleep together and
wake up together or
not at all.
exercise but
not to the extreme.
match her lap for lap unless
you have a family history
of heart disease
or other conditions that might
add a variable.
compensate as best you can.
don’t smoke.
if you do,
get her to.
for the sake of the relationship,
the easiest method
may be to shotgun her
in her sleep.
this can be awkward, but
less so with practice.
take care of her
when she’s sick and
let her breathe on you.
at last, decide
where you’re going to die
and do it
holding hands
or something.
Skinny Jeans
Johnson Hagood

as RNA polymerase quietly unzips your DNA and moves along the length of your genes and a bit of RNA emerges and moves through the cytoplasm, after the snRNPs do their work, of course, and your ribosomes attach and tRNA does its noble job fixing to its anti-codons, linking peptide chains of the building blocks of life, as all this happens I close my eyes and kiss you gently on the cheek and you smile a little

Doin’ The Cockroach
Clint Robertson

we’re all just doin’ the cockroach
doin’ the cockroach, for Uncle Sam, man.
&
there’s two dead cockroaches doin’ the cockroach on the floor.
one black

by the cracked white recycled door looking up from its back in prayer with infected hands folded towards the lord & one canine looking quite like kimba the white lion without a roar looking up at me between rolls in the grass bored with her old red collar.
&
so i’m just not sure that I wanna do the cockroach anymore.

29
Remember that time
you woke me up in the middle of the night to eat watermelon in the
garden?
I woke to the name only you called me,
“Shhh, Little Bit,”
you motioned for me to get my jacket quietly,
we didn’t want to wake anyone.
The house was silent except for the passing of seconds
I thought of the ghost stories you would tell me
when I begged,
but I never told you
they made it hard for me to fall sleep.
Outside I could still hear the continual booming of
gun fire from Fort Bragg.
The moist, sand-like soil was cold against my small, bare feet.
You let me pick which one I wanted,
of course I picked
the biggest one and you sliced it open with your pocketknife.
The sweet, bright red flesh of the melon
stood out against the crisp, dark night air.
We left the rinds among the other unpicked melons,
I grinned
as if I had secretly done wrong.

With cold toes and sticky fingers,
I crawled back into bed, the cuffs of my pajama pants
damp with evening dew
and my little belly pleasantly full.
I drifted back to sleep wondering if it had really happened or
maybe I dreamt it.
The next morning I knew.  
You were in the kitchen humming  
“Tweedle o Twill”  
- or maybe it was “I wanna go fishin’”-  
you winked when you saw me  
and I knew.  

Your “slap-abouts” are no longer kept by the front door,  
next to the chair that used to hold your well-worn straw Farm Bureau hat  
and that awful red and black plaid flannel coat.  
I still half expect to see you  
walking through the pecan orchard  
toward the house,  
smelling of Old Spice,  
and sometimes strong cigars,  
with fat little Jake, waddling in tow.  

Although no matter how much I tried,  
combing your bald head  
ever made your hair grow  
and my Mickey Mouse bobber  
ever even caught a Bluegill,  
much less the famed big Bass.  
I never told you that I hated bowling,  
or that the first and only time you grounded me  
I was mad at you for a week,  
but now I understand.  
I brought home the stuffed blue duck  
that sat on top of the television  
in your hospital room,  
but I never wanted it back.
Characters:A boy and a girl, a ghost

Setting: October 12, 2009 5:05 pm, perpetually.

The play begins with a black stage.

Ghost: (a voice, coming from the dark) “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Lights up on a boy and girl sitting on the side of a tousled twin bed. Light is dim, as if moonlight through a window creates a spotlight on the boy. He faces forward, speaks to her, but mostly to himself.

Boy: David and Michael couldn’t even go up to the casket. He didn’t look like himself. You could tell he hit his head on the way down. (He is overcome. Girl tries to comfort him, doesn’t know what to say…) The service was nice though, I guess (gathers himself). There was a cookie buffet (laughs), seemed pretty appropriate. Knowing him he probably wrote that in his note: “And there will be a cookie buffet.” (laughs… remembers)

Ghost: (a voice, coming from the dark) “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”

Lights up stage right on the Ghost, a boy, late teens/early twenties, sitting in a simple wooden chair. He sits facing the bed. A pause while he examines the pair.
Ghost: (to himself) To fall is to let go. Just let go of it all! Darkness! Chaos! Voices screaming: Hold on! Let go! To fall is to fly, leave it all behind. (turns to audience) Friends! Who among us is free? The world is pushing, pulling, dragging, pounding, demanding submission, no, beating it out of us! One day at a time. One step at a time. One foot, lifted, muscles contract, relax. It only takes one step…

Lights out on Ghost.

Boy: Yeah, I’ll be ok. I guess, in a weird way, I should be happy that he’s finally happy. I just feel too young for death to be taking away my friends. I just feel like, nothing is certain anymore.

Lights up on Ghost.

Ghost: (to audience, himself) There are only certainties. To fall is to fly, to fly, and be free! That is certain. Take all the rest, I want nothing else. What is this body but a weight keeping me from flying away? An anchor holding me to this wretched world. I want nothing but freedom. I want nothing. I am nothing. To fall is to fly, to fly, and be free.

Lights out on Ghost.

Boy: It’s just weird they had his service in that church. I mean, if you knew him at all you knew he was atheist, he would never have wanted that. I mean, I wish I could say “Oh, someday we’ll meet again in a city of gold, as pure as glass, singing with angels in white robes,” but you know, who can really say? He sure didn’t believe that. I don’t even know what I believe. I just hope he’s finally at peace. Finally, free.

The couple lays down, Boy faces audience, can’t sleep. He looks in direction of chair; almost waiting, waiting. Long pause. He rolls over, lights go out on him.

Lights come up, chair is empty.

Elliot Smith’s “Everything Means Nothing To Me” begins to play, quietly at first, and then louder and louder, until almost abrasive. As song fades, lights fade on chair.
Mr. Cain and Sr. Cáin are brothers, but they don’t know it. They fight over what belongs to neither of them. Gentlemen, the Earth will no longer yield her fruit to you because you took it without asking. Eve and La Malinche are not to blame. El pecado original was subjugation. You claimed whatever land you could get your bloodthirsty hands on and then took lady and called her woman—wife person. You wanted power and pleasure, enough food to rot in your cellar and enough descendents to fill the Earth to her breaking point, so you impregnated her so many times that she’s bursting now, she can’t feed them all. You’ve already drunk all the milk and honey of her breasts, drunk each other’s blood. El sangre de lo hermano. El sangre de la Tierra.

I will never be Mrs. Cain or la Sra. de Cáin. If you want to speak of me as titled property, then you must call me Ms. YHWH, el Sr. de YHWH, and if you insist on calling me la Sra., the man I marry must be lo Sro. He must walk through the forest with me, gathering berries, plant a small garden to grow what we need, not complain when I refuse to bear him children. Cain and Cáin will not care for their own children, so we will take them in, raise them as our hijes, not just hijos, and the hijas will have my name, the name of my god, YHWH. Hijas de YHWH. Tierra de YHWH. Sangre de YHWH. And our hijes will not be cursed. Cain and Cáin, you are not cursed because of your mother but because of yourselves. “Yo Momma” is my sister. “Tu Madre” es mi hermana. We are les hijes del Bendite, children of God, el dios andrógine Who created la Tierra, lo hombre, la mujer. Created us to share.
Wordsmith

John "Johnkey" Key
I.
The room smells of crisp hospital sheets
and laundry detergent.
We’ve opened the window so you can hear
the sunshine and the blue jays
and Enya on the stereo softens
your breathing for a while.
Delicate orange and white flowers
lay their petals on the mirror
near your bed;
they don’t have long.

I pet your hair, still damp,
still thick, despite the radiation
(nothing could take away
those stubborn red and brown curls).
I hold your hand,
stroke each finger evenly,
counting each time you squeeze my hand.
Silly girl. I still hope.

I hold your hand
(and my breath)
all night. I feel
like a shallow grave, a cavity of
oxygen and tears. I am haunted
by the smell of chocolate chip cookies
I made in your kitchen.
They filled just enough space
to make me realize how empty I was,
like dropping a seed into a vast,
unsheltered ocean, I sink
into sleep.
II.
I dream you’re you again, giggling
like a naughty school girl,
some trick you’ve played,
some joke to tell.
I’m about to ask you
when I wake to someone shuffling—
it’s morphine time. Sweet remedy
for pain and lucidity. They told us
to give it liberally the last few hours.
They said it would be like taking a train;
I hold your hand to keep you
from leaving.

III.
You’re breathing
like a boxing match,
one you plan to lose.
In and out,
you shake and thrash,
an aged newborn
so unsure, so confused I wish
I could mediate your fight—
call some
time out
so we could rest…

IV.
I wear your lipstick to the funeral, pink
like your painted toenails,
and a short, low-cut black dress
to make a statement
for you. I wear heels
like I’m going to a party.

I smile
before I start to cry;
I hope you’re laughing somewhere.
THE SWEETS

FELICE REGINA
“Jeff?” Lucy asked.
“What is it?” He lifted his feet high in the grass, as high as he could, but the long thin stems were so tall he might’ve been shuffling. And Lucy, she was almost as good as buried in them as she trotted behind him.
“What can’t angels be big?”
“What?”
“Yeah. In movies, angels always have people sized wings, but sometimes when I think of them, they’re big as school buses!” Lucy’s arms exploded outward, sweeping through a mess of grass. She watched it bend violently then fall back into its usual rhythm.
“You’re all confused. Which is big, the angel or the wings?” Jeff walked through the shadow of a train of power lines.
“I don’t know, I’ve never seen an angel.”
Jeff snorted and widened his stride. When he realized he could only hear the grass crunching under his feet and sweeping around his body he turned and saw Lucy was gone. He thought it was funny how quickly the field fell quiet. His mind filled in the spots where the river should be passing some distance that way, and where, the other way, cars ought to be buzzing along. For moments he thought he could actually hear what he imagined. It was strange; his brain wouldn’t let him be alone.
“Jeff?” Lucy popped up from the grass a few feet away holding a wildflower.
He turned around and continued walking.
“Jeff, do you think people in the future will need juicers like the one Mom has?”
“What difference does it make?”
“Mom bought ours from a TV commercial. She uses it every day and I know she does because she always lets me taste them and sometimes they’re gross but I don’t tell her.”
“The last thing your mom needs is disappointment, huh?” He swiped at the grass and one blade stayed in his hand. He felt the smoothness of it freeing itself from the earth.
“Well, Mom says juicers are good because they take old flavors and make them new again. But Jeff, sometimes Mom’s new flavors are fun for a while but then I get tired of them. What happens when all the flavors get boring?”

“I guess it’s because they need a person to play the angel and people aren’t as big as buses.”

“But what about special effects?”

“Well yeah. But there’s something about a person playing an angel that’s kind of reassuring.”

The smell of a dusty and redundant summer. The sound of a car passing might’ve filled the air. But the grass was crunching and Jeff’s mind was working hard.

W I S H L I S T

M A T T H E W  S T I G L E R

I want to secede from this union
    and disappear to some mountain
        the answers have to be in
some place I’ve never been
Take me there.

I want chocolate cake,
    creamy and delicious and
dark as clouds
    before the rain looming overhead like toddler tyrants
        preparing for a primal tantrum
dark as the bottom
of the sandbox where 30 years ago my uncle
lost his shoe
lost his dignity
lost three marbles he won
four days before
five miles from his house
six years from seeing a dog shot
in the middle of a field,
clouds looming overhead
I don’t want to work for anything worthwhile,
I want my work to be full of lost hope
full of frivolity and eaten only by those
who, with some fruit besides plums
in their hands, will suck out the juice
in their hands beg forgiveness for complacency
because they realized that the world is burning
and sat down.
I want nothing more than to have a purpose
I want you to understand
it is not all about you
and your
wants, we’re all affected too
we all thought it figured
we all could smell the gingerbread
and we all knew you were dead,
so stop rubbing it in.
my jewish friend sneers
at the passing volkswagens
from behind the leather wheel
of her new ford escort

“don’t they know
their history?”

she goes on about hitler,
the nazis, the autobahn,
murdered distant relatives
under the pavement.

i don’t interrupt her because
i respect it.
she ends with an assurance
that she’ll always buy american.

i do not tell her
of my grandfather in buenos aires,
his union card,
his misshapen fingers,
or the difficulty he has
remembering names.

but i do suggest
that we get out and walk.
The Little Chef
Felice Regina
We haven’t talked much lately, and maybe you don’t care, but this whole friends thing really isn’t working. I think we should just be lovers. Don’t take this the wrong way, but after four months apart, I love you just as much as ever. And I don’t want you to take it personally, but I really don’t need any space right now. I feel like things are pretty well in order, and I’m quite stable actually. Maybe we shouldn’t see other people anymore. Don’t think of this as getting back together. Just think of it as a new stage in our breakup. I hope you aren’t too heartbroken about this because I really don’t want to hurt you. All I’m saying is I feel like we’re drifting together, like we’re hanging around with the same people and developing a lot of the same interests. Don’t get me wrong. We were great together as friends for a while. But now that we’ve cooled off a little and had more time to think about it, I have to admit that it feels a little awkward. I think it would be better for both of us if we just took a break and went back to being in love. It was more natural, you know. That’s how it all started out anyway. Maybe someday, we can put all this behind us and forget each other, but right now, I think the best thing we can do is spend as much time together as possible.
[The exterior of an open-air coffee shop in a poor but charming section of Havana, Cuba. The coffee shop protrudes toward the audience, sitting at the corner of a building in the middle of the stage. This is the only visible structure and it extends above the audience’s view. Dirty streets meet in front of the shop. Both run out of view on opposite sides of the dais, empty except for a few bikes, one motorcycle, and two American cars from the 1930s. At the point at which the two sides of the building meet, a metallic, green pole connects the cement below this shop with the second floor above. An askew poster on the shaft presents Fidel Castro and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara in messianic splendor. The poster, the building, and the surrounding vehicles evidence a certain wear. Everything seems depleted.

It is the first dark of an early evening in January. No music plays.

Close to the table, directly behind the metallic green pole, immediately at the center of the stage, there are two men. One stands to the left of the table. He is very handsome, of normal height and weight. He wears a bespoke navy blue suit and red tie. Wayfarer sun-glasses adorn his attractive face despite the fact that the sun is setting. He smokes a cigarette debonairly while looking toward the audience. The other man sits to the right of the table. He is much larger and totally bald. He appears fat despite a loose-fitting cut to his suit. If he were to stand, he would appear to be swimming in fabric. With one elbow on the table and his head in that hand, he stares disconsolately toward the standing figure. His other hand plays nervously with the cloth around his knees.

The standing figure is Senator John F. Kennedy. He has only weeks until he will be sworn in as President of the United States. The sitting figure is Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Lovers since meeting at a UN Summit on Nuclear Arms in 1957, the two congregate this evening to discuss their relationship’s future, or lack thereof. Khrushchev moves his hand from under the table and begins to tap his fingers loudly on its top. Kennedy regards him for a brief moment, sighs, and takes one long drag on his cigarette before tossing it into the unkempt street.]
Khrushchev [*pleadingly*]:

Jack, this isn’t fair! Is it about the weight? I can lose the weight.

*Kennedy removes his glasses slowly, tossing them onto the table. He still stares toward the audience.*

Kennedy:

Nikita, listen, that’s not it. You look fine. I already explained this to you. I’m going to be the President. You’re still the Soviet Premier. We have to call this off.

*Khrushchev furrows his brow in thought.*

Khrushchev [*excitedly*]:

What if I defected?

*Kennedy laughs, shakes his head, and sits again at the table, crossing his legs with one knee directly over the other. He still looks toward the audience, away from Khrushchev.*

Kennedy:

We both know you aren’t going to defect.

Khrushchev:

You’re right.

Kennedy:

I know.

*Khrushchev again bows his head in thought. He clinches his eyes shut.*

Khrushchev:

Be honest; is this about the weight? Jack, I can lose the weight.

Kennedy:

Stop that. Nikita, we both knew this wasn’t going to last. I tried to break this off in November after the election. I even told you we could continue this until the New Year but then we’d have to break it up. Do you remember what happened?

Khrushchev:

I don’t want to talk about that.

Kennedy:

You said you couldn’t handle it. You said it’d be like sitting on a ticking bomb. You told me we might as well leave each other right then and there. For once, you acted like a man.

Khrushchev:

I don’t want to talk about this.

Kennedy:

And, what happened next? I left Russia. I got on the submarine and went
back to Alaska. And, by the time I get to Juneau, who is calling in tears, begging that the two of us stay together until the inauguration? You were.

Khrushchev:

You cried, too!

Kennedy:

I was sad. So, I cried a little; in Russia right after we decided to end it. And, then, I was over it. I was over it by the time I boarded the submarine.

[Khrushchev guffaws in disbelief.]

Khrushchev:

I have feelings, Jack. When I thought what we had was going to end, I was very afraid. And, you didn’t have to accept continuing this until the inauguration. If you didn’t love me, you could have said so in Juneau.

Kennedy:

I honestly don’t know if I ever loved you, Nikita. The first time you said it to me, I didn’t respond. Do you remember that?

Khrushchev:

You said you were falling in love with me. That’s exactly how you responded.

Kennedy:

Right, right; I didn’t actually say that I loved you. And, to be honest, I wasn’t even falling in love with you. I didn’t have the heart to tell you that I didn’t feel reciprocally.

[Kennedy, growing visibly frustrated, takes a deep breath and laughs.]

Kennedy:

So, I told you that instead. How’s that sit with you?

[Khrushchev stares coldly at Kennedy in silence, backing away from the table. He looks toward the ground]

Kennedy:

Are you crying again?

[Khrushchev puts his hand over his eyes, fighting back tears.]

Khrushchev: No. Go away. This is over. I don’t want to talk anymore. You’re not welcome on my island. Fidel doesn’t want you here either.

Kennedy:

Nikita, come on. Don’t be melodramatic. I thought Russians were stoic and strong.
Khrushchev:
   No, shut your God damned, Yankee mouth. I can’t stand you. I can’t stand the way you talk. You sound ridiculous.
Kennedy:
   Hey, come on, Nicci. Let’s not say things we can’t take back.
   [Kennedy attempts to pat Khrushchev on the back.]
Khrushchev:
   Don’t touch me. I’m serious. You can’t charm me anymore.
Kennedy [haughtily]:
   You never charmed me.
Khrushchev:
   I never charmed you? You were never even the least bit attracted to me?
   [A few moments of silence pass as Kennedy shakes his head and laughs again.]
Khrushchev:
   Is it about the weight, Jack? Please, if it is, just tell me!
   [Kennedy stands abruptly, places both hands on the table, and stares at his former lover.]
Kennedy:
   Listen, I never loved you. I never will. I can’t explain why it worked at first but it did. And, then, despite my misgivings, I kept you around because you were so God damned nice to me. You treated me terrifically and I just couldn’t --
Khrushchev:
   I treated you that way because I loved you!
   [Kennedy laughs and looks toward the sky. He takes a few steps away from the table, eventually standing where he was at the play’s beginning.]
Kennedy:
   Sure, maybe you did. But, that’s not the issue. You were so kind. Nobody treats anybody as well as you treated me. But, that doesn’t ever mean the feelings were mutual.
   [A few more seconds of silence pass.]
Khrushchev:
   Then what were they?
Kennedy:
   I want to say it worked as a marriage of convenience but that’s not right. It was all about the kindness. But, I was only decent to you because you were so kind
to me.
Khrushchev:
    I treated you that way because I loved you. Jack, why can’t you understand that?
Kennedy:
    Stop calling me that. I’m President Kennedy. Remember that. And, love isn’t the issue.
Khrushchev:
    How can love not be the issue?
Kennedy:
    Because I never loved you, Nikita. And, I’m fine with that. You’re the one with problems. Look at yourself, you’re crying like a school-girl.
    [Khrushchev puts his head on the table, defeated.]
Kennedy [with increasing condescension]:
    This is what I’m talking about it. Get over it. Cowboy up, Comrade. Have you really never been through something like this before? I’m sorry I had to do this to you. It’ll get easier, though, trust me.
    [Kennedy looks at his watch and approaches the table. He grabs the sun glasses and puts them back on while turning to walk toward the motorcycle. He looks at Khrushchev for a few moments and then looks at the ground. Once more, he laughs. Next, the Senator straddles the motor-bike. Khrushchev, head still on the table, begins to wail with tears.]
Kennedy:
    I know, this hurts you. I’m sorry. Just, you know, get over it. Drink it off, whatever you got to do.
    [Khrushchev’s sobs grow even louder.]
Kennedy:
    Sorry, Nikita. You’re a good guy. Something will work out.
    [Kennedy pulls a key out of his coat pocket and ignites the engine. The cycle starts and he pops the most fantastic wheelie you’ll ever see while riding out of the audience’s view, stage left.]
Khrushchev [amid tears]:
    Yankee Bastard!
    [The noise of the President’s motorcycle grows faint. The lighting on the stage is brought down entirely. Two spotlights, first pointed toward the opposite ends of
the dais, slowly converge near the center, on Khrushchev’s pathetic figure. The only sound is his continued sobbing. Over the next thirty seconds, however, Khrushchev gradually regains composure. Finally, he looks toward the audience, defiantly, and stands.]

Khrushchev [addressing the audience directly]:

Nobody will treat that arrogant bastard the way I treated him. And, he doesn’t deserve to ever be treated with kindness ever again. He’s petty and small and mean. He doesn’t want love. He wants gratification, all types. This whole damn world only wants gratification, all types. Well, I want something greater than that. [The Soviet National Anthem begins to play.]

Khrushchev:

I will strive for something great. I don’t want money. I don’t want fame. I don’t want people to love me the way they love Jack. [At the mention of his former lover’s name, Khrushchev flinches momentarily. He seems again on the verge of tears.]

Khrushchev:

That petty, stupid, no-good, handsome, Yankee devil…Son of a bitch! No, Nikita, don’t do this. He’s done with you and now, even if you don’t want to be, you’re done with him… [The Soviet Anthem fades.]

Khrushchev:

He’s a bastard. No man’s love is worth your tears, Nikita. No man’s love is worth your tears. Not even Jack’s. Not even beautiful, intelligent, hyper-charismatic Jack’s. [Khrushchev, placing his hands on his hips and looking skyward, sits back at the table. The spotlights fade and the stage lights resume. Seated, Khrushchev looks to his left and then his right. The barren, dirty street seems to depress him. He shakes his head slowly and laughs.]

Khrushchev [to himself]:

Huh. Until now, I never realized what a fucking shit hole Cuba really is…

CURTAIN
Ode In An Airport

Elizabeth Muire

The problem I’ve found
With writing everywhere
You go
Is that some places
Just don’t make good Muses.
There’s so much possibility
In metaphors of flight
Of hope and birds and
Escape.
But what the hell
Rhymes with threat level
Orange?

Café Del Corazón

Trevor Flynn

I am walking through the dew,
wishing that our dorm would flood
with all the coffee we’ve consumed.
You and I might come up for air,
sharing a scalding first-last kiss
before the caffeine spiraled
down our arteries and blew open
our hearts, providing some
extra flavor to this awful brew.
Skull

Katherine Leonard

Rehistory - Driven to Extinction

Bryant Wright
I felt like such a gringa when I couldn’t roll my r’s, and what was the difference between pair-o, pero and perro anyway? My r’s were mistaken for d’s and l’s and th’s, so I practiced in the shower: pero—perro—pero—perro. There seemed to be no rrrroom in my mouth for such a sound. Why even write it the same way if it sounded so different? I was jealous of my cat, just sitting there purrrrrrrring in my lap like it was so easy, as if to say, I’m more cultured than you are. I’d beg her, Teach me, Dulcie dulce. Enséñame a hablath como ti. She just purred and rolled over, rolled like a native tongue, like my tongue wouldn’t. Mi lengua danced around my mouth, tried to do the flamenco, the tango, the salsa, which I only knew how to eat. I hoped I would never need to go undercover in Mexico or I’d be exposed by mi lengua, mi lengua gringa, mi lengua que quería ser mariposa, colibrí, but it was nothing, nada, but a red rug, a dry slug, a sore roar. ¡Ay de la lengua mía!
I may or may not have just found a Hallmark card that I may or may not have bought for myself. I’m sure I had a Special Friend in mind when I was standing in line, but reading it now, I know whoever I bought it for didn’t deserve the condolences the card was offering. Which explains why I am holding it in my hand today.

I read it over today and it seemed that it spoke to Me.

It read: “I’m here for you, if ever, whenever, and however you need me to be.” It said more to me than any Special Friend ever had.
Please lay here with me on the ground and we can talk about these things.

We can talk about the dusk and how the watermelon skies feel on my face. We can talk about the bird I saw run across the street with its gold feathers waving frantically in the wind. We can talk about the green and red chiles I ate and how my tongue burst into fire.

Let us talk about the kind of laughter that makes my stomach ache with joy. Let us talk about the soap bubbles in her sink and the rainbows that live there. Let us talk about the drizzling rain that misted my glasses until all I could see was a grey happiness.

Tell me about the way water slips and drops from a blade of grass. Tell me about the horses that live in the ocean at night. Tell me about the tears sliding through the wrinkles on her face.

I know how to make the smoke rise in circles. I know how to send music across the dark and tepid waters. I know that the way she smiles means light through a stained glass window.

Please lay here with me in the sky and tell me what you know.
Wall Of Rain
Ashley Rebecca Conway

Window-pain
Lyndsey Johnson
We don’t sleep together anymore. We just pass out in the same bed. And you’re still beautiful when you sleep, and I feel love but no more comfort than if I were alone. Your breathing isn’t fascinating or even something strange.

Tonight, by the light of our closet, I’m trying to figure out what’s gone and why my throat is tight, as if I were about to say something I’m afraid you might hear.

The ocean seems built to weep. You always said things like that and expected me to be able to explain them, as if I too was made of water. With skin so white, you would whisper, running your fingers down my neck, your veins must hold water instead of blood. I agree that that would explain my lack of pigment, but not my lack of tears. I didn’t cry even one when you left, just smiled and settled into the peaceful melancholy that I have always called home. Do you think the moon lives there too? I asked a fish. I think it does and that it controls my tides just like the ocean’s. I rise and fall as your chest did when you held me close to you. Maybe you don’t care to hear this, but sometimes, in my dreams, you curl up into a ball, and I hold you while you cry for both of us. When I wake, I remember your tiny tears, each one an ocean.
Soles
Megan Peak

I ran through our dead yard
After a frisbee or old ball
That you threw for me to catch
But I came back with blood in my
Soles
Dripping from a rusty nail
That was sitting crossed in wood
Like some message
We hobbled back together
Though you were not bleeding
From any superficial wound
And heather lifted me up on the rumbling
Washing machine
To look at the black thing that stuck
From my arch
I don’t remember crying
Much
But I remember taking that wood pile
To the trash and
Throwing the cross back where it came from
And taking the nail and holding it
Somewhere close
The grainy metal smelling of dried blood and cells
Of whatever makes up a body
And wondering why people feel so much
BALLERINA

KATHERINE LEONARD

59
LAMENTATION

ERIN FRISCH

Pieces of you are falling off of me
In small delicate pieces.
They indulge in a few aimless twirls
Before being absolved into the ground.
It’s a slow evolution,
Quietly beginning and progressing
At a constant rate
With an inevitable conclusion.

I’ve forgotten street names
And all the other images.
I was so sure I’d remember.
Whipporwill.
Ivy Ann.
Lakeshore.

It doesn’t hurt.
There’s just an ache, induced by
awareness.
Maybe it’s wrong to be so indifferent.
It just seems wasteful
To expend such emotion.
How can I resent the inevitable?
I used to fight it,
Throw myself against it
Until it had nearly conquered me.
Now I am weakened into submission.
I let time pass over me.
Manipulating me,
As it has manipulated others.

I am consoled by remembering
When I sat under familiar trees,
Old ridged wood under my bare feet.
All of my memories are now reduced to nostalgia.
But that’s how things always are.
Only this rough jolt of change has brought me to
awareness.
Now, as I am looking up at these new trees,
Black and brown from shade-obstructed sunlight,
I can feel fascination with the novelty
But no solace.
My passivity begins to intermingle with unrest.
And as a rush of wind awakens me,
It brings forth that which I previously denied.
Regret.
SABBATH

KAYLEIGH OVERMAN

Waking up: five, four…too late and blood-sharp screech denoting where rest and work begins. I want to do something today, I think and can almost hear Angelina (or in daily parlance, Lina) say, as opposed to all the other days, in her still, voluptuous, fleshly, jocose murmur.

“Lina.” I say.
“Hmmmmm?”
“I’m going out.”
“It’s very early.”
“7:30.”
“It’s very early.”
“Shut up,” I tell her and kiss her cold cheek. “You’re cold.”
She shrugs the blanket around her cheek and sighs, “Thanks.”

***

I’m on the street ten minutes later. Everything’s golden. The sun’s a sick fever, but it’s good and it’s bracing. A pregnant woman rubs a gloved hand against the purple cloth concealing her memorable stomach as she stands reading a newspaper next to a smoking man.

She knew I was just teasing, Lina. We pretend to talk rough to each other (Shut up, Go to hell, etc.) because it makes her laugh. A year before we were married, I read Endgame and still had it when she brought her cascades of women’s silks, satins, and suedes (along with all her other uncomfortable, begrudgingly loved comforts) to take up permanent residence with me. One day, I was looking for books to donate to the local library when I saw that Beckett’s favorite had been marked with a piece of blue lace. I opened it to the page and in dry red pencil, Lina underlined Nell’s line, “Unhappiness is the funniest thing in the world” and scribbled “Ha Ha” beside it in a way that only a lover and husband would know she was sincere. An odd one, my Lina. Perhaps a grim, abortive masochist.

Down the street there’s a slack-skinned lovely looking hopelessly fertile and unfulfilled. Ice blue gloved hands jingling at her sides she suddenly turns to me, takes a few steps and turns again. As I pass, she continues to pace with stoic irregularity.

The library, a coffee shop, a resale store, a boho boutique all bathed in a democratizing cold radiance as I walk by. Dry, chapped hands beg for alms, and I
give them two gilded dollar bills without looking at their face. There’s a devastat-
ing number of white cars along the curb and drifting up and down the streets.

We were kids when we were married, now we’re infants. I think she said that. But she was right, it is early and my ambiguous goal will have to be post-
poned until the world is sufficiently awake. So I buy some coffee. Unhappily, from across the room another early-riser eyes me. His hands shake as he surrenders to more than swallows the oily steam-crazed coffee. Maybe he hasn’t slept at all and what I see as early is to him the quickly lengthening lateness.

No one else is in the coffee shop.

I read the cover of a month old magazine and try not to feel like I’m at a doctor’s office. Keep Your Man Satisfied: 10 Things He Craves. What Hip Size Says About Heredity: Take the Quiz. Hot Winter Fashions. Hips, hot winters, and things I (as a He) must crave. Lina likes to read aloud to me at night. Last night it was “In the Penal Colony.” The things you do to Kafka, Lina love.

It’s good no one else is out on this deliriously radiant Saturday. Brave acrid coffee and a morning white with frozen sun. A beam is draped across the table and a fly shuffles in its minimal degrees of warmth as if on a highway, but the road’s clear and even as it gets later, the place is still empty except for the belated voyeur to my right.

Cloud passes the sun. For all the time wasted, it’s 9:00.

***

Returning to Lina. She’s awake and hums triumphantly. “Hi there.”

“Hey.”

Curled on a chair, looking like how Saturday feels, she sighs. “What’d you do?”

“Terrible things, love.” I slip an arm around her shoulder and her mouth full of joyous, defiled morning greets mine. She allows me to kiss her for long, awkward moments until I feel dizzy leaning down and she whispers, her teeth gracefully intruding into my mouth, “Tell me about the villages you’ve pillaged.”

“It’s much worse than that.” I confess.

She sighs into my mouth, “Oh?”

“Mmmm.” She pinches off the kiss and reclines. “I spent the morning reading about what I should crave.” I tell her.

“ ‘Crave.’ That’s a nice word. We don’t use it, do we?”

“Not as often as we should.” I take off my coat and my scarf. “Here’s a bagel.” I pull the slick bag from the coat’s pocket.
“Thank you.” She opens the bag and gently begins to dismember the bagel. “So,” she mutters, “what is it you want?”

“Oh, lady,” I sit across from her, “I wouldn’t take your purity.”

She grins. “Have you eaten?”

“I had coffee.”

She stands up and in two steps she’s encased in our kitchenette with its Picasso print and the yellow bandanna she found on the street catching damp light and simultaneously fading as it hangs in the window above the sink. “You know, when I asked you if you’d eaten, you could have said, ‘no.’ You realize this don’t you?” She laughs because once awake, she is the morning.

“I know. I just assumed you wanted more detail.”

“Hmmm…how wrong you were.”

“We all are once in a while.”

She cracks an egg. “I didn’t think you were.”

“Yay. Then I’ve tricked you.”

“I guess you have.”

She brings me the eggs. Before I have a chance, she says, “You’re welcome” and returns to her spot and the bagel. “Thanks” I say belatedly. She merely winks and ravishes the bagel with cruel happiness.

“Let me tell you about my morning,” she says.

“Anything interesting?”

“Maybe you’ll think it is.” She swallows. “Sorry, let me get something to drink.”

“I’ll get it. I want some more coffee anyway.”

“Caffeine junkie. I married a filthy junkie and we’ll raise our children in desperate poverty.”

I bring her a mug of crystal cold cranberry juice and then return for the coffee. “It might not be bad. Look at all the great artists that came from terrible homes.”


“So,” I sit down with the coffee and with Lina, “what happened this morning?”

“Well, I checked my email when I got up this morning at about 8:15 or so. And guess what? I got an email—“

I interrupt with an exaggerated gasp. She smiles, takes another bite of the bagel and continues, “One of those mass emails that get passed around to every-
one. You remember Marla? Well, she sent it to me and now I remember why we aren’t friends anymore. People that send out mass emails have diseased souls.”

I agree.

“Well, I was going to delete it, but I opened it anyway even though it’s against my principles.” She laughs. “Turns out, someone read this email to me a long time ago, when I was in school. I must have been only twelve or fourteen. I guess fourteen.”

Five years before we met.

“I had this teacher that always began his classes with reading these stupid mass emails to us. He was a history teacher, and I don’t remember anything from the class but these inane emails. We all ignored him when he read them… we all ignored him when he lectured also, but we all liked the emails better. One day, I actually listened to one. I think I had just finished reading Journey to the End of the Night. I need to get that book for you. I don’t have my copy anymore. It’s so sick, you’d love it. Well, the email he read that day always stuck with me, all through undergrad and I think about it sometimes in class. I haven’t told you about it? About that professor that gets his face punched in?”

“I don’t remember it.”

“Well, basically, it says that it’s supposed to be a true story, but that’s an insult to the collective intelligence of the internet using world. So, it’s this story about this professor of ethics or philosophy or maybe some science, but I think it might be philosophy. Oh well, he’s not real. But I have always seen his face and he has lank white hair and a hook nose and eyes that might make lonely girls fall in love with him.”

“You’ve really put some thought into this.”

“I heard it when I was fourteen…that was….”

“Seven.”

“Seven. Thanks. Seven years ago. So I’ve had time.”

“Well, what happens to him? He gets punched?”

“Hang on. Well, it turns out that he talks all through his class about why God isn’t real. When I was fourteen I thought this was crazy until I took a sociology class and then I understood the one track minds of professors.”

And the sons of men.

“So, he keeps going on his tirade day after day until the last day of class. And this is how I know it’s not true because in the story all the students show up because the professor, let’s call him Benjamin Stone—that’s a good name for a
professor—tells them that on the last day of class he’s going to prove that God isn’t real. Now, we have been among the college crowd, and how would a real class react to this grand news?”

“They would have gotten wasted the night before and gotten up at noon, three hours after Dr. Stone comforted the atheists.”

“Exactly. So, anyway, let’s pull a Coleridge (her strange, adorable, pretentious way of asking me to suspend our disbelief) and imagine that these starved souls show up on time—No! Fifteen minutes early, eager as Israelites to receive the tablets, shall we say?” She laughed.

“Let’s say.”

“Alright. So, Benny Stone teaches from this dais—I should have told you that in the beginning because it’s important. Well, he stands up there and puts a stool on the dais and climbs up.” Lina jumps up and stretches her arms, “And he stretches his arms and calls out, ‘If the Almighty God is real, let Him knock me, a feeble man much broken with sorrow and various degenerative diseases, from this stool. That’s all He has to do to prove His reality.’”

Lina drops her arms and sits again. “Further proof this is fiction: they all stay. It’s the last day of class and they all sit there for upwards of thirty minutes. The room is silent. Benny Stone stands firm. His thin legs shake a bit and his arms tremble, but the stool stands and so does he-- this great O’Connor cast-off.

“Then--” Lina springs up, smiling broadly. “Then! This football player walks in forty-five minutes late and looks at dear old Stone stretched out in front of the blank chalk board. He looks at a buddy on the front row and asks what’s going on. The friend fills him in on the existential battle waging five feet from him and the football player I’ve named Duncan gives his books to his friend.”

She assumes Benjamin Stone’s pose, except one of her legs curls elegantly upward like a flamingo as she balances on the imaginary stool.

“Then” she exclaims, voice cracking into a soprano strained octave, “Then he walks up to him and BAM. Punches his face in-- and he flies off.” She claps her hands together and falls back into the chair, crying suddenly, explosively punctuating her own onomatopoeia.

“Then,” she sobs into her thin cold hands, “Duncan stands over him and says,” her voice breaks off and already, my arms are around her. She is shaking. Lina leans into my shoulder, her hot, tearful saliva soaking a gorgeous flower shape into my shirt. “He tells Benny, ‘God is too busy and He sent me to take care of jackasses like you.’ And…and I’d never heard my history teacher curse before and I was shocked he did-- not because I hadn’t heard much worse, but because,”
her hands pumping feverishly at her streaming eyes, “he thought that part of the story was so important. That’s why."

I help her stumble to our couch and hold her. She cries rapid, undulating sobs into my chest and says over and over, “I don’t know.”

Paradoxically, I can only say, “I know.”

Finally, she coughs and coughs and coughs, and I jump up and bring her the cranberry juice. She stares into the red reflecting cup and whispers, “Do you think Benny Stone believed in God after that? With his nice nose broken? And his sad, sad eyes? Sadder.”

“It’s a story,” I begin.

“Stop it,” she sobs without force, “I know it is. I know that.”

SOFTENING LIGHT

Brett Shaw

I will mellow out the ways
I’m affected, like a honeyed spoon for the continued mornings, springing anew, except now I will float a little, more amber opacity less stark outlines of broken keys laid on the piano divided black to white, now everything will shimmer, dust motes in the crack of window light, which seem almost electric beings instead of grey inconsequentialities, and night will come, through neon lights, an intensity to fry retinas away, and our attention will be focused past the shouts, to the outer void, to hang in starlight above the noise, where we will make new lives, and sup the liquid chocolate that enhances us and makes truth right.
"- and thus was the Empire forged."
—Play on.
Not because the lit, lonely cube
crowded with empty furniture we’re
situated in demands it, not because the lights are low,
or because my body relaxes when you do.

But because not playing is a concert too.

(My single, ever-once clap
is as good as a hundred.)

Please do not play for you, for me,
because your instrument was made,
or for your black button-down shirt.
Nor for my cigarette whose orange ring
sulks toward my lips. Because I will light another.

Rather, since outside the trees rustle the tune of mortality.

(Your song might never be heard by anyone
you don’t know. Maybe for that.)

Do not imagine a coffee ring is permanent on a table,
for trees, like single hands, reach up.
Maybe for rain, or for God, or
for a wish to spread their roots and fly.
Who knows. But when they die, these hands are empty.

Do you lament that?
MAN PRINT

JOHN "JOHNKEY" KEY
I believe that it is human to want to leave everything.

I want a Plane Ticket that:

a. doesn’t have a date.

b. that I could buy when I had the money and use when I had the feelings.

c. I could “sit on,” like how people “sat on” bars of silver in the Great Depression.

d. could be locked away in a safe.

e. that could be taken to a bank to be cashed in like a bond check for a voyage. Isn’t that how bond checks work?

f. could change the course of the world, like some sort of butterfly effect: the simple gesture of my foot crossing the threshold into the customs line would start a fire in Australia and kill all of the Koalas. The only ones alive would be the ones already living in zoos. Koalas would then become more popular than Pandas, which would just be crazy. I mean, think about it. Pandas are always the most popular zoo attraction.

Often, I imagine myself buying a plane ticket for Chicago and coveting it in my bedside table drawer that locks, taking it out when I feel sad and holding it in my hands, or running my fingers over my name printed on the ticket in big block letters (REBECCA REINHARDT) and thinking to myself, “This escape was made especially for me.” Sometimes in my daydream, I get sad enough to stick the ticket in my back pocket and pack a suitcase. I never make it out of the door on the first few times I do this. Instead, I collapse into the suitcase, exhausted from crying, and go to sleep with my raccoon-eyed face in the pile of my unfolded clothes inside of that 4’x1’x2’ rectangle.

One time, though, I’ll leave. It’s inevitable, eventually I will get worked up enough to go and my daydream will become reality. I’ll pack my clothes—folded this time—and I won’t forget a toothbrush or anything. I’ll make it out of my room and I’ll make it to the airport and I’ll be gone for the weekend. A long weekend. I imagine that I’d leave on a Thursday. I think that a Thursday night has the possibility to stir up enough agitation inside of me to do this kind of thing.
I’ll leave my phone in my bedside table drawer that locks because I’ll have switched it out for the plane ticket. I’ll show up, unannounced, and I’ll stay in my best friend Rachel’s room. She goes to school in Chicago and she’s got a dorm room there. While I’m there, I’ll do a lot of thinking and take a lot of walks in the city, but I won’t take any pictures. I don’t want proof of this. It is unacceptable for me to leave a mark, except maybe in the heart of a stranger who’ll see me wandering around Logan Square touching the bark on the trees and looking pensive. Usually they won’t remember that they ever saw me, except when they get drunk at parties and realize that life around them is moving so slow, yet there’s still so much life to be lived: there are careers to start, papers to sign, bills to pay, children to make, houses to buy, retirement funds to invest in, funerals to attend. They’ll feel so overwhelmed with the future they have to live that they’ll want to run away, and they’ll remember me with hope, the blonde vagabond wandering N. St Louis Street with a big backpack. They’ll think, I’ve got to get away; I’ve got to get away like how The Blonde Vagabond got away. Where’s the nearest computer, I need to buy a plane ticket. That’s the only kind of mark I’d be okay with leaving.

I’m pretty sure that people back home would have noticed that I left, and they’d ask me about it when I got back.

“Where did you go?”
“Why did you do it?”
“What was the weather like?”
“Did you buy me anything?”

Maybe they’d even have called the police, and I’d have to talk to them about it at the same time. I don’t even know how I’d respond, I don’t know what kind of lie I could tell. This is the thing that scares me the most about doing this. I don’t care about the money or about my school work, it’s the fact that I’d have to face my friends with answers when I got back that deters me the most. I mean, what do you say? How do you not seem crazy in a situation like that? I’m not crazy, I’m restless and my body aches, I have to get out of here or something! Don’t you understand?
Verdant Rose
Stephany Weaver
Morning Bike Ride
Paul Hoeg

Reach the top
The sun
The river
And descend
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With our thanks,
Lauren Browning & Ashley Gabbert
Co-Editors, 2009-2010