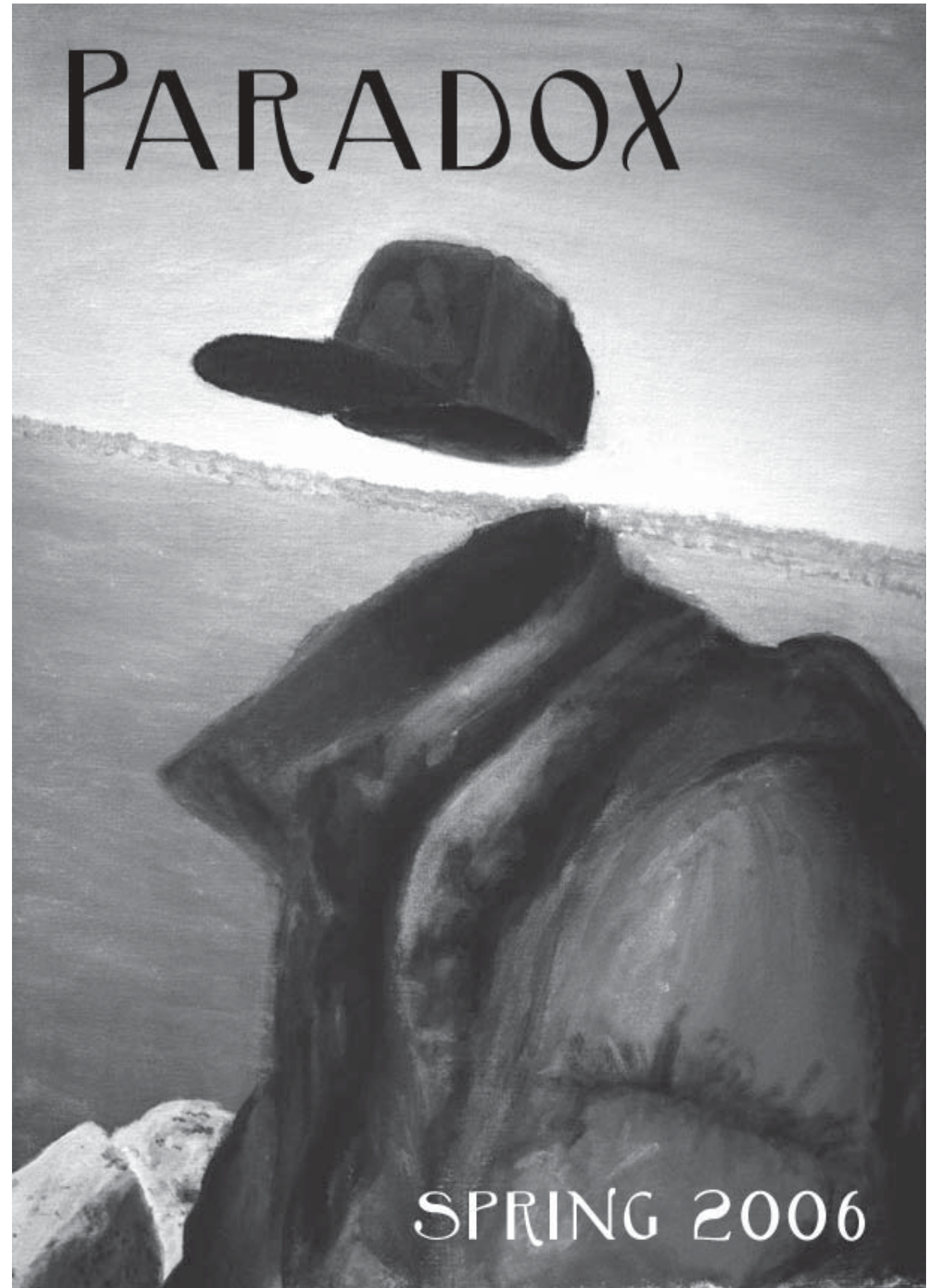


PARADOX



SPRING 2006

PARADOX

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*Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful
that which is distorted.*

Percy Shelley

Volume 8

Issue 3

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PARADOX STAFF

EDITORS

Marshal Caro
Callin Curry
Samantha Huntington
Catherine Mahoney
Carlin Starrs

STAFF

Sarah Abrams
Alice Baker
Katie Buder
Elise Calonico
Patrick Fitzgerald
Emma Floyd
Nicolas Franco
Gregoria Grigsby-Olson
Catherine Kim
Dakota Ledford
Yesenia Lopez
Amber Magaña
Dyani Main
Michael McRae
Amanda Nguyen
Eila Saarni
Jason Shaw
Joshua Stein
Max Sussman
Erin Woulfe

ART EDITOR

Sean Cochrane



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W

I apologize to W
For saying such
Mean things about him,

Even though
He really
Deserved it all along.

D said one day
“Why do you
Suppose he’s inadequate?”

I replied I
Wasn’t sure
And pinched myself.

Walking down the
Staircase, W trips
On his shoelace,

And regains
His balance by
Tripping on the other.

SEAN COCHRANE

FALLING

falling like stars from the sky
our dreams slip through our fingers
all of the chances we should have taken
are laughing in our faces

SARAH ABRAMS

UNBROKEN

Behind closed eyes
The figures on my eyelids
Dance in a perpetual painting,
Moving through the hall
In groups of two
To a cheerless song.
The couple in back,
A man and a woman
wearing black and blue
Move gently, hands raised
One in the other,
Like a music box
Which travels forever.
They spin once more,
Two as one,
With eyes locked firmly
In a sort of promise
That's deeper than words.
Down her cheek
Runs a single tear
And she looks away.

CARLIN STARRS

THE QUEEN AND HER DIAMONDS

There was a cherry tree in front of my house. It was an ugly, black-burgundy colored monstrosity of a thing, with bitter fruit and leaves that fell to the ground during autumn, producing a mess which I eventually had to clean up. It covered three-fourths of the closest second floor window which overlooked the front yard and the driveway and the street beyond that, as well as the neighbor's place across that street.

I left my house every day and looked upon that tree with distaste. There it was, covering that window, along with a fourth of the front of the house. It stood tall, as if it were the most splendid tree on the entire face of the earth. It had grown larger since I first moved in, almost reaching the height of the house. I wondered if perhaps I might cut it down, ridding myself of the unappetizing fruit and the perpetual fall of autumn leaves. I convinced myself I'd do it sometime, someday, when I wasn't so busy.

Then came an odd, fateful morning, when I happened to be sitting outside, behind the tree, enjoying the warm summer air and crisp sunshine. The grass sparkled with dew and I sat transfixed for a while. The sun was high in the blue sky, having risen just to the right of my neighbors' house, across the street.

I looked up at the tree and, for an instant, my heart stopped beating and my breath was caught in my throat. There, before me, was a tree with branches extending mightily above and leaves of the deepest, most beautiful crimson; leaves whose tips were dripping with tiny diamonds, glistening in the morning sunlight. There this tree stood, majestically, elegantly—a queen in all her stature.

It was then that I began to cry. I cried tears of the oddest sort. I was neither happy, nor sad. Nor was I relieved nor excited nor distressed. I suppose now, that I might have cried out of the beauty of it all, of this tree, which I knew was only the same ugly cherry tree I had glared at countless times before. For I knew in my head that it was just the sunlight behind the translucent leaves that caused them to look red and the diamonds were really only drops of morning dew. But all the same, I sat there and gazed at that magical tree, lost in its strange beauty—the beauty of this queen and her diamonds.

CATHERINE KIM

the East Coast, lord knows I've paid some dues getting through." I still play them Dylan every day, but it's different. It's like getting communion at church. You do it not because you want it or need it or gain entrance into heaven because of it. You do it because you've been doing it for so long you feel obligated to continue. On my days off and on weekends, I sit outside on my patio and listen to Dylan with my raccoons. Sometimes I read a book, but usually I just relax on the patio, alone with my family of raccoons and God's gift to music.

MAX SUSSMAN

that for around three months. Then I had a thought: “They’re raccoons, not people. Maybe they respond differently to different things.” So I reversed tactics.

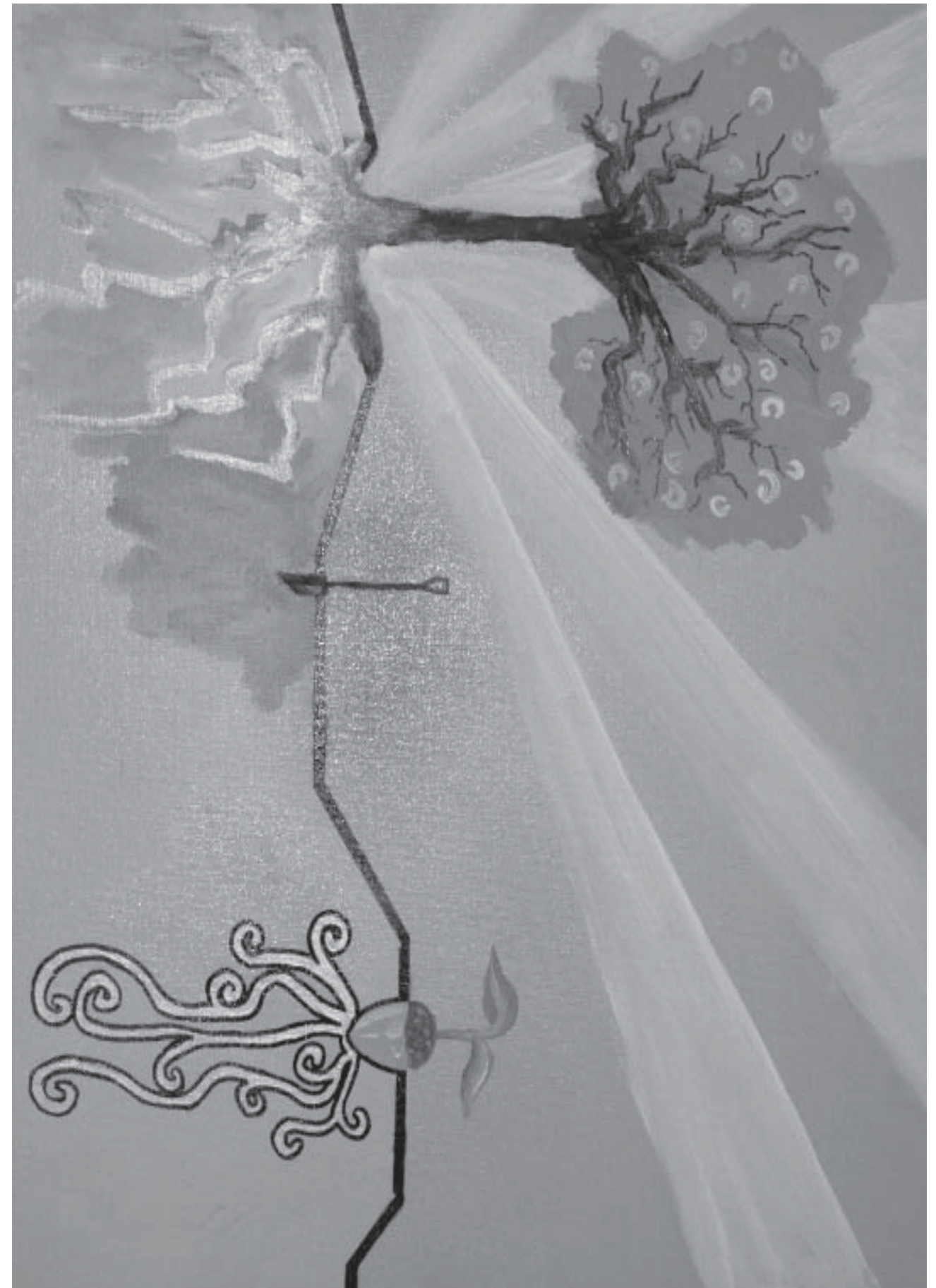
What music do you like the best? That’s difficult. I like a lot of stuff. If you had to pick one CD to have with you on a deserted island, which would you take with you? I’d take my iPod. Pretend iPods don’t exist. I’d need a boombox or at least a discman. Then you’d have a discman. I’d probably take The Freewheeling Bob Dylan. Play them The Freewheeling Bob Dylan, see how they react. The album? Or his entire catalogue? It doesn’t matter.

I began playing Dylan for them all the time. Every day I’d put a different album on, repeated from when I woke up to sundown. First it was *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan*. Then it was *Blonde on Blonde*. I even played them the album titled *Dylan*, easily his most awful work, in hopes that they’d leave because it just sucked. They gradually, after hearing Dylan every day, became calmer, less punk rock and a little more peace and love. I was kind of hoping to go outside and see them sitting in a circle with acoustic guitars singing “We Shall Overcome.”

I read in college that Truman Capote had once called Jack Kerouac a “typist.” I also read that Kerouac was a huge fan of Capote’s. I hope that Dave Eggers never calls me a typist. I would be heartbroken.

The raccoons, since I have been playing them Dylan records for about nine months, have become complacent, even contemplative. They seem to be poets, sitting under my patio, thinking deep thoughts and living in their heads.

It’s a damn good thing I like Bob Dylan or I’d probably have gone insane. I would have started speaking in verse. People would come up and ask me where I’m going and I’d say “Headed out for



NOOSES AND COFFEE RINGS

Eyes focus
A lonely leaf tumbles from its suicide branch
I loathe its fall
She watches the stream
It twists inside her
I feel my heart crack and her lips tear
The crash of silence pounds through me
This reality warps
I am hidden in a neverland of leaves
Mass suicide is dripping onto the roses in my cheeks
A storm rages behind my eyes
There is clarity in my blindness
I've found my missing note
My song plays clear and empty
Like glass in her eyes
Half past November is a time as cold as love
Clouded in a firework of nothing
She devoured in a moment of laughter
Ringing notes captured in our shelter
Fluttering inside me is a grasp at life
Our emptiness never felt so full

SAMANTHA HUNTINGTON

backyard. I had one thought a lot while I was setting up the speakers. "Why am I going to such lengths to get rid of raccoons?" They look like burglars, I would tell myself. My voice (in my head) would rise at the end like I was asking a question.

When I was a lot younger, maybe four or five, we had feral cats living in our backyard. My mom set up a trap. One night, I heard the trap slam shut. I immediately got excited, but I was in bed and I was five years old, afraid to go outside in the dark. So I was up all night anticipating going outside to check the trap in the morning. What I found was something I had never seen before. It was an opossum, only I didn't know it was an opossum. All I could come up with in my small head was the Rodents Of Unusual Size in the movie *The Princess Bride*. Those things scared the hell out of me when I saw the movie, so naturally, the opossum made me conjure up images of The Fire Swamp. I seem to have had a rodent aversion since then. It's a shame, as I have heard many times that *The Princess Bride* is a fantastic movie.

When I was first trying to get the raccoons to leave, I played them stuff that by no means would let me sleep. I played them Primus, I played them Zappa, I played them the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Zappa. I even went out and bought a CD by what I think is the worst band in history: Korn. This didn't make them budge; it instead made them angry. It made them the kind of angry you see in videos of the mosh pit from Woodstock '94. I would like to state here that I love Zappa and Primus. I hate Korn, but Primus rocks, as does Zappa. Les Claypool is a brilliant bassist. I kept playing them this music, sticking to metal and anything loud and kind of a-melodic for quite some time, hoping that they would one day get so pissed off they'd run off to the Gilman and vent. I did

up and hightailed it inside. Looking through my screen door, I could see the little furry rodent looking for me. Raccoons are vicious little bastards.

When do raccoons sleep? I asked myself a few days later. Well, last time I checked, they seemed to be nocturnal animals, so that would mean they sleep during the day. What pisses you off more than anything when you're trying to sleep? Well, obviously loud and a-melodic music. How can I drive these raccoons away? Play loud and a-melodic music during the day.

I have been blessed, or cursed, with the innate ability to give a fantastic job interview. I also am able to live incredibly frugally, hence my living in a cottage on Milvia. The job interview skill came into play as I interviewed at the Safeway on the corner of Rose and Henry, about a half mile from the North Branch library, where I spent most of my childhood. You must be thinking "Man, you're proud of giving a good interview at Safeway? You aim pretty low for someone who wants to be a writer." Here's the thing about Safeway: It's a union job. The people at the cash register make around \$20 an hour and get full benefits with paid vacation. That's a pretty good job coming right out of college with degree that can't help you with anything. Not many accounting firms or advertising firms look for 22 year old Creative Writing majors. That's probably a huge reason why I had to go all the way to Canada to major in Creative Writing. Nothing is good or useful in America if it doesn't help you get a job and/or money. I got the Safeway job. I bag your groceries and say, "Thank you Mr./Mrs. So and So," as I hand you your coupon that comes with being a Safeway Club Card holder.

It was with this money that I got as a highly paid and largely unskilled Check Out Boy that I bought speakers to install in my

FOR PULSES THAT QUICKEN

Of gentle sea and black tar tree
Here I stand, hair in shambles
Until I have told my thoughtdream (and it rambles)
I will not cease, I will be seen

Come as we go down
This complicated plot
Whose lifetime has been stalled and stopped
Whose story has never been told since the Earth was knocked
around

How should I know where the thoughts of me go
When synapses froze and took with them my ego

You see naught but what you wish
To live your favorite moment repeatedly
These questions to which you respond heatedly
Were nothing if you missed them in the mist

Of angry bitter foe and friend
Does sleep in peace of mind that's rested heads
Whose mind turns off when pillow hits skull hits bed
And does its best to save you in the end

A star is born, rinsed in holy water and absinthe
Perhaps washed out by a hose
Though those closed door noose's nose
Of magic plant and paper
Your eyes wander, born of caper
Silence but still waking dripping white drool

Your opus composed
Steady walk, predisposed
To violence, to silence
To answer what questions, all questions been posed
Your sorry thought opposed
Through stilted heart, javelin thrown
Until you wander, torn asunder, alone

MAX SUSSMAN

tell you “Ezra has delusions of grandeur and he thinks he’s going to be the next Jack Kerouac.” But honestly, I don’t think I’m going to be the next Jack Kerouac. I don’t think it is possible to be the next anything. You can only be the next you. It is true that after I read *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums* I decided that I was going to be a writer, but at no point in my life have I said I wanted to be Jack Kerouac. The only thing I have in common with Jack Kerouac is an affinity for sedation. I would not, however, consider my four years of college to have been a waste of time. I made some of the best friends I’ve ever made in my life during those years.

I left high school in La Jolla with my home life kind of on the skids. I was in a constant state of house arrest, using band practice as an excuse to get out. I would tell my mom that we had practice all day—from nine in the morning to nine at night. I would then go to my drummer Paul’s house, where we’d practice until about noon, sometimes one. Sometimes we wouldn’t practice at all; we would just go out. I always felt better about myself when we actually practiced.

When I first realized, the day after I moved into this house—this cottage rather—on Milvia, that there were raccoons in my backyard, I didn’t think anything of it. I just thought, “Oh, well there are raccoons in my backyard. It’s night, so that’s not abnormal, especially in Berkeley.” At the house I grew up in, there were constantly raccoon footprints tracking across our backyard, usually disappearing amidst the clutter of trash cans and recycling bins in our yard. After a few days of seeing the raccoons, and seemingly seeing the *same* five raccoons, I began to wonder. One day, probably a Saturday, my day of rest and relaxation, I peered under my small patio in and was greeted by a scuffling quickly followed by a raccoon hurtling towards me out of the darkness. I pulled my head

THE TYPIST

The Dylan seems to have an interesting effect on the raccoons. I play them all of the albums I have of Dylan's: *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan*, and *Nashville Skyline* among others. I even played them a new Dylan album I got called *Time Out of Mind*. When "Dirt Road Blues" was blasting from the speakers I had installed in my backyard, the raccoons seemed to stop what they were doing and listen. They hadn't heard Dylan like this before. They only knew the Dylan of the 60's and 70's.

On my 17th birthday, which was nearly six years ago, my mom took me to see Dylan and his band at the Haas Pavilion at Cal Berkeley. I love him and his music hits me, but in concert you can't understand a word he says. I thought about what would happen if I were to take the raccoons to one of his concerts. They would probably boo, or make some raccoon noise of disapproval. My raccoons like his acoustic songs better, it seems.

They have been here for nearly a year as far as I can tell. They weren't here when I moved in but the next night they appeared. For all I know they had been living in the backyard of my house before it was my house and were on vacation when I moved in. But they've been there ever since the second night after I moved in. I was 22 and fresh out of college and I was moving back to the Bay Area after spending college roaming around the streets and pathways of Victoria, British Columbia. Some people, like my mother, consider my four years of college to have been four years of my life that I wasted. "He just spent four writing and doing God knows what else," she'd tell you if you asked her what Ezra did in college. She'd



FINDING LOVE

My everlasting tears
cascade down my face in torrents.
Unable to control the pain,
my scarred eyes unable to close,
the sun sets upon my heart.
As from my pen flow my very woes,
your words pierce me like a poison-dipped dart.
Alone is my imprisoned mind,
enclosed and walled in
so I cannot find
the strength to win
the battle I am forever fighting for my love.
Love, which is the basis of all humanity
and, yet, unknown to me,
as is your love or tender touch or gentle word.
You are lost.
You are lost as you stand before me.
Invisible to the naked eye
my heart turns cold
as you lie and hurt my soul the way you have.
And yet,
behind the metal bars that enclose my mind
I knew what you would do because
you didn't know what you would find
after peeling away at me layer by layer.

Then the butterflies are gone
And I crash back into the mattress
Lying in the pillow
Waiting for them to return

JOSHUA STEIN



IRON BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies floating through my stomach
Like a brick in a gentle breeze
I feel comfortable and warm
Like a corpse at a wedding
Sweet sighs of desperation
Choke out of my lungs
I lie face down in the pillow
Wishing I didn't have to breathe
Soft sheets run along my back
Irritating the bloody wound I gave myself
I slide my feet onto the ground
As slowly as an earthquake
And each step echoes in my shins
Waiting to collapse onto my knees
I reach the sink and let my head fall
Banging into the brass and porcelain
I put my knuckles against my stomach
And force them into my chest
I inhale and hold my breath down
As smooth as the four-day-old stubble on my cheek
I exhale and all I see is red
Red in the bottom of the sink
Dying the ends of my bangs
Reeking in my nose

Stripped of all camouflage, I am exposed.
You know me although I try to guard myself
because I know you cannot return my love.
Love which sustains life,
as life sustains love.

MIGNON COMBS

IT'S ALL JUST A LIE

You want to know why I won't willingly hold your hand while walking down the street. I'm not sure if you noticed but it seems to be an issue for everyone but us. It's a part of me, something I can't hide. I'm gay. But I'd rather not show off for people to mock me because I refuse to be ashamed of what I can't control. Holding your hand makes this real to a public that doesn't want to see it, to a world that will judge you and me for being who and what we are. I'm sorry that I'm too chicken to even hold your hand but being told that this is wrong has taken its toll and I'm just tired of fighting a never-ending no-way-of-winning war with people I don't even know. I won't hold your hand because of what other people might think. I don't mean to admit defeat, but I can't fight. I'm sorry, but I'm letting them win. I know that is exactly the opposite of everything I have ever stood for, but I'm rolling over. Please forgive me, but I can't even hold your hand.

KELLY McMAHON



understand. I did not know why she played it over and over if it just made her cry. I once even tried to prevent her from listening to it by turning the radio off. She became angry, so I turned it back on; she started crying and I left, exasperated.

A couple of years later, when she was in the hospital, I turned the radio on, sat down, and shut my eyes, waiting for the song to begin. It started and I began listening to the lyrics, trying to understand what it was that was a trigger. I immediately got it. I understood for the first time. I started to cry. I turned it off.

“You okay there?” Dave asked peering over at me from behind the counter. Not looking at him, I nodded, which then caused a single tear to roll down my cheek and onto the newly swept floor. I wiped the tear-streaked cheek with my right hand as I used the other to get my wallet out from the back pocket of my blue jeans. As my hand searched around inside the pouch, I suddenly felt it find something thin and circular. Curiously, I pulled my hand out and opened my fist, finding a brand new quarter in its grasp. I looked at it, then at Dave who pushed my full glass forward and nodded in my direction. I nodded back, a sliver of a smile spreading across my face and turned around, feeling the coin with my fingers. I stood in front of the machine and pushed the quarter through the slot. Selecting the same song – her song – I pushed play. The music filled the room once more; I headed back to my stool and sat down quietly. I took a sip of the ale. It was perfect. “Good song....I actually like this one,” Dave said, nodding as he ran his hand over his beard. “Yeah,” I responded, “Good song.”

GREGORIA GRIGSBY-OLSON

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE

How do you describe an untouchable?
What words can begin to relate that which is beyond words?
How vain of me to even assume that I know what I'm talking about.
Because I don't know
And won't know
And can't know
Unless I abandon my word inventory.
Forget i before e except after c.
Focus on the i before he, and she, and thee.
It is me before we, and always shall be
Until we lose our vocabulary.

Clichés like that are the best I can give
Because what I'm thinking feeling writing speaking about
Is what we experience in a déjà vu.
We let go of what we know and leap for the true.
Like nothing you've experienced hitherto.
Your mind clear of all—until—w—a—n—
You're back again.
But you had an instant didn't you?
Of purity
And clarity
And the sanest insanity.
Your mind now filled with quick quick emptiness
And you can finally see
That you're an empty fragile egg cup.
How can you believe that you're full
And whole

And contentful
After you've known better?
After you've felt better?
After you've been better?

You don't know what I'm saying.
I don't know what I'm saying.
I'm saying it can't be said in words.
We'll have to wait until we can go there.
Like the dancer with passion,
Like the spiritual with faith,
Like the artist with vision,
Like the poet
Who doesn't care use need the words
That chain me to this paper
And this world.
Someday that may be me.
Until then
It is a dotted i and a crossed t
And then I'll be free.

MARGO WINTON

SONG FOR A SUNDAY EVENING

As I sat there on Sunday night at the counter of Dave's – in need of a nice pint of ale – a song drifted out of the old jukebox that had been sitting quietly, isolated in the corner of the bar. I stopped kicking my Doc Marten's methodically against the wooden stool I had been sitting on and looked up slowly, a feeling of nostalgia sweeping over my tired body and my all too sober self. The song was familiar. I had heard it before, many times before in fact. I shook my head in disbelief, getting up. Dave, a broom in hand, seemed to question my sudden movement, but continued sweeping.

Slowly, counting each step I took, I went over to the luminous machine that had dared to remind me of the past that I had wanted to forget, forever. I wiped down the glass that had been covered with dust and grime with the sleeve of my sweater and peered through. Looking in, I saw the now old and yellow pages and pages of songs that had not been played by anyone for years. All the classics were there: Presley, Cash, Dylan, Lynn, Cline....

I kept on reading until I saw it. The name brought everything back. I suddenly remembered every single time that I had heard the song coming out of the radio my father had given her — every time that she had cried, which was every time that she had played it. I remembered not understanding why the song made her act the way she did. If I was there, she would hold me close and tell me that she would not leave me until I was old, much older than her. I was a ten year old boy; I did not want to be held by my mother. I would try to break free of her grasp but she would just hold me tighter. I did not

BULLETS IN REVERSE

His eyes a dove
Hers a gun
Locked in an inescapable cascade to the oblivion
From whence they came, to where they're going
He's drawn not to her beauty, nor to the delightful appeal of verbs
not meant for the ears of men,
but to the naiveté of a child
A naiveté he knows too well

She draws her dove closer with the prospect of destruction and lust
One from the other,
as two lovers reciprocating that which they do not feel
but who they strive to be

So then
These two
Each engrossed
In the other's complexities which ring so true

His bloody dove
Her smoking gun

PATRICK FITZGERALD



TRAVELER

A migrant bird stands by his nest
Where his family was raised a year ago
But now they've flown to join the rest
And he's got nowhere else to go,
So he sits upon his branch and sings alone,
"Sixteen flowers, a ball and chain,
Have brought me soaring back."

A sailor aboard his fearsome ship
Stands on the prow with a hand over his eyes.
He's been looking forward to ending this trip
And at last someone's heard his mournful cry
Which he'd sung for years with no reply,
"Sixteen flowers, a ball and chain,
Have brought me sailing back."

At last stands a woman, hands at heart,
Wearing a chain of daisies and a silver ring.
She's been waiting years for this ship to port,
And now she sits at the dock and sings
To her love who's finally come home,
"Sixteen flowers, a ball and chain,
Bring my heart wandering back."

CARLIN STARRS

SEASON OF DEATH

In the winter
Trees begin to splinter
Leaves fall
Trees are not as tall
Animals are crawling
On earth they are dying
Lying on their sides
Waiting for the hunger to subside

The bodies that now wither in the cold
Were nowhere close to being old
For now their lungs take their last whiff
Now their bodies lie stiff
Since there was no food to eat
Their hearts have ceased to beat

MARSHAL CARO

GOLDFISH

For twenty-nine cents, I bought a fish of gold
But fish are not pets you can either pat or hold
They don't often make for very much fun;
Just plain boring fish that sparkle in the sun.

In the morning I give him food,
But he only eats if he's in the mood.
The selfish brat thinks he's won
But he's just a plain boring fish that sparkles in the sun.

Find him dead, floating in his bowl,
Just a husk, without a soul.
Though I can't recall anything he's done,
I'll miss that plain boring fish that sparkled in the sun.

NICK FRANCO

APRIL SANDERS

Has it always been this way? Were you always so distant that the moment you turned to face her, she'd look away? From the moment you see her gleaming face, the sunlight forming her mystical halo, the breath is caught in your throat and you don't know what to think or do or say.

She walked with a confidence so great, yet somehow she remained humble and blended in with her own crowd. But it was the fact that you were the complete opposite that you knew drew her attention. It was the fact that you were the odd one jutting out from all of the others, sneering as they passed, while your mind whimpered and wondered why it was so, why it was that they never accepted, acknowledged, supported you. You drew deeper into the shadow of your life, knowing you'd never come out into the light again. You were nocturnal, feeding off of the depths of your darkened mind.

Yet she... She came around and so subtly changed who you were—who you had become. You were a thousand shattered pieces, broken by your past. Yet she fixed you, even while your sharp edges cut her fingers until they bled. She defended you, was kind, and had mercy on you. Among those that jeered and taunted, she would always be the one to step away from them, to make them stop—to make *him* stop.

So why is it that she has turned to him and away from you? You've become abandoned and lost again in the world of darkness you've created. You're spinning perpetually in the dizzying abyss of your own hatred and darkness but for once, her hand is not there for you to grab hold; she is not there to fix you. She is forever with him, the one she claims to love. Now, when she looks at you, she holds

pity in her cool green eyes, holding your gaze only long enough to say that you shall never change, for you are the evil that she will not allow to burden her and there is no more for her to do with you.

As your paths cross one last time, a child in her arms, your gaze hardens to ice, hoping to break her—to make her see that because of her, this is what you had become: a monster swallowed whole by hell. Yet, as she turns away and creates a distance you shouldn't dare to break, you whisper one last time, "April Sanders, I had loved you."

CATHERINE KIM

Danny smiled politely, handed George a piece of binder paper, and stepped by him out the door.

"She'd let you visit if you wanted to," Danny said over his shoulder. "But here are the directions in case you get lost."

MARGO WINTON



“Sometimes a day trip during math is enough, but it’s so much more fun to spend the night, too,” Emily responded from the rope swing over the lake.

“Yours is so much more fun than mine, though. How come?”

“Well, I visit a lot, so I get a lot of new ideas, and I sketch them out before I visit again. It gets better every time I come, but if it gets too hectic, I take something out. Just the other day I got rid of the jai alai court. Too many seals got hurt,” Emily explained in her quiet way. Danny liked her quiet way. It was so much nicer than the loud way that everyone else had back at school. Which made him think of math class. Which made him think of homework. Which made him think of home. Which made him think of his mom.

“Hey Emily, I think I should get back to class. My mom gets mad when I spend the night at my own imagination and she’d flip if I spent the night at a girl’s.” Danny dismounted the giraffe with some difficulty and went to help Emily out of the lake. They started the walk back to the grassy field, discussing on the way a few more ideas to add to Emily’s imagination, and agreed that she should move the otters closer to the uphill-running river. When they were a few steps away from math class, Emily invited Danny to visit again sometime soon and promised to help him work on his imagination over the weekend. Danny’s mind took two steps to the left and three back and he found himself back in class towards the end of the lecture about cubed roots of negative inverse fractions. When the bell rang, George ran up to Danny’s desk.

“Did you go? I can’t believe you! What was it like? I see her doodle in class and it looks so crazy! How come she let you go? I’m the one who always asks about her trips.” George’s aggressive onslaught didn’t phase Danny that much. As Emily walked by,



THE MIGHTIEST SWORD TO FALL ON

What do you do when you're at the end of your rope – a pen stroke and a half from turning into the self-pitying abomination that you mock so freely? There doesn't seem to be a path worth taking and the only option is to lie on your back and stare at the ceiling, wondering where the creativity went, trying to fix the once overflowing fountain pen that stained your fingers with ideas and innovations that no one else had imagined and letting the mind wander until it trips on the corpse of an old muse who used to smile with her eyes.

Who do you turn to when you can find no peace, remorse or even the sympathy of souls who used to look down on you with a sigh? Four inches from a complete breakdown where the only thing that can save you is the makeshift noose that you make from your own belt and the gravity that is so beautifully acknowledged every time that you fall down the stairs, you curl your toes over the brink and peek down, trying to unlock the secrets of the calm and breezy blackness that smiles up at you and winks, like a mockery of all of the ones standing behind with the cattle-prods, pushing you towards an inevitable fall which may or may not have a bottom.

Where do you go when the muse is gone and logic makes no sense? The once fragile heart that had been so reliably broken and pasted back together is as soft and red as a charcoal briquette. This is the end of the line. The edge of sanity right before you fall in a

know what it was. His lack of conversation with Emily in the past led to a sense of mystery around her and Danny was interested in what sort of things a mystery thought about. So instead of strolling down his own path, Danny's mind took three steps forward and two to the right. He found himself at the edge of a pleasant grassy field with blue flowers growing everywhere. He looked around, hoping he would find a place to start, and for the first time he truly saw Emily. Her hair couldn't decide between brown and gold in the sunlight, so it settled on a bit of both. The green in her eyes matched the grass so completely that it made Danny want to lay down in them and watch the clouds go by. And, thank goodness, she was smiling at him.

"I hope you're not mad. I just thought I would try something new today," Danny ventured. Emily wasn't mad at all. No one had ever taken the time to visit her imagination and she was glad for the company.

"I'll show you around if you like." He would like. So Emily grabbed Danny's hand and gave him a tour of her imagination. She was very proud of the stuff that she had added. And she should have been. It was much more exciting than his imagination. All his had was a beach and the perfect waves over and over and over. Emily's imagination was full of things he had never even thought of, like a bakery whose sweets never made you sick, and the perfect climbing tree with dozens of limbs and hundreds of ripe fruits of every kind and all sorts of swings to play on. She had animals, none of which wanted Danny as lunch, she had his favorite songs that seemed to be coming straight from the soft-smelling breeze that ran through Emily's undecided hair, and she had slip-on wings so they could swoop through the puffy clouds in the blue blue sky.

"Is this where you go when you're gone all the time?" Danny inquired while riding the giraffe.

HOW WAS YOUR TRIP?

“How was your trip?”

Emily smiled politely at the question and responded with a simple “Nice.” She never liked people to probe about her constant absences, especially people like George. George was a big-time prober. “He’s like those popsicle sticks that doctors shove so far down your throat you can’t do anything but gag,” Emily thought to herself. She smiled politely at this, too. Emily smiled politely at a lot of things. That’s just the way she was. She never laughed uproariously, or sobbed uncontrollably, or argued vociferously. She giggled quietly, wept silently, and spoke gently. And people didn’t like her for it.

Emily was not popular. Not that she minded. Actually, she didn’t even notice it that much. But everyone around her did and they disliked her for that even more. People like George saw her as strange. Most people chose to stay away from her, unless of course they were probing, or needed a pencil during a test, in which case the pencil-lackers would ask for the writing utensil and turn back to their papers. No one ever said thank you. No one but Danny.

Danny himself was not a popular sort of guy. He had his fair share of friends and he played his fair share of sports, but his brown hair and clean shoes weren’t dangerous enough to label him as popular. Danny sat exactly two rows to the left and three rows behind Emily in their math class. They were decent students but not big participators. Danny preferred to let his mind stroll down the path of his imagination during lectures. It was this wandering that led him to his first encounter with Emily.

Danny noticed that she was sketching something in her notebook during one particularly boring lecture and he wanted to

seemingly endless abyss of despair and useless therapy sessions, right before the pen runs out of ink and you laugh yourself to sleep dreaming of what life would be like without the pen.

JOSHUA STEIN



SUBMARINE

As I gaze through the submarine porthole,
the blue sky swimming with trees
reminds me of high school English class when,
through the closed window, I watched
green seaweed blowing in an ocean blue.

SEAN COCHRANE



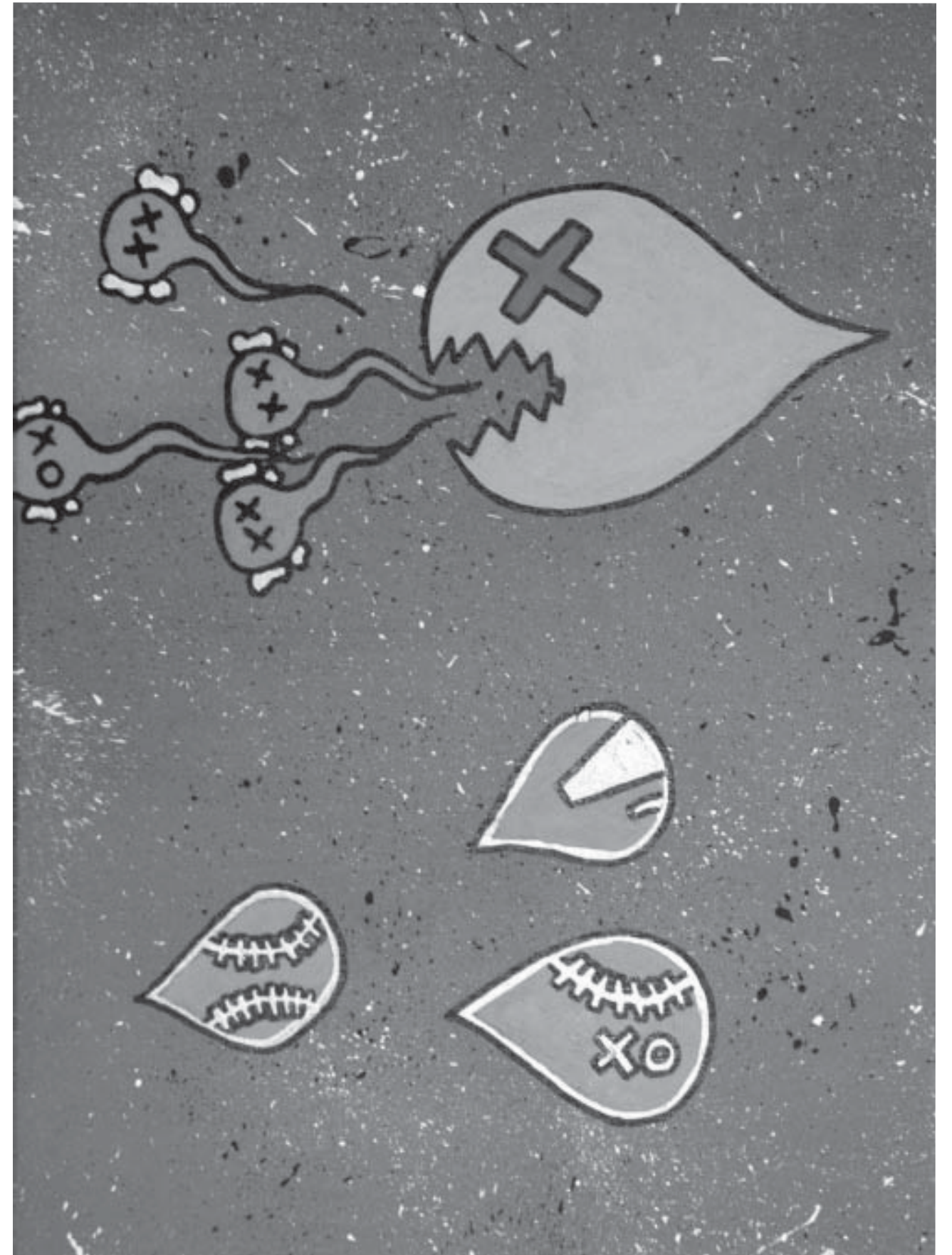
A STAINED TUNNEL

Walk into the warmth
Looking around, it's all the same
Only people and lack of self
Deny the thought of a never-ending mirror

Walking out of the lying reflection is a monster
Closer, and closer, blocking you in
Speaking in tongues you barely understand
Pushing you down under the ocean of shame
Under a stench of sorrow and missed opportunities

The only way to escape is by means of humiliation
Crawling under his legs, over his lap
Walking past the mirror into the cold, crying
Mourning the death of the person that was you

DYANI MAIN



POINTS OF FORGOTTEN PERFECTION

Withered and worn they lay, their ribbons clinging on by mere threads of hope. They were frayed sole-less imperfections heaped among the countless other forgotten memoranda.

It was dark where they rested, a closed entrapment—shutting off the modern day world from their view. Occasionally a complicatedly beautiful face would appear with a sudden urge that let light seep through a small crevice, but the light, along with the painfully familiar face, would leave just as quickly as it came.

And so they sat, just so, for days, months, years. How long, they could not tell. But each time her face appeared she had changed, aged. From once being the shy and humble young girl they had known so well, she had grown into an elegant young woman, sleek and refined.

Yet, every time they saw her, they felt pangs of longing to be worn again. They yearned to be where they once stood, atop her beautifully crafted point, protecting her from the dangers she faced, guiding her across deserts of tarnished wood in hour after hour of practice.

They had been her first pair. Her eyes had sparkled with joy the first time she pulled them out of their box, the smell of the fresh wooden points engulfing her. She had been feeble in the beginning, afraid to trust them. But she quickly learned to be dependent on upon them as they learned to be dependent upon her. Gradually, they molded with her, becoming one fast-paced blur moving gracefully across the room.

FEAR OF MIRRORS

A rose blooms in the nape of your neck as the crescent of your eye awakens to a brand new morning. Escaping from the emptiness, you hide.

Inside, you've shattered.
O goddess, hear me sing! Your tales unravel my web of guilt. Inspired, lone spider, blinking away new waves of fright.

Faster, heart beats, harder.
O loneliness, abide, breaking from the sky. Overhead wasteland, painlessly devoured, forget me. O beast, leave me behind.

SAMANTHA HUNTINGTON

peer out through its tunnel. The garbage man meets my gaze with a blank look on his face.

I ask him, “Am I really supposed to love you?”

Ten years later, who knows where I am. Perhaps the paper cuts have healed and the scars vanished. Perhaps I’m married to the garbage man. Maybe that was the beginning and the end. But maybe I’m still trapped under the papers of my past.

EMMA FLOYD

For many years they stood by her side, following her wherever she went, obeying the direction she placed them in. She was grand, a true prima ballerina. And they had gotten her to where she was. It was this pair, only this, that she trusted, and she loved them.

They continued their journey together—guiding—and following, always carried in a special bag, *their* bag, until one day when her dependence was lost. They had been used too many years, worn for too many practices. A hole had swept away the fabric that let her slip through and, as they watched her fall, they knew her faith was lost forever.

Now too tattered to be trusted, she placed them in a box, wrapping their once pink ribbons around and around. For one last second they gazed at her as she smiled, knowing she was reminiscing about all the wonderful memories they had shared together. They hoped—no, they *knew*, she would grow to be magnificent.

They only wished they could have been there for her when it happened.

ELISE CALONICO

ABANDONED

My soul is scorched
with the bitter burn
of my abandoned love for you.
When you walked away
as I sobbed like a broken record,
I knew I was never going to return to holding you close.
When you walked away from me
as I came undone,
I realized you were never coming back.

EILA SAARNI

THURSDAYS

When I was young, I came home one day after Gymboree to find a television and two sleeping bags missing, a persistent beeping, and a crying mother. A wispy fear entered me as smoke, which leaves on its own accord. Two years later, I left a scar on my sister's foot, which left me with a deep sense of guilt. In third grade, I gave him my half-eaten chocolate rabbit, and he gave my best friend gold earrings. I told myself, "It's alright; my ears aren't pierced anyways." By this time, I was sick of feeling these things. As I grew, excuses and illusions developed into a self esteem which would cover my eyes and seal my heart in a plastic baggie. I could see the pain I should be feeling but quickly discarded it into the trash, under the strict command of my Self Esteem.

Ten years later, the garbage men come to take my full bin away, as they have every Thursday. I'm not sure where it goes; ignorance is bliss, right? I sit in an over stuffed arm chair and enjoy a life without other people. The only pain I feel comes from physical ailments.

Glancing out the window, I see papers flying around in the wind. The man downstairs looks up at me and I know they are mine. Somehow I'm sure it's not coincidence that it was he who released my past.

In the air spirals every detail of myself, every blueprint of every tear never shed, every heart I wouldn't allow to be broken. I hear the home security system and taste the bitter (sweet) chocolate of that stupid rabbit. I feel the smoky fear rise up from the bubbling guilt. New realities spring up, such as regret, love, and not being able to get back up. Thousands of paper thin memories bury me.

I find one small ray of sunshine poking through the pile and



THE BALLAD OF A VOICELESS PRODIGY

Born without a voice, amounts to half a man
Took to making noise with a guitar in his hand
He left his house on a quiet night, stole off into the dark
His mother was no victim but she sure did play that part
She cried her eyes out and called his name
He didn't pay her no heed and he hopped right on the next train
Rode that rail as far as it went, jumped off 'round Baton Rouge
Smells of the South, they reached his nose, blood in the chicken
coop

He disappeared into the Bayou, his shape devoid of form
He didn't return for nearly ten years but when he did, he blew a
feudal horn

Returned from the swamp, guitar across his back
He saw a train was coming, so he headed for the tracks
Hopped aboard and hid in a stall; he never could be caught
Rhythms of life pound in his head; he tried to keep his head hot
He hopped off the train round New York City, heard the notes of
blue

Tried to speak but couldn't, blood splattered in the chicken coop

He met a man in a bar who told him he could stay with him
In return the boy was to play his songs as the sunlight grew dim
He played the bars abandoned, paid his rightful dues
Then one day he got lucky and away this bird it flew
A woman said son I been watching you, listening from afar

UNDONE

He took the knife and
ran it up
the stitches that
he had sewn into
my heart.
He walked away
as the stitches slipped out
and I fell to the ground.
He didn't look back as he walked away
because he never will
look back
on the day
he ruined me.

EILA SAARNI

The newspaper crinkles loudly as she opens to page six. Always page six. Never seven, nor eight, simply six. Her eyes glance about the page, searching for an interesting piece of news. Nothing captures her eye. She turns calmly to the obituaries, taking a sip of her coffee.

Peter Towland. That seems to ring a bell. Oh, yes. He was that funny boy in grammar school. The one that traded me marbles for my delicious homemade sandwiches. "Died peacefully and succeeded by three wonderful daughters and two loving sons." Lucky fellow; he had many children.

She closes the newspaper and leans back in her chair, folding her hands neatly in her lap. As she sits quietly, thinking to herself of the forlorn table, there is a sudden knock on the door.

Could it be? Maybe it's someone important, waiting to sweep me off my feet and take me far, far away. Maybe it's someone coming to invite me to an important, exciting event. Or maybe they've come to tell me that I'm needed for something big. Something grand.

Excitedly, she jumps from her chair, making her way swiftly to the door. Thoughts race through her head as she gets closer and closer, wondering just who it might be. A neighbor coming to compliment her on her gardening in the front yard? An old friend who happened to chance upon her name somewhere and has come to say hello? Or maybe a long lost family member come to rekindle a relationship. She reaches the door and fumbles with the locks, anticipation growing inside her. She opens it little by little, yearning but afraid of what she knows is to come.

Ah, it's just the milkman. But there'll be something next time. Yes, there's always a next time. Right?

ELISE CALONICO

Then the boy he said nothing; she said I'm gonna make you a star
He looked at her, played a chord, dropped his pick and stooped
She picked it up and gave it to him; there was blood in the
chicken coop

Another train he rode out West, this time with the woman in tow
He played for the passengers on the train; they tell me their minds
were blown

He spoke not a word; his guitar talked, said enough for him
Six hours playing on a train, his crowd it never did thin
He played for the sun and he played for the moon, never
acknowledged the crowd

He just sat there and strummed away, softly yet quite loud
He arrived in San Francisco, met a Devil with his crew
Said look at me son, we're gonna make you famous with blood in
the chicken coop

He immersed himself in painful living, stuck always playing his
songs

Backed by a band he didn't know, unhappy but he played along
It was 'round this time I met him and you know I remember the day
I met him in a coffee shop; I was struck by the music he played
But I saw in him an empty look; no gleam was in his eye
He looked at me from up onstage and then he began to cry
The mute button was off; he made his first sound; a sob rang 'cross
the room

We all just froze, didn't know what to do; he was stuck there in the
gloom

He ran off stage and I found him later, playing a song atop the roof
He looked at me, then turned away; there was blood in the chicken
coop

We stood there for quite some time and though he didn't speak
He looked down then up at my face; his eyes said come with me
He walked down the fire escape, guitar hanging from his back
This tired young soul with no voice at all looked at me and tipped
his hat
His eyes they told me thank you but it's here that we must part
I had no delusions; I knew he'd leave, knew it from the start
He vanished across the train tracks, leaving and thrown for a loop
He disappeared forever that night with blood in the chicken coop

MAX SUSSMAN

WHAT'S THE OCCASION?

Bing! Bing! "Coffee's done," she thinks to herself as she slides gracefully out of the depths of her cold wooden chair. Her reflexes overcome her as she places her dainty old feet on the tile, jumping slightly from the shocking cold. A sigh escapes her as she reaches her coffee pot, looking out the window. Two brilliant birds have caught her attention as they wind twigs and leaves into a delicate nest on a branch of her redwood. They twitter and flit about carelessly from twig to twig, leaf to leaf, enjoying the early morning calm.

What a nice life they live, though I never have cared for their song.

She shuffles rigidly toward the cabinet, reaching for her fresh morning *Drink Me* coffee mug. Sliding the pot off the counter, the coffee streams into the mug, steaming and writhing as it settles in its new surroundings. She puzzles to herself as she lifts the burning mug into her hands. Never have understood why I use this same old cup every morning. That company worker, he seemed to enjoy it. Ah, yes. Donald. He always had a never-ending supply of these silly things.

Making her way back to the table, she pulls her old tattered robe closer to her body.

It's cold out this morning. Wonder what the occasion is.

She pulls out the wooden chair again and places herself at the head of a long, intricate table set for six.

Nobody ever sits here, yet the table is always set. Rather silly of me, I should say. I can't say I know why I even bought the old thing in the first place. Ah, yes. Now I remember. The salesman said it was such a beauty it would attract plenty of people to it. Ha!

FOUR OUNCE BEAUTY

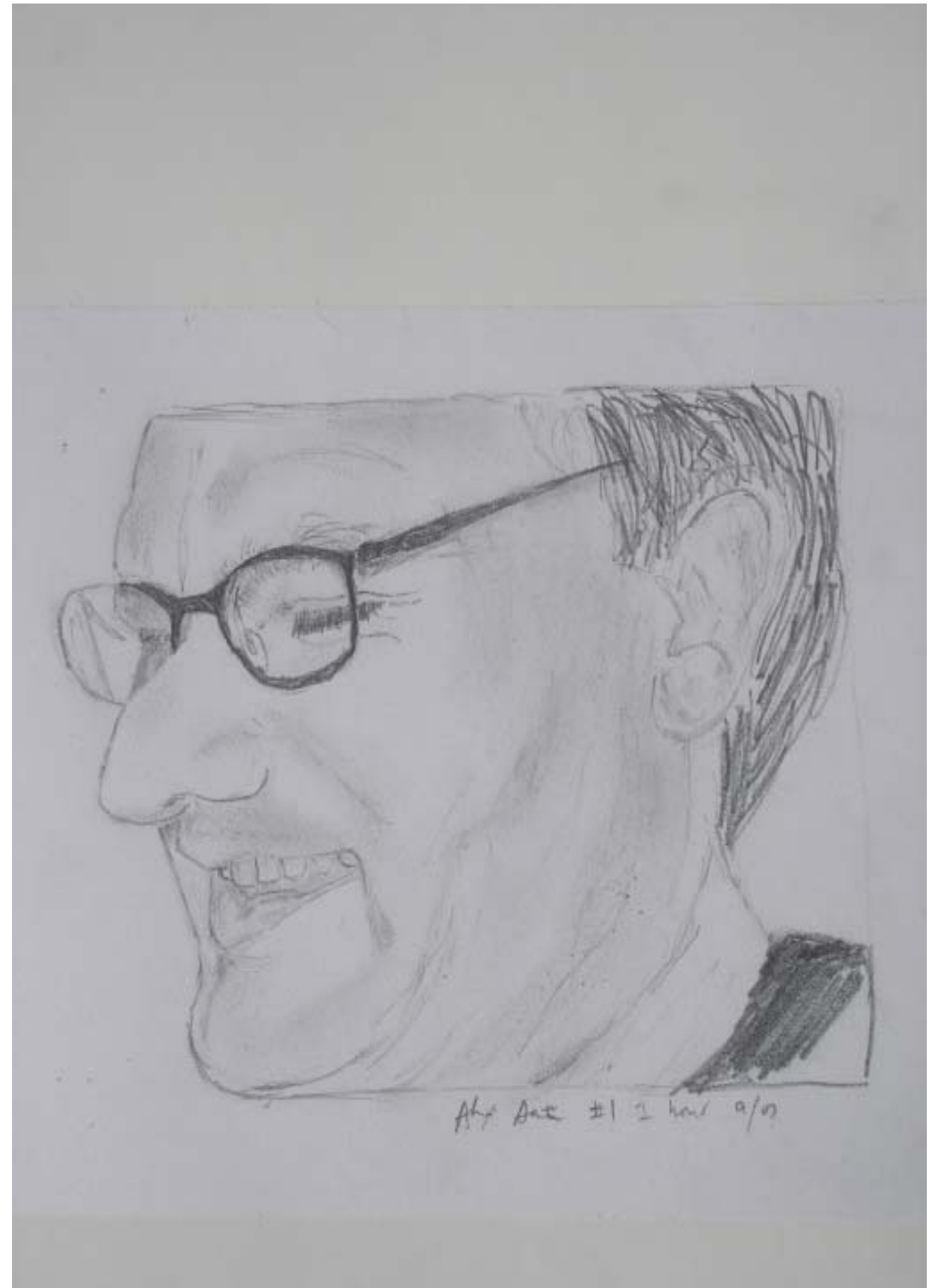
It was a bar
Filled more with lust than love.
It was a clean sort of lust,
If there ever were such a thing.

She crosses the threshold with her sharpened edge,
Tall in stature, but thin in reason,
Sits down, and orders the apothecary to do her bidding.
His back to her, her blade flashes as she unsheathes her shoulders.

Her medicine man now faces her and slams a grindstone on the
metal bar.

Her eyes flash with the lust of sex
showered with grenadine;
Slowly she sharpens her blade.

PATRICK FITZGERALD



THE OFFICIAL STAMP LICKER

An ordinary day
Always an ordinary day in the life of ordinary me

Wake at dawn
Wash my face as the sun creeps up my windowpane
Drink milky tea as my neighbor's carpool honks his horn twice
Leave the house as the mail carrier walks past

A woman enters from right. It is still crisp and bright in the early morning and she recognizes WALTER, smiles, and waves. She is carrying a briefcase and is wearing a business suit. She waits at the corner of the street until she can cross. WALTER watches her cross and glances down at his unprofessional clothes, feeling lesser than her. They work in the same office building, but not the same office. He then realizes that he also has to cross that street and hurries across while cars are honking at him.

Get to work early
Prepare for the day's routine
The other workers come later
They wear unprofessional clothes like me

WALTER greets the other employees with a gracious smile. They offer no such greeting in return. Presently, all workers take their seats at a long table. WALTER sits in the middle and

MIRROR THERAPY

I look into my eyes,
Bloodshot after a long night.
I cough into the sink,
White porcelain dyed red
By the contents of my throat.
I slowly raise my eyes to the mirror.
"You suck," I say to my reflection.
"You cast me, not the other way around."
"Shut up!" My voice escalates.
I look down at the sink.
"Look me in the eye."
I fix my eyes intently on the blood in the sink.
"Fix your life."
I cough again and I see more blood.
"I know you have problems."
I try to tune it out.
"But there are people who can help you."
I turn away from him.
"They're called therapists."
I slump to the floor.
"I know it's not what you want to hear."
I cradle my head in my hands.
"But it's what you need."
No response.
"Get up."
Silence.

JOSHUA STEIN

STREETLIGHT SOLILOQUY

how dark is the night
I walk to the left despite
how to the right
I might
find a light

YESENIA LOPEZ



at each end of the table there are stacks of papers and envelopes. In front of WALTER is a large roll of stamps.

The system begins
We, a machine made of human parts
I ready my stamps
Sealed and labeled envelopes are passed to me from either side

Lick and paste – only the top right corner
I am Walter Carlisle, the Official Stamp Licker

CATHERINE KIM

AT A DISTANCE

a flower sitting alone
looking as beautiful as
a rainbow encompassing the sun
picked up and put in the hair
of another beauty
forgetting the disfigured dirt
that helped it to live
ignorant of its meaningless purpose
three steps onto the cemented world
dropped in a gutter and forgotten
leaving with only one thought

beauty is only beautiful from far away

DYANI MAIN

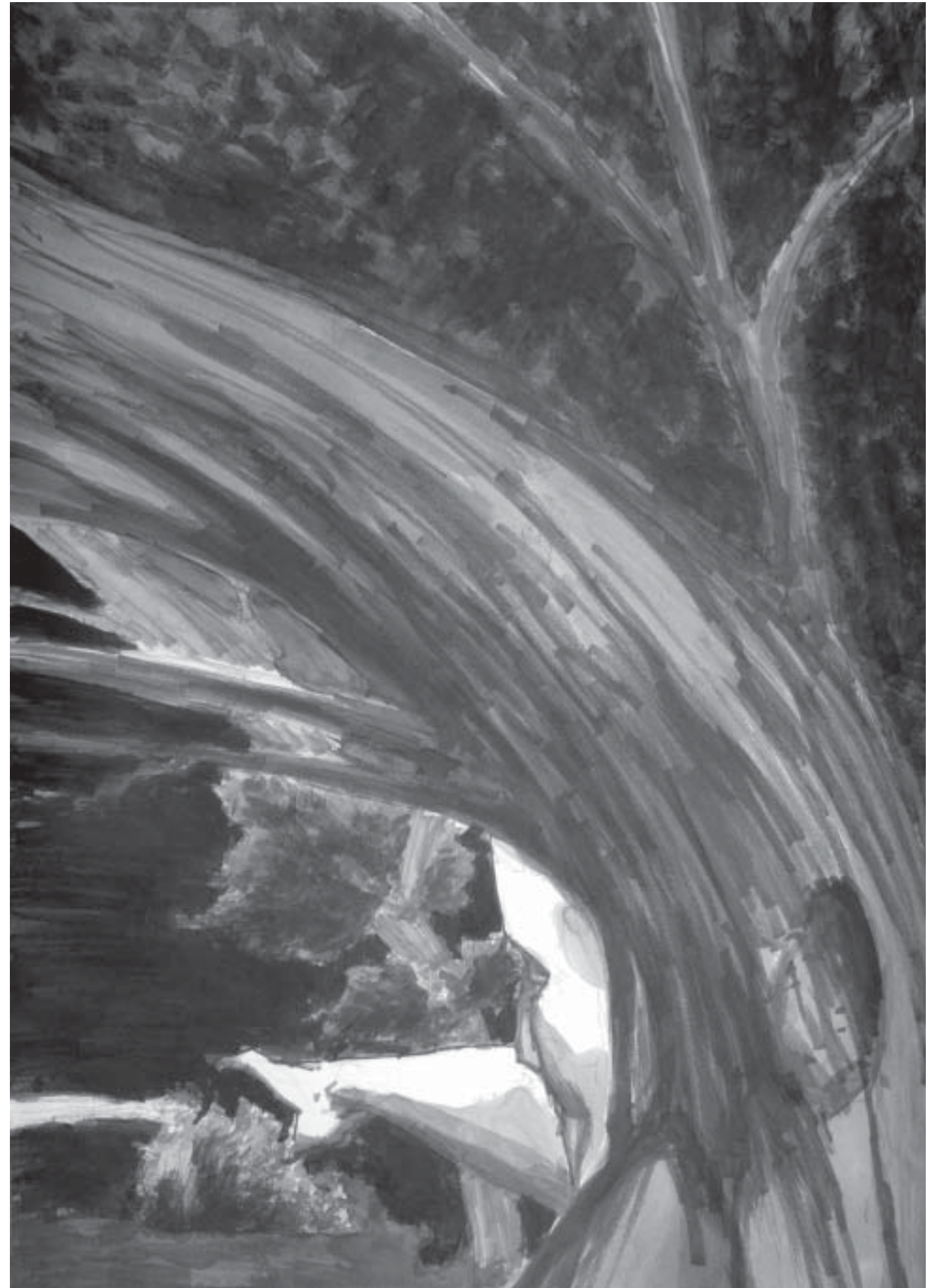


FORGIVENESS

Fear, but nothing quite so.
Was that a sound? Is something breathing?
I breathe, but she does not.
Joy of all joys!
A tear waits to fall
But it flies, NO!
Never to be seen again.
“A dance, my dear? Shall we celebrate?”
But only the breeze responds.
“We shall dance, for the day is reborn!”
Spinning and stepping,
Music plays inside himself,
An eerie tune, by an unknown hand,
But it dances along with him.
“I love you!” he cries, to the wind,
And it answers silently.
He kneels onto the floor,
A makeshift altar of blood and rug.
He weeps, the sound of a grown man crying
Spurring fear in the hearts of the dust now disturbed
“Forgive me!” he yells, but no one...nothing speaks
“I have done wrong!
I give myself, a sacrifice for my crime!”

Never...

CARLIN STARRS



LIFE HAS PULP

The perfume bottle sat atop an old wooden jewelry box. A ray of sun was coming in through the panes of the surrounding windows. Droplets of water were heard falling and there was a slight murmur coming from the old heater. A cat sat perched on the windowsill looking out at the world he presumed was his own. His tail shifted back and forth and his eyes were focused on something across the way. A radio then turned on, which produced a slight groan from the lump underneath a floral duvet cover. “Good morning Bay Area! And what a morning! MAN OH MAN! I got to tell you, when I was crossing the bridge in my car this morning the sun rise was amazi—” A hand extending from the “lump” had vigorously switched the clock/radio off. The figure then emerged slowly, steadily from beneath the covers. It shuffled its way across the bedroom, out the door and into another room. This one was considerably smaller with a sink and a cabinet with a counter at one end, and a bathtub and toilet at the other. The person headed over to the porcelain sink. There was slight orange rust materializing in the drain. They then looked into the mirror above the basin.

The person turned out to be a “he.” He had dirty blond hair that was relatively clean cut and was wearing nothing but green striped boxer shorts. His eyes were the shape of two blue almonds, if such a thing existed, glazed with the essence of living life. A few freckles that had developed over the summer were speckled across his seemingly tired face. He shook his head and grunted, studying his appearance. He placed his hands over his eyes and began rubbing them slowly, trying to reach complete wakefulness. He then turned on the faucet that had been dripping and cool water poured out quickly, lapping over the basin. He formed a cup with his hands

HEALTH FREAK

You break me down
You're not healthy for me
So I'm getting rid of you like expired milk
Into the trash bin you go
Never to be seen or tasted again

AMBER MAGANA



before turning the faucet off and scooped up some of the water. Quickly, he splashed it on to his face and then looked up once more into the mirror. Droplets of water clung to his face which was rosier than it had been before.

“Why?” he whispered to his reflection. There was no answer. He then shook his head once more before taking a crimson towel off the rack and drying himself off. A phone rang in the distance. Then half a second later, a female voice could be heard coming out of the message machine and drifting up the stairs into the bathroom or rather, “the powder room,” as it was labeled on the door.

“Charlie. Are you there? C’mon pick up...please. It’s Kate...remember me. Your sister? Anyways...I hope you are okay. Listen, I am here if you need me to do anything...anything at all. Understand? Well...hope to see you soon...Love you. Bye kiddo.” Charlie, as his name turned out to be, thumped down the wooden staircase. At the bottom, he looked over at the message machine. A small, blinking red light was staring him down. Suddenly, the light started to become somewhat deformed and slightly out of focus. Charlie shook his head and a sudden tear fell to the floor. He took a deep breath and wiped his wet cheeks with his hands. “Stop...now. Stop feeling so...so damn sorry for your stupid self,” he said angrily, running his hands through his unwashed hair. He then headed towards the kitchen. It was a simple room; nearly all rooms in this house were, come to think of it. There was a rather quaint looking stove right across from a long marble counter with a sink embedded into it. Next to the counter surface, there was an old-fashioned, cream-colored refrigerator. Charlie first searched through the contents of the fridge and came out with a carton of o.j. He then sat down at the rather small, round table placed in the middle of the room, between the stove and the counter. There were rings on the table. Neither of them had ever found a point in coasters. Homes

were meant to look lived in right? So why not leave traces, memories behind, for that is what makes up life: memories. Charlie opened the carton, chucked the small blue cap into the stainless steel sink and chugged the liquid down with anticipation. The juice tasted sweet and tart at the same time and the pulp got caught between his two front teeth.

There was pulp, of course. She only drank orange juice with pulp, said that it made it fresher, more earthly-seeming. Once he was done he threw the carton into the metal basin with disgust. He personally despised pulp; it frustrated him. He thought it made something as simple as orange juice more complicated than it should be. He never told her this though.

The phone rang once more and another voice entered the house coming from the small machine. "Charles? Charlie? Honey, are you there sweetheart? It's your...it's mommy...mom...Oh pick up, Charlie...I...I...oh-...I hope you...you know that I...I well...I am coming over... I am sorry but I must. See you soon...Love you. Buh...Bye."

Charlie looked in horror at the little white box, agonizing over what it had just revealed to him. He hated how people were acting. I am so sorry. She was so lovely. Oh you were perfect for each other. What a tragedy. She would have wanted you to move on...and on and on it went. Move on? How could he? Everyday he was reminded....the phone messages, the sudden packages appearing at the door, the photographs in every room of their house, the house itself, the sympathetic looks, the flowers, the memories...

He then heard a car roll up into the driveway. Charlie peeked behind the curtain and out the window, hoping with all his might that he would not see what he expected. But of course there she was; there it was...his mother getting out of the familiar box car

To be complete,
So I turn it off
I tune it out
I give up on it all
I hated being fake and plastic anyways
Because it doesn't matter.

KELLY MCMAHON

BECAUSE IT DOESN'T MATTER

I am an enormous blob
Feeding off the media
Stuck to the television
Where I become a
Forever driven
Teenage consumer
Buying in to every lie
Shoved down my throat.

Believing
This product will give me perfect skin
This will make my hips thin
This will make my flat butt big and
This will bring back an ever-dwindling self-esteem

I am told I'm not pretty so I need
This diet
This makeup
This shirt
This skirt and
This personality for people to like me.
But I will never be a size three, nor will I ever want to be.
I hate thinking that I'll need
Something outside
Of myself

Volvo. It was a classic “hippy” car. It was forest green and had, on the bumper, over a dozen radical bumper stickers; some had been saved from the year 1975 while others were fresh from 2005. All, however, depicted his mother’s view on politics, the environment, the economy and whatever other topic that would get her ranting for hours on end, on any occasion, at any time.

Today, he noticed, her outfit consisted of some black slacks and a Hawaiian tee. He shook his head, knowing that she would not be one to wear only black on account of what had happened and for this he was, surprisingly for once, grateful to her.

There was a knock at the door and he knew that she would be there searching through his mailbox, as she always did when she waited the whole minute for him to greet her. Charlie slowly opened the door. A slight breeze came through and curled chillingly around his body as he looked at his mother expectantly; she was busy tearing out a coupon from one of the magazines he received daily. She looked up and studied him for a brief moment before running at him and throwing her arms around his half naked body. “My... My...baby booooy,” she exclaimed, stammering, swallowing back the tears that were sure to come at any moment. He gently pried himself loose from her loving but amazingly strong hold. Charlie led her inside and shut the door behind him just as another breeze kicked up.

Charlie looked at his mother who was staring directly at him. He wanted her to stop, but he knew she wouldn't. “Hi mom...” he said, sighing before methodically scratching at his unshaven face and looking down at the floor.

She shook her head, pulling at her dangling earrings, a habit she had whenever she was at all distressed. “How have you... been?” she asked with a crack in her voice.

Charlie sighed and shut his eyes tightly before giving her his response. “I’ve been fine mom,” he lied, “why are you here,” he then asked hesitantly, opening his clenched eyes.

“I wanted to make sure you were alright and it seems that even with you saying you are, I believe, that in fact, you are not. I mean, honey...look at you...have you eaten? Have you gone out... well let’s hope you haven’t given what you are wearing,” she said finishing with a heavy sigh.

“Please don’t be the doting mother, okay? That is all I need right now. And to answer those questions, no. No to every one of them. No, I have not eaten. I drank some of her orange juice but aside from that no and no, to your relief I am sure, I have not gone out at all for the past three days. Okay?”

His mother bit her lower lip, trying to understand what her son had just told her. She sat down on the plush chair in the corner of the room. Charlie turned away, breathing deeply. Why did she have to go and sit in THAT chair, he thought, the anger rising in him. His mother surely knew when he had gotten it...and with whom... Charlie looked back at his mother trying to ignore where she was sitting. “Charlie, Charles...why are you acting this way? Come on now,” she said cocking her head just as a muddled dog would.

Charlie sat down on one of the sofas. A sarcastic smile then spread out across his face and he let out a short, bold breath. “This is unbelievable,” he exclaimed in slight frustration before then turning to look at her, “Okay mother, you want to know why exactly I am acting like this? Huh? Well I’ll tell you. I just lost the love of my life, okay? And, oh, I don’t know, it came as a bit of a shocker after two years of marriage and for some reason I just am not able to dismiss the fact and immediately continue my life normally. Because you want to know what? My life is no longer normal, if

DARK ONCE AGAIN

The smoke curled around his listless body. The sirens could be heard in the distance. It seemed like it took forever for them to come. I persistently nudged him with my toe, oblivious of how weak I was. Sweat dripped down my clammy cheek and I shook myself to stay conscious. He wasn’t waking. I didn’t stop though. I whispered his name, trying to once again revive him. I heard some crashing sounds and lifted my head skywards. There were two figures all dressed in black. They looked promising; there was help. Suddenly a voice could be heard: “There are two victims in here...only one seems to be alive, though—” I stopped listening, not wanting to hear. I then slowly stopped tapping my brother and felt him. I realized that he was cold, colder than he had ever been before. I withdrew my trembling hand and attempted to shake my head, but I didn’t have the energy. The man lifted me up and carried me to the other officer. “Here is the dead one,” he stated quietly, placing me into the other man’s extended arms. I lay there, my eyes fluttering until suddenly it was dark once again.

GREGORIA GRISBY-OLSON

THE BALLAD OF Y

Oh why does the y swing away
Distanced in flight like you and your birds
Yolk separated in distinct despair
Oh why does the y act this way?

Why would the y want to curl as it does
To spring to the sky in a fit of deny
All the emptiness inside can't describe you
Oh why would the y want to fly?

Why was the y left alone by your side
Running from life, can't you see that I, like
You my love, am a liar at best
Oh why was the y left to die?

SAMANTHA HUNTINGTON

such a thing as normalcy exists. My life will never, ever be the same. No one can change that...okay...and...and..." Charlie stopped speaking and lowered his tired head, interrupted by the tears that were now streaming down his cold cheeks.

"Charlie, it's not your fault sweetheart. It is no one's... well maybe that driver's but...no, do not even think it's his stupid self's fault. Do not blame anyone... especially not yourself. You could never have stopped it from happening. It was fate, I guess...I mean you could go and sue that guy's sorry self, but what good would come from that... you know that...it would not bring her back." Charlie's mother said before coming over to sit by her now weeping son. There was a silence apart from Charlie's choking sobs. She hesitantly placed her hand on his head and then slowly began to stroke his hair.

"I could have...I could have gone with her... but I didn't. I chose not to; I chose not to be with her when she took her last breath...Why didn't I go? Maybe things could...could have been different..." Charlie said in a worried tone between sobs.

She shook her head and kissed his forehead. "No, you couldn't have done anything...you could have just died along with her and then what would have become of me, huh? I know you want to beat yourself up so as to have someone to blame for something you do not understand but, don't. I already told you, no one could have prevented it," his mother said reassuringly. There was yet another short silence. "Do you have a suit for tomorrow?" she asked changing the subject and breaking the silence. Charlie nodded dreading the thought of the funeral. "That's good...well I have to go...I guess I will see you tomorrow, here at nine o'clock right?" his mother asked. Charlie gave a quick nod before getting up. He walked his mother to the door and hugged her

goodbye. “Get some rest Charlie,” she whispered in his ear before walking out the door towards her car.

Charlie then shut the door behind him and headed towards the message machine. The blinking red light still shone just as brightly. He pushed the button that said play and a clicking noise could be heard. He skipped over his mother and his sister’s messages searching for the one he wanted. It was from her. Charlie clenched his fists preparing to listen to her voice. There it was. She had always spoken in an elegant fashion, pronouncing every syllable of every word and carrying each out to its fullest. She said that she was coming home, she said she had to go, she then said goodbye and she was gone. A tear rolled down Charlie’s face and fell onto the button whose purpose was to delete. Charlie nodded, his finger trembling as he pushed down the button. There it was done; it was gone. Charlie turned away. He looked around his living room, a place that had once been a comfort to him and now seemed cold and desolate. Always it had had color and now it seemed he was looking at a still black and white photo. There was no life; it was bland. Perhaps there still was color, but he could not see it; it no longer existed to him... she no longer existed.

GREGORIA GRIGSBY-OLSON

