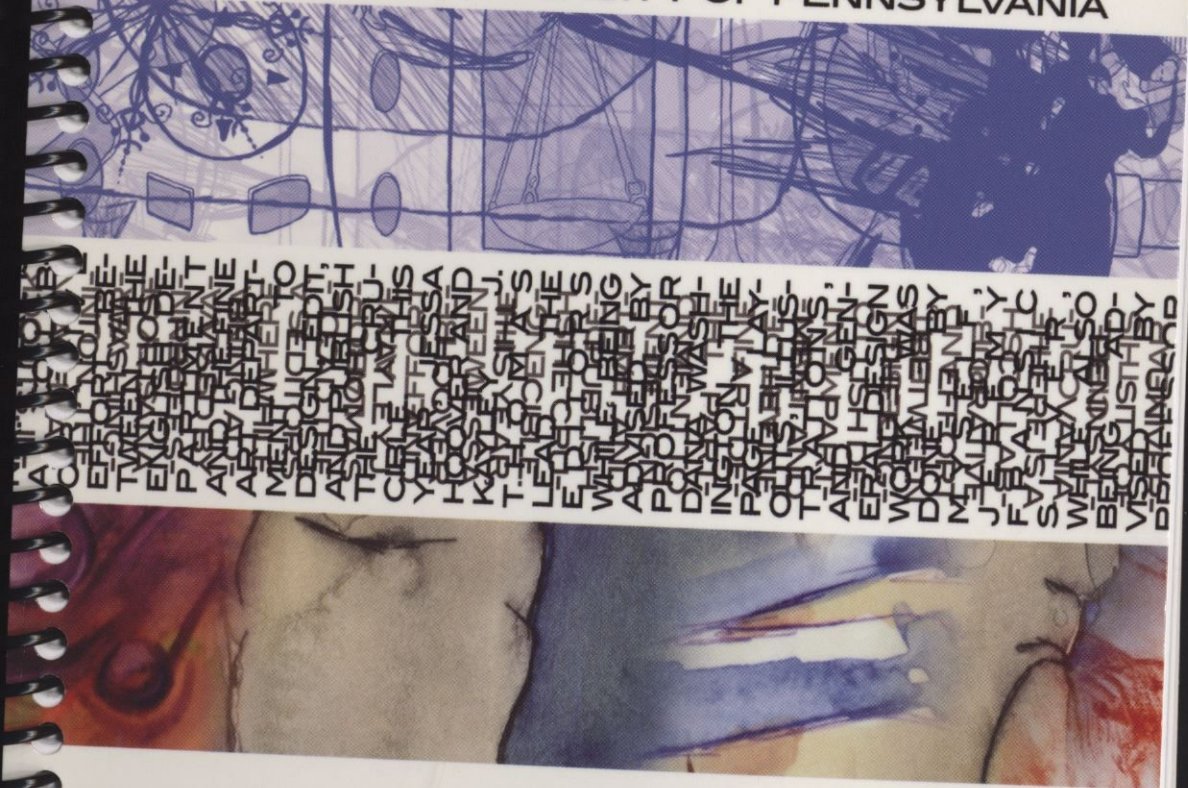


THE **C**RUCIBLE
 2007
 STUDENT LITERARY & ART
 JOURNAL OF LOCK HAVEN
 UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



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The Crucible 2007

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We owe a special thanks to the English and Art Departments. Some of the poetry and prose in this issue were written in Professors Marjorie Maddox Hafer's and Dana Washington's creative writing workshops or in composition classes offered by the English Department; some of the artwork was produced by students for studio courses in the Art Department.

Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and encourages applications from minorities, women, veterans, and persons with disabilities. Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania is a member of the State System of Higher Education.

Cover, page layouts, and illustrations were designed by Jeremy Francis Silver.

crucible (kroo-suh-buhl) n. 1. A vessel used for melting
2. A test or trial that causes great change or development

Simply put, *The Crucible* is an annual collection of Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania student prose, poetry, and visual art. All of the pieces are selected by a staff of students and arranged by a student designer.

The Crucible's purpose is to serve as a showcase of creative talents and build interdisciplinary community.

But art is rarely simple.

In the process of compiling the words and images of these artists, something wildly organic happens, and *The Crucible* truly becomes a container in which the ideas and expressions of the students on this campus are melted together. Instead of being merely a literary magazine that lifelessly displays individual works, it becomes a fused collection that tells its own story.

We would like to invite you to treat this edition of *The Crucible* as you would your own journal. Doodle in the margins and write reflections in between the lines of text to express yourself however you wish. It is our hope that you throw your own thoughts into the melting pot and become a part of our creation.

Jessa Hoover & Kayley Thomas
Editors

Eliza Albert

Of Parrots and Alley Cats	14
Old Piano	16
Of Stardust	24

Angel Anderson

She Never Came	7
I Am the Solipsist	12-13
Beatitudes	24

Amy Burke

Peter Pan Syndrome	8-9
The Complications of Finding	26-27

Greg Davis

Vicarious Vacations for You, the Voyeur	62
---	----

Amanda Gogle

Freedom at Any Cost	11
Boots	19
Central Pennsylvania Stranger	60

Jessa Hoover

This Dance	17
Keeping the Peace	20-22
Moth	57

Lyndsay Jasper

Bedtime	3
---------	---

Danielle Kilcoyne

Snow	60
------	----

Lindsay Landis

The Confession of My Weakness	51
-------------------------------	----

Leona Livingston

The Morning After	15
Gift Horse	55
I AM	56

Ian Taylor Presnell

Switching Channels	52-54
A Continuation of Things	58-59

Mindy Prestash

Forever Remembered	50
--------------------	----

Evan Reibsome

Danger: Extremely Hot	22
-----------------------	----

Melissa Reifsnnyder

His, Now Mine	28
---------------	----

Mike Rinard

The Green Leaves Are Tinted in Orange	15
Nothing but Hope Remains	18
The Dream	23

Christopher Ruff

Redial	4-6
--------	-----

Rebecca Shorter

She Prefers a Line	25
--------------------	----

Danielle Tepper

Close the Curtain	2
Unknown	10
Heart of Glass	49

Kayley Thomas

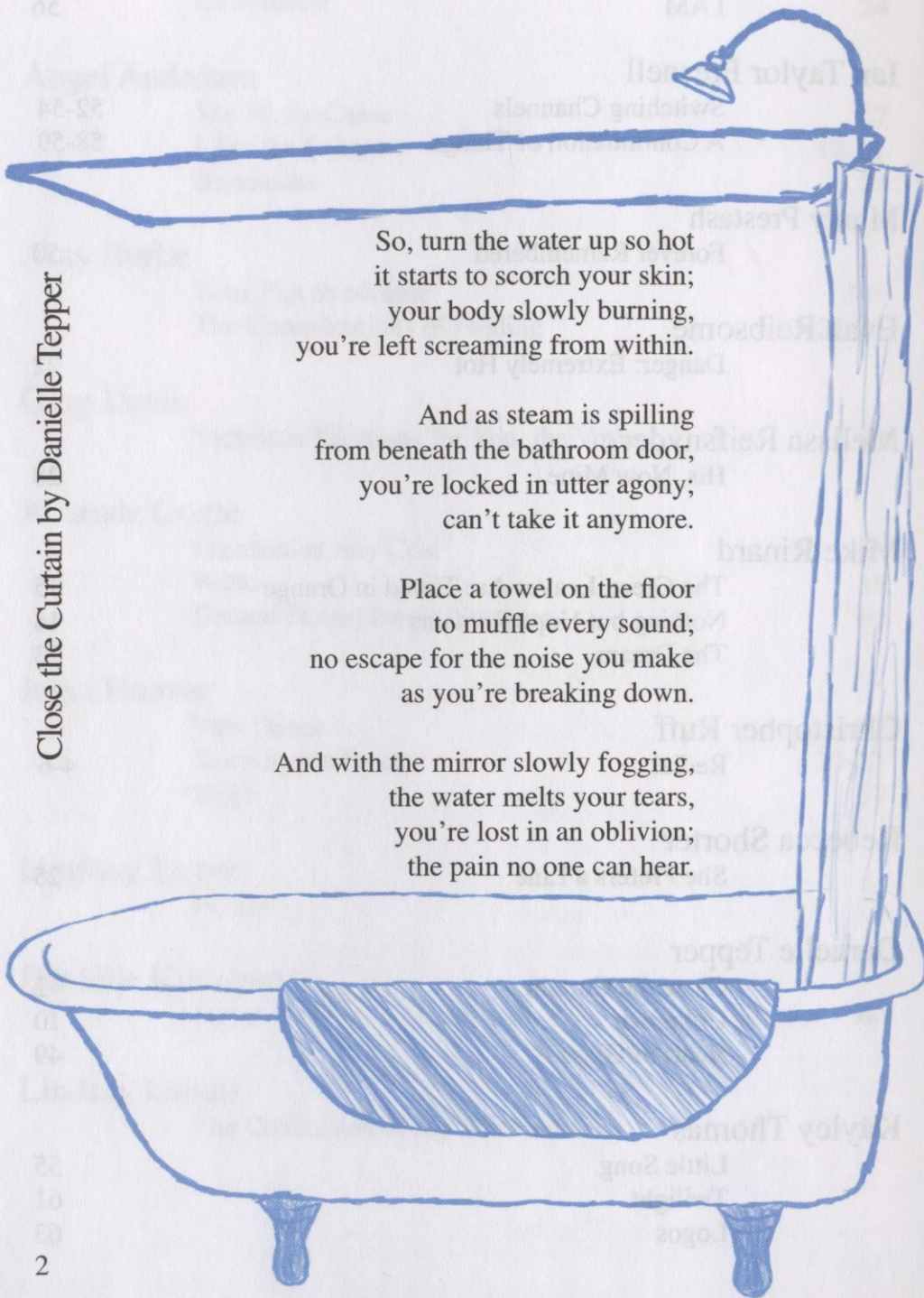
Little Song	55
Twilight	61
Logos	63

So, turn the water up so hot
it starts to scorch your skin;
your body slowly burning,
you're left screaming from within.

And as steam is spilling
from beneath the bathroom door,
you're locked in utter agony;
can't take it anymore.

Place a towel on the floor
to muffle every sound;
no escape for the noise you make
as you're breaking down.

And with the mirror slowly fogging,
the water melts your tears,
you're lost in an oblivion;
the pain no one can hear.



Without fail
the day is done
A new chapter has begun
in more ways than one
Words begin to slip
Sentences become
scattered vowels like scattered thoughts
and mismatched words
Eyes flutter and
suddenly
thoughts turn to you.
Just like they always do.

Wondering
if you're okay
Or if you're feeling
like giving up
Not all can say
that it's ok cause you're just a call away
Sad to say but we all know
that some are not all
cause I can't make that call and
suddenly
thoughts turn to you
Just like they always do.

Tonight
the stars shine just for me and you
Here, there
same stars, too
and now the distance doesn't seem so far
The moon sings my thoughts to you
Another day gone, another test passed
I wonder, how long this will last
unrelenting faith that this time
will be the last and
suddenly
thoughts turn to you
Just like they always do.



The apartment—a two-bedroom, one-bath, living room/kitchenette—resonates with the high-pitched ringing that you can only hear in the quiet. The wind knocks periodically on my hollow log of a home, against the panes of glass. In the too-small living space, a couch, TV, computer and desk, light and stand, and beanbag chair crowd around a contracted patch of carpet like the homeless around a burn barrel. The only sounds are the whirling fan in my computer, the rhythmic tap, tap, tapping of my fingers on keys, and the occasional whooshing gusts rattling my windows.

It's early Spring semester. The exact date, or even month, eludes me, but I know it is January, February, or, at the latest, early March because I am living alone in my apartment. It is a strange time in my life, the time after my brother moves out and before my friend Jason moves in. I have little to no contact with those who are closest to me. My brother has dropped out of school to join the Army the day before he was supposed to come back to our apartment. My mother and I are locked in a three-month argument over my brother's decision to sign up. I shut my best friends and basketball teammates out and lock myself into a \$35 Wal-Mart office chair. My days consist of getting up at 7 a.m. to lift by myself in the mildewy air of Rodger's Gymnasium, going to class and basketball practice, then coming home to write and drink Tom Collins until I nod off while watching Howard Stern. My legs hang over the arm of the three-fourths sized couch and fall asleep just before I do.

My brother's room has that eerie feeling about it like the empty room or shrine of a dead aunt or grandparent. I leave it undisturbed except when throwing darts at the board hanging on the inside of his door. It relieves stress, frustration. On this day—whatever day it was—I am taking a break after finishing a paper for physics seminar and before starting a short story. As one of my darts smacks just northwest of the bullseye, the phone rings. On the other end my dad says, as if it is a question rather than a greeting, "Chris?"

"Yes," I answer, surprised because my dad is still just Jim to me at this point of our lives, as he has been since he left when I was two. The only time I ever talk to him on the phone is when I call needing my bike tuned up. He's never called me. We don't

have a relationship like that yet. Our interactions have been limited—Christmas visits absent of conversation, birthday presents left with Mom while I'm at some sporting event. I know something has to be wrong.

"Chris," Jim's voice comes through the receiver, "I've got some bad news." Some crackling noises—either static or his beard rubbing against the phone—follow his words, disallowing silence. "Your Aunt Mary Ann passed away today," he says, interrupting the grating sounds.

The news shocks me. Along with the alcohol in my body, his words make the already close walls seem to close in nearer. The lights throb, appearing to breathe. "I'm sorry," I barely whisper into the phone. No other words are able to climb out from my throat.

I notice a crack in the molding of the window frame by my brother's bed that allows the winter breezes to rattle the Venetian blinds. Jared must have really gotten cold in here, I think as Jim tells me that the cancer was just too advanced and that he is going out to Oregon for the funeral. "I want to come up when I get back," he says. "She left you a few things."

Telling him that I'll have to check my schedule with basketball and school, I ask him to call first to make sure I have time. "Yeah," he says, the scratchy, sandpaper echo of facial hair amplified through the phone, "I understand." I say I'm sorry again and then we say our goodbyes.

I sit down at the computer and instant message my sister with the news. She already knows. We chat for a little about the Christmas cards Aunt Mary Ann has sent us every year, without exception. I never have seen a card or a letter with the addresses of Jim's other brothers or sisters, postmarked from Washington, Oregon, California, or Utah. We—my brother, sister, and I—seem to be dead wood to most of our Ruff relatives, pruned from their family tree after the divorce. Yet Aunt Mary Ann, having only met us children as babies, always has made a point to send a card with an update from out west, ten dollars, and instructions to buy something fun—nothing practical. My sister and I both regret never meeting her, but after those lines of text, minutes of white worthlessness hang on my computer screen like wet linens on a clothes line in the frozen February air.

After I hit the gray switch, the screen snaps to black, and I sit staring at the person within. My beard tangles around my fingers like a briar patch; my eyes, black discs with no ancestral distinction. When I pull my hand from my face, the sound of ripping Velcro—of static, of sandpaper—ricochets against the expressionless glass of the computer and the bare walls. I try to recall an image of Aunt Mary Ann—a picture sent with a card, a family portrait, childhood photographs with Jim—anything; nothing. For no known reason, I picture her to resemble Grandma Ruff, whom I also never met but have seen from a portrait that remains filed between her bedside

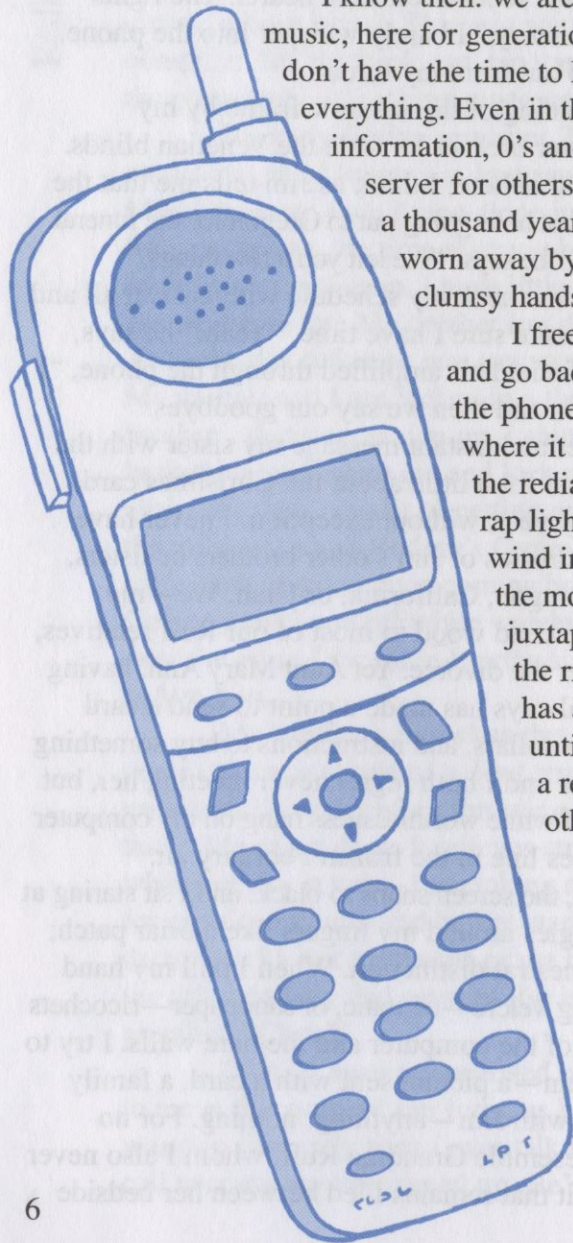
stand and the wall. I'm sure that they have that same, heavy jaw, stern yet handsome. Her hair brushed with the same silver strokes throughout tufts of coarse black. Her eyes the same basaltic rock peering through sea foam. I imagine Mary Ann to have the Ruff nose, wide and round like a weathered peak.

Peering into the screen, I try to force an image to take shape. The only face that stares back at me, though, wears that same groomed beard, the same questioning tight-lipped smile, the same unpainted marble eyes.

I know then: we are not stone or words, photos or music, here for generations meant to be studied; we don't have the time to learn, interpret, or understand everything. Even in this age, we can't be bits of information, 0's and 1's, stored away in some server for others to love in fifty or a hundred—a thousand years from now. We are mud rocks worn away by water or wind, crumbled by clumsy hands.

I free myself from the chair, get up and go back into Jared's room where I left the phone. The bed covers are wrinkled where it lay tossed. I pick it up and hit the redial button. The Venetian blinds rap lightly against the glass from the wind invading through the crack in the molding—an offbeat rhythm juxtaposed against the steady beat of the ringing phone bell. Their music has an almost hypnotizing effect, until interrupted by the clatter of a receiver being picked up on the other end....

"Hello, Dad?"



Somewhere off the coast
of Finland, happily in a spring
garden, a man and woman, side
by side. She, her hands
in the dirt, and he,
his mind in the clouds.

He stands and says, "Are you
coming?" A tulip blooms.
Worms burrow holes in
the earth. "I'm not
coming," she said.

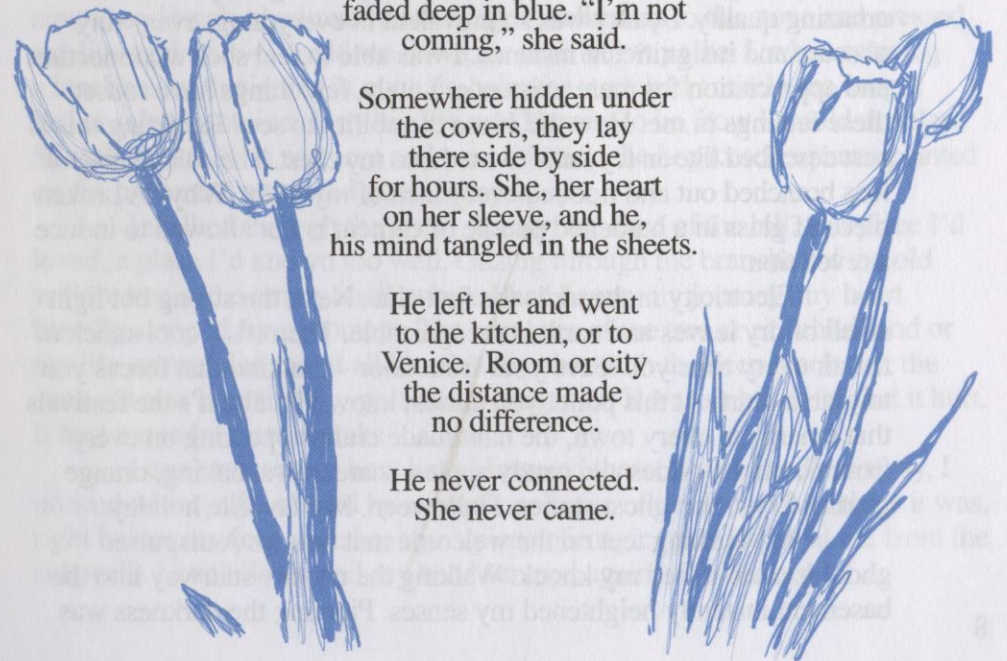
Somewhere on the shores
of Helsinki the waves come
hurtling inland. Rising and
crashing. Crashing
and breaking. Rising
again. She, her feet
in the sand, and he,
his mind somewhere else.

Walking away, he turns
"Are you coming?"
The waves have receded, the sun
faded deep in blue. "I'm not
coming," she said.

Somewhere hidden under
the covers, they lay
there side by side
for hours. She, her heart
on her sleeve, and he,
his mind tangled in the sheets.

He left her and went
to the kitchen, or to
Venice. Room or city
the distance made
no difference.

He never connected.
She never came.



When I was young, I owned the world. Clothing racks in department stores became my hiding spots; dirt was merely war paint and salt and pepper shakers were transformed into toys. When walking down the sidewalk, I stealthily avoided cracks (so as not to break my mother's back), but more importantly, I noticed every shiny spot. The tiny pieces of glass rarely failed to catch my eye. I knew the truth. The tiny sparkling spots were actually slivers of magic stuck between the stone, only seen by those who believed. As I was kneeling down to scoop up the magic, the shine was suddenly hidden by a dark shadow. I was always left scraping my hand against the hardened cement.

This memory struck me with immense force as Fred and I stood outside of work using our allotted break time. His lips wrapped around a cigarette, sucking in deeply as his curly head began to tilt back – ready to exhale. His lips then slightly parted, and a white cloud erupted from his throat. I heard the low monotone rumble of Fred's voice; it was steady and cool, but I didn't comprehend a word. I sat on the steel bench, my arms dangling over my knees, fully transfixed on a piece of glass shining up at me from the cemented walkway.

The biggest change from my childhood into adolescence and into adulthood has nothing to do with an expansion in knowledge – nothing remotely close to increasing in height and absolutely nothing to do with losing imagination or giving up dreams. When I was a little girl, anything could move me. Even a few years ago, I possessed that amazing quality. Beauty was so prevalent in everything, every tiny obscure and insignificant instance. I was able to feel such a connection and appreciation for mere existence. Lately, few things have roused these feelings in me. How did I lose the ability to see? Realizing this is best described like an icy knife twisted into my chest. The cold feeling of loss branched out and flooded every inch of my body. Why? A broken piece of glass in a hardened puddle of cement is not allowed to induce a revelation.

Electricity in the air is the first clue. Next, the strong but light smell of dry leaves and earth is recognizable. Then it's a cool shock of the air every time you leave your front door – the kind that forces you to grab a scarf. At this point, you almost know. Finally, it's the festivals that emerge in every town, the handmade crafts appearing on every front porch, hay rides and candy apples, scarecrows, baking, orange glaring faces, and ghost stories. Halloween. My favorite holiday.

My shifting feet on the welcome mat ceased. A disguised ghoul had answered my knock. Walking the narrow stairway into the basement instantly heightened my senses. Piercing the darkness was

candlelight, while raucous voices and laughter filled the silence. The damp musky smell, however, was blatantly not concealed. Behind every mask, every face caked with makeup, every costume, every façade, was a face I knew – a soul I'd connected with. Time, school, and the pursuit of money had distracted me from the Geisha seated upon the couch as well as the vampire cheerleader on the loveseat clinking glasses with a Jedi master. I made the rounds. I promised to spend some time with the pirate and apologized to the masked slasher for my lack of phone calls. We sipped red Kool-Aid and watched old Japanese horror films. Then it hit me. Tangled among random limbs, linked arms, fingers intertwined, heads on laps, whispers of conversations, the impending music spewing from the television, hearty laughs, greasy food, couples in love, all the people I loved surrounding me... I had to get out of there. I was choking. I was drowning.

The sudden chill of the autumn air slapped me as the door swung shut and I entered the night. Silence and solitude, the only things I seemed to encounter, made me feel even more restless. Clenched fists swung at my sides as passing houses caused lights to flicker on almost simultaneously. I began to walk on the street. In that basement, experiencing such a simple warm moment, made me so cold I had no choice but to escape it. Hiking up the sloping land and through the fallen leaves, my feet led me past my old house. Past the shadows of my jungle gym, my thousand-foot evergreen, my sandbox filled with spiders, my window on the second floor; past my hiding spot between the couch and table, my collection of bottle caps, my porch swing, the hill I slid down in the winter, my sundial, the patch of wild flowers at the base of my drain pipe, finally I reached my destination. It stood tall, my past... or the beginnings of it. The only existing and concrete piece of my history, simple and brick, shadowed and empty. I walked up to the stone and pressed my lips against it – I could see down the dark hallways that I, when carrying a lunchbox with pigtails in my hair, believed stretched entirely too long. I had absolutely no idea how big life would grow to be, how I would develop. Standing there for a moment and remembering the hopscotch squares painted on the pavement produced goosebumps.

I walked through the uncut grass to the base of the hill, to a place I'd loved, a place I'd known too well. Gazing through the branches of the old willow tree at the empty shell, where I had begun my journey, my heart literally stopped for a moment. The branches of the tree or my childhood or my life surrounded me. It all blended together with the deep black sky, the stars – it was here that my past and present met. It was so beautiful that it hurt. It hurt me to be there, to take it all in.

I can't remember how long I lingered there, but as I walked away, I noticed white puffs caused by a simple collapse of my lungs. And there it was, right before my feet, pure beauty. A piece of magic sparkled up at me from the sidewalk. I knelt down and my hand scraped against the cement.

*look towards me, see through me,
kiss me, can't taste me,
listen, don't hear me,
touch, but won't feel me ...
know nothing about me.*

There's this thing called
judgement,
(((evil incarnate)))
I've learned to live without.
Snow globe life s h a t t e r e d,
on the concrete world
I've grown to resent.
Memories don't matter
when their significance
is lost in crowds of
unfamiliar faces.

Walls built cannot be breached;
no one yet has proved their worth.
Nostalgia m e l t s, burns painful tracks
straight from my heart to the ground;
trampled, forgotten ... *meaningless.*
Vocal cords strained, throat hoarse;
unnoticed, unacknowledged.

Conversation attempts
c r u m b l e
on crimson-stained paths
overshadowed
by green-blanketed giants
who taunt and mock,
and know
every insecurity.
Outside looking in,
nose pressed to Plexiglas barriers
of membership-only
cliques.

Let me in.
Clipped wings can't soar,
spread & fly away;
(escape).

No returning
to where self-identity
is enough to grant
self-worth.
Solitary twilight strolls
down "Ivy Lane;"
vine-woven intricacies
of whispered hopes.

Glide past shoots of water
with nowhere to go but up;
yet barely reaching stars.
sparkle and shine

Broken connections; can't you see them, too?
Only the light of the moon
illuminates fears unspoken.
Desperation transparent
as cinder-block walls.

LHU: Left Here ... Unknown.

She pours coffee down
her throat like an ancient
remedy to cure all ailments.

Sleep no longer her friend
as tears slowly cascade
down her face. But there

is no medicine to heal
what is broken. Steam
rises from her cup like the last

gasps of life, too shallow now
to share. Cold strangers
treat her better, but what

can you do besides drown
when you're drawn to scum
somewhere at the bottom

of the pond? Suffocating all her sorrows
in brown colored water, scalding
yet soothing, burning away every thought,

every kiss, with every sip. Aroma therapy
with a taste and boost; for sleep ships
haunting dreams, like rushing

river water over her. Even in his
absence he holds her tight,
like her caffeine addiction, never

letting go, never allowing peace.
And so she sinks into a sea
of tears and coffee.



This is a white wall. There are three more like it. They connect to the white ceiling and the white floor. Lit by white light. And it's white, and it's white, and it's white.

I am in it; I am it. Even the bed sheets are white. Not a day in bleach could get these sheets any whiter. I love the color white. The foundation of all color. The alpha and the omega. After all, everything needs a creator; you can't have creation from nothing you know. Jesus needed the water before he could make the wine.

I am alone. Not lonely, just alone. If I am the only, does that mean I am the alpha or the omega? Did I begin, or was I always? A past life of a past life of a past life? If I am the only mind, then which mind created mine? *Ex nihilo, nihil fit!* I guess that says a lot about me...

I'm almost certain I exist[ed]. I had a life, I think. Or should I say, "I think, I have a life," or better yet, "I think, therefore you are." Yes, you are and I was, and we were. But now, here we aren't. I am here and you are there, or are you?

Am I dreaming? I wish you were here. A wish is a product of a dream, a product of thought, a product of the mind. Do you mind up there? I'm trying to think. Hey buddy, are you a head?

The trouble with thinking is the thoughts that come with it. I mean, they are my thoughts; I have them, but I do not control them. The generator, not the driver. Oh no, no homunculi upstairs here.

They tell me I'm dreaming, hallucinating if you will. I tell them, "Yes, I most likely am. Unfortunately, you are a product of that dream, a bad trip, if I will. If I will." (There's not a whole lot to be done about a bad trip.) They only dope me up a little harder and I finally get to see some color around here.

Does white ever end? All foundations crumble. Look at what happened to Rome. Poor Mesopotamia. Everything changes, except change. Figure that one out. December is the cruelest of months. Max sunlight hours on my window linger at around four, barely enough time to admire how ridiculously white my room is. All I get to look at is the snow on the ground and the gnarled grey trees. What is grey but white's shadow? Nothing here to celebrate. There is a tree somewhere around here with tinsel and twinkling lights and an angel, and all it makes me want to do is

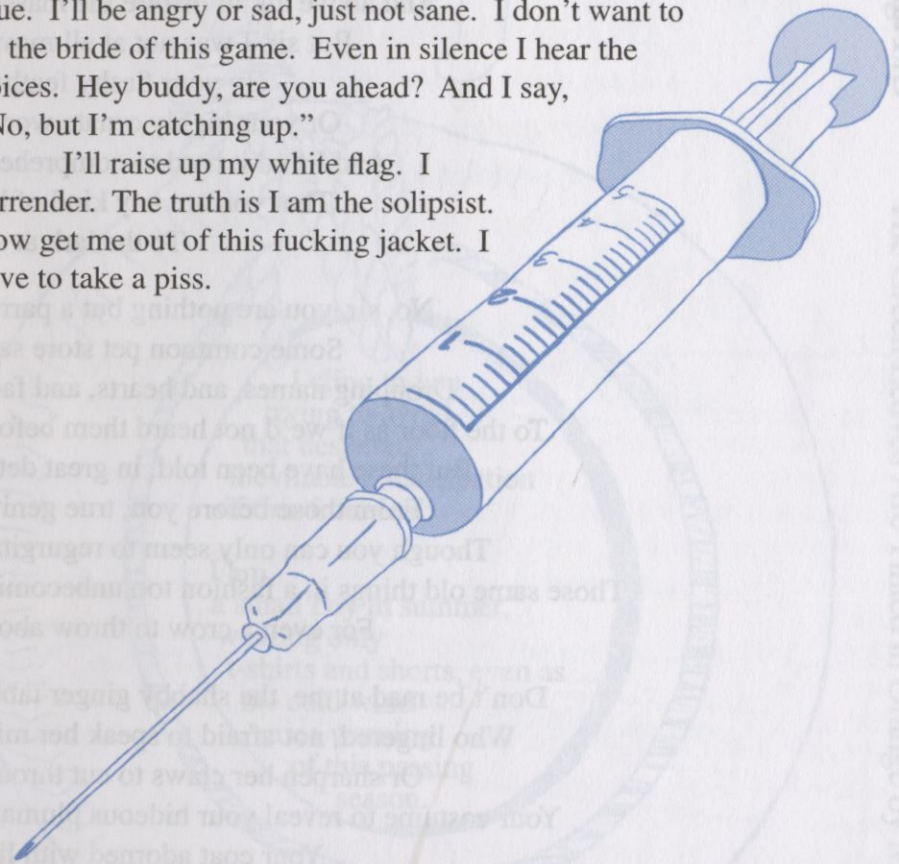
scream, "Jesus wasn't born in December!" He was born in March or April or some other month when you wouldn't freeze to death walking around Nazareth. I wonder who I was back then. Probably something shitty like a tax collector. I just can't ever get anyone on my side.

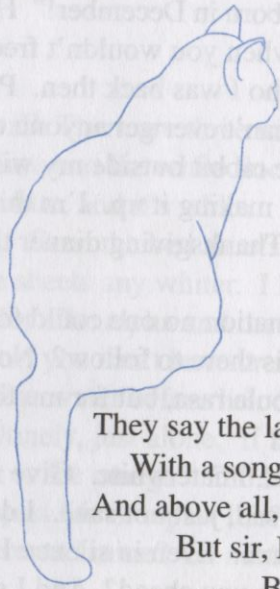
There's a white rabbit outside my window now. Oh, the irony. And no Alice; I'm not making it up. I'm thinking it up. Let's go to your restaurant and have a Thanksgiving dinner that couldn't be beat. Oh wait, that was last month.

Without imagination no one could follow me into these halls. That's just silly; who is there to follow? Nobody is listening because nobody is there. A tabula rasa, but for me that is just too dangerous and too void. White noise.

You know what, I hate white. Give me some red, or blue. I'll be angry or sad, just not sane. I don't want to be the bride of this game. Even in silence I hear the voices. Hey buddy, are you ahead? And I say, "No, but I'm catching up."

I'll raise up my white flag. I surrender. The truth is I am the solipsist. Now get me out of this fucking jacket. I have to take a piss.





They say the lark represents the poet
With a song to captivate, enthrall,
And above all, to inspire the masses.
But sir, I was not at all moved
By your flashy feathers
Or your highly ornate words.
And I find it hard to comprehend
That you are any kind of kin
To the lark at all.

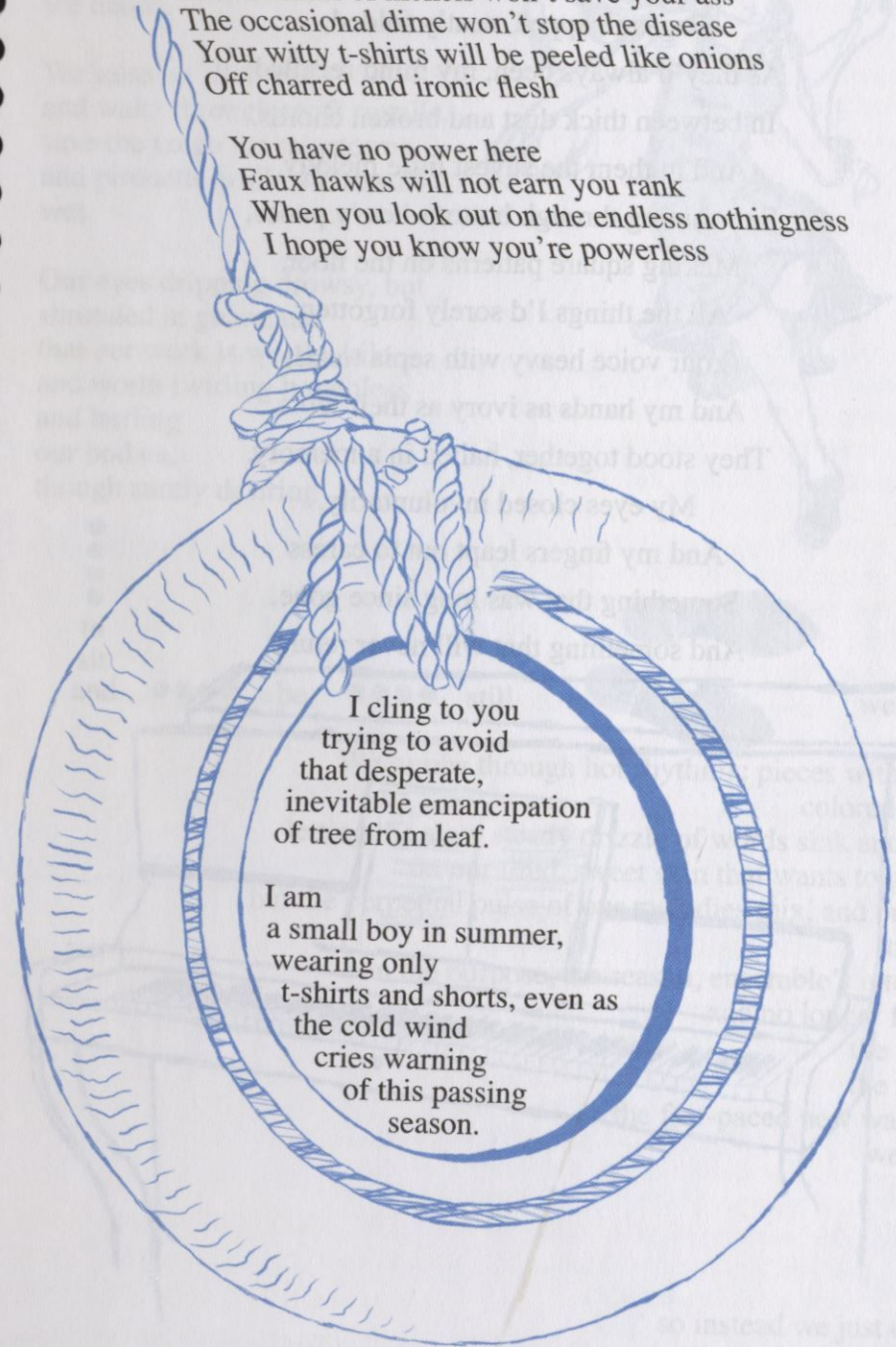
No, sir, you are nothing but a parrot:
Some common pet store sale,
Dropping names, and hearts, and facts
To the floor as if we'd not heard them before.
But these have been told, in great detail
From those before you, true genius,
Though you can only seem to regurgitate
Those same old things in a fashion too unbecoming
For even a crow to throw about.

Don't be mad at me, the shabby ginger tabby,
Who lingered, not afraid to speak her mind
Or sharpen her claws to cut through
Your costume to reveal your hideous plumage,
Your coat adorned with lies.
I may choke on you yet, sir, but please believe
That no song you could sing would ever
Taste nearly as sweet as you did,
Flavored with bitter defeat.

You thrashed your arms in useless attempts
To stop the drowning.
We tied you down because we hate the fanfare.
No alarms will be sounded here

Your handful of nickels won't save your ass
The occasional dime won't stop the disease
Your witty t-shirts will be peeled like onions
Off charred and ironic flesh

You have no power here
Faux hawks will not earn you rank
When you look out on the endless nothingness
I hope you know you're powerless



I cling to you
trying to avoid
that desperate,
inevitable emancipation
of tree from leaf.

I am
a small boy in summer,
wearing only
t-shirts and shorts, even as
the cold wind
cries warning
of this passing
season.

I'd rediscovered the map to the piano bench,
 Taking slow, caustic steps there,
 Treading deeper into stagnant, sad notes,
 And lifted the seat to what we'd found.
 Pages wrapped, neatly folded,
 As they'd always been, my mind recalled,
 In between thick dust and broken chords.
 And in them the shyest little melody,
 Sun shining through bottom-heavy panes,
 Making square patterns on the floor.
 All the things I'd sorely forgotten:
 Your voice heavy with sepia tones,
 And my hands as ivory as their tools.
 They stood together, halted in a memory.
 My eyes closed involuntarily,
 And my fingers leapt out to caress
 Something that was long since gone,
 And something that will never return.



Whisking and pedaling,
 words merging and melting
 through gales of thoughts
 blust'ring by

we dance.

We salsa on slick cliffs
 and waltz through swift squalls,
 save the tango for rainstorms
 and pirouette while we're still
 wet,

Our eyes dripping drowsy, but
 shrouded in guarantee
 that our work is worthwhile,
 and worth twirling breathless
 and hurling
 our bodies,
 though surely desiring

to
 sit
 and



be



still



we dance.

We rumba through hot rhythmic pieces with bright
 colored thesis,
 letting the slow steady drizzle of words sink and sizzle
 on our tired, sweet skin that wants to give in,
 but the perpetual pulse of our melodies mix, and our eyes
 transfix
 on the purpose, the reason, ensemble's intention,
 and no longer fearing
 the failure
 the falling
 the fast-paced new waltzing,
 we don't
 want
 to
 sit,
 so instead we just dance.



What is it that keeps
the lady there waiting,
her husband lost at sea?
The sand swirling `round her
white dress at dusk,
eyes stretched across the water?

What clenches a small boy's
eyes tight shut, as he swings
in his first ball game?
The shaking stripes on his uniform
reflecting the feelings grasped inside?

The same that holds a man's eyes fast
storming across a battlefield,
through a whirlwind of swirling bullets and bombshells
yet seeing only one thing.

That notion that sustains the song of the oppressed,
under the watchful eye of tyranny
and the heat of the sun.



Worn and cracked
blistered and bruised
by hard work, much
like your hands. Hours
upon hours of trudging
through rows upon
rows of peach trees;
grooming, pruning,
cutting at excess branches
so new life can thrive.

Soil soft and thawing,
boots sink in, engraving
mud into the fiber of your soles
like your belief in religion
deeply rooted in the earth,
nature and solitude, you
pray. Bronze weathered face turned
towards sky, silver stubble and whiskers
reflecting light. Praying, wishing for more
time with us. Chainsaws sing
hymns accompanied by the creak
of splintering wood, your voice resonating
through the house like a trumpet
when you get home, but
you always use your quiet
voice when you wake me.



We talk now,
I am grown and use
an annoying alarm clock.
And you never remember
me taking ballet, maybe
because little pink slippers never
rested next to broken boots
in the cold garage. They never saw mud
or worked in the fields, still pristine
and perfectly pink. You don't remember
me water coloring on linoleum
kitchen floors. Must have been a Mom
and me thing. But that's okay,
regardless of the changing years
you remain like your boots,
outside, standing solitary
and strong like soldiers
guarding our home.

The day I turned ten was the day I became as still as a tree. It was the best day of my life.

Birthdays were a big deal when I was growing up because we always did something special. We didn't have a lot of money, so we had to find ways to make the day exciting besides giving tons of gifts. For my birthday, the special event was making caramel apples over an open fire in our backyard.

I liked caramel apples, and I looked forward to them every year, but what I liked best about my birthday was the time I got to spend by myself after I finished preparing the fire pit.

Right after lunch, when the sun's final intense rays were threatening to toast the crisp air, it was my job to set up the stones and drag out the benches for everyone to sit on, gather the kindling, set out pots for melting the caramel, and gather a peck of apples from the orchard. It didn't take me as long as everyone thought it did, though, which meant I always had a few hours to myself while my mom and sisters made cake and cookies and silly-looking cards for me.

So every year on my birthday, I would spend the last hours of the afternoon in the strip of woods that lined the back of our yard. It wasn't a very wide thread of trees, but once I was inside it, I felt as though I was in the hollow of a mountain, with thin, skyscraping pine trees that looked like old grandfathers quietly keeping the afternoon sun out of my eyes.

If I sat among those trees long enough, I would start to believe that I could really be as still as they were. My breathing would grow shallow and I would find the place where my posture would be flawlessly straight, but I wouldn't even feel as though I had to hold it there. The only thing that would move was my head, swiveling at every sound in the brush. But even that would stop. Soon, I would become so committed to the stillness that I would not even notice the chipmunks darting or the birds' startled fluttering. It is easy to think you are as still as a tree if you spend a lot of time in the woods.

The day I turned ten was also the first time I had ever smelled burning flesh. Of course now I have smelled worse, but at the time, I was only used to smelling apples and firewood in early October. On my tenth birthday, I was in my usual wooded seclusion when a cruelly acidic odor plowed past my elderly, muted friends. It smelled as if someone had speared a decaying carcass and heated it until it swelled and burst.

I was sickened but boyishly curious, so I followed the repulsion through the stretch of trees until I could see the edge of our neighbor's backyard. Through a web of stiff brush, I could just

make out Mr. and Mrs. Musser pouring more coal over the flaming body of their newly born son. The baby wriggled artfully in the ashes, but I was unable to see the beauty then. In my ignorance, I was absolutely terrified. It was 2081 and the Relativity Act had just been passed, so I had never before witnessed what my inner self sensed to be unusual.

Childish shock overwhelmed me, and I stayed crouched in the undergrowth for some time. Everything I had heard on the kitchen television over the past few months crowded my memory. My dad's explanations hadn't made sense until I sat there on the soft moss, marveling at the conviction of my neighbors. Reports I had paid little attention to came back to me clearly.

"It is officially illegal in the United States of America to pass judgment on citizens' actions..."

"...We are self-governing persons that have the right to follow our own truth without the restrictions of government or civilian..."

"My fellow Americans, this is a great step in the direction to a more compassionate society. Today we are advancing toward a deeper respect for humanity..."

I knew it had been a glorious day when the act was passed, but my hopeful family and the promising speeches from Washington didn't seem to match the blackened newborn bawling through the trees.

I will never forget the terror I felt as I tore back to my house and relayed the events to my father, who was seated by the kitchen window, smoking a pipe and watching the Mussers' stoke up the fire. Dad smiled when I told him the story. He assured me that the Mussers' were just following their inner selves, but that my mom and he were sure their inner selves would never lead them to do such a thing to my sisters or me.

"Now I know it seems a little odd to us, but that's what's true for them. We can't be runnin' over there, tellin' them they're wrong. It would be rude, Charlie," he explained as he blew smoke out of his unshaven mouth. "Not to mention it would be against the law. And we certainly don't want to go back to the day when folks were always arguing over the Truth that everyone should follow. Bunch of intolerant folks tellin' everybody how to live." He pursed his lips around his pipe and looked over at my mother silently stirring a bowl of cake batter. "Son, that's how wars get started. Now you just mind your own business and finish up that fire pit." Dad got up from the table and held open the back door. I wiped the tears from my cheeks and walked toward the door, silently reciting Emerson's words, which were engraved in the plaque that hung above the doorway: "The only right is what is after my own constitution, the only wrong what is against it."

Mom skirted around the counter and bent down beside me with a soft smile on her face.

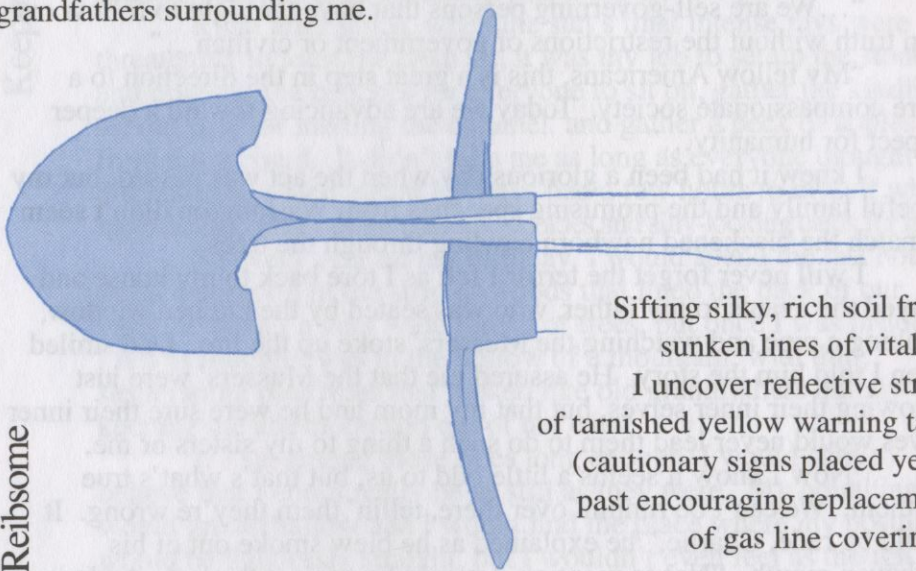
"People need to follow their own hearts, sweetie," she whispered. "Don't judge."

I nodded and walked back into the autumn air. The odor had unabashedly propelled into our yard.

The fire pit didn't need any more fixing, so I headed towards my place in the woods. I wanted to be like the trees, quiet and still and unconcerned with the world around me. They had watched the Mussers and countless others follow their truth without even shifting their gaze.

I climbed through the brittle leaves and tangled branches and sat on my rock, back straight and eyes forward. The waning sunlight danced softly through the treetops.

Twice I stole a glance through the tree line to see the Mussers' poking at the charred heap at their feet, but my dad's voice came to my ears and I looked up at the model trees who stood peaceful and unjudging. I closed my eyes, pinched my nose shut, and sat silent like the old wise grandfathers surrounding me.



Sifting silky, rich soil from
sunken lines of vitality,
I uncover reflective strips
of tarnished yellow warning tape
(cautionary signs placed years
past encouraging replacement
of gas line covering).

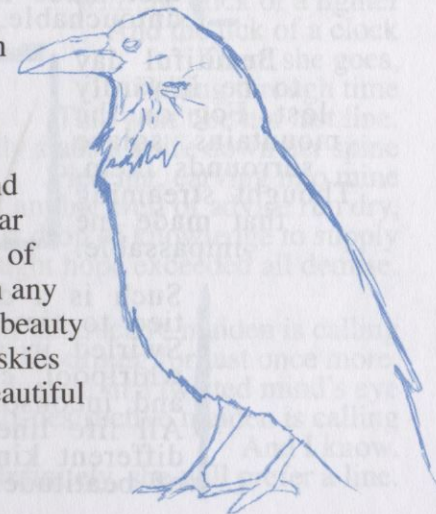
In omnipotent arrogance
did you bury dangers near
the surface for your amusement,
chuckling at divine cleverness
while hiding intentions behind
free will?

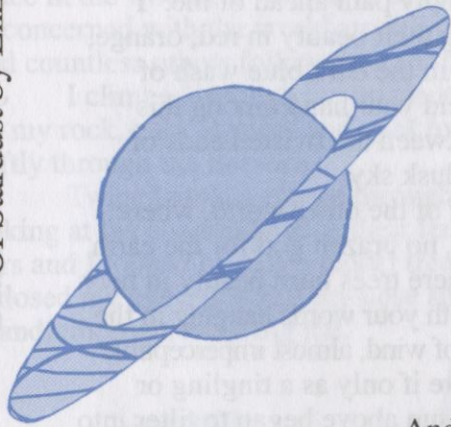
If so, I will ignore your
meticulously crafted patterns,
digging, instead, to establish
a foundation free from influence,
allowing myself the fortune
for failure.

A pale, red moon lights the empty path ahead of me. I imagine it as it was: the trees, burning their beauty in red, orange, and yellow flames that slowly flicker in the dark blue wash of night. Here we walked, and here I held your hand among this rhapsody of light, the stars gazing between the twisted ends of limbs and twigs, slashing across the dusk sky.

You were telling me this story of the other world, where there is no sun blazing in the far blue, no brazen god for the earth to worship in circular revolutions, where trees burn beauty in fiery colors. As we walked hand in hand, with your words hanging in the air, I felt a small change, like a whisper of wind, almost imperceptible on the back of my neck – but still there if only as a tingling or slight shiver – and slowly the golden sun above began to filter into the leaves surrounding us, shafts of color falling like drops of water from the sky, and my eyes were wide with wonder as you led me into a clearing that shone in its brilliance of light and half-lights, the deepest crimson burning the air above us and your face shining gloriously. I listened as the wind slowly blew over the far hills and watched as your hair flung around your face, which now shone as bright and colorful as any of the leaves, and you slowly spread your arms and opened your mouth, filling the air with song so pure in its being even the trees shuddered at its terrible beauty, and your eyes flashed like the stars above and your voice thundered across the green stretching hills until the vibrations ripped through my body, and the light began to spin around me, the flames whirling in dizzying circles, spinning and spinning, burning and whirling and earth rising around my body with green grass stretching to the sky –

I woke up alone on this path
with nothing but a memory.
Tonight I will dream I am a raven,
and my spirit will fly through the
blackest black of night. Like a wind
I will stalk the flaming trees and roar
at the stars, singing songs in waves of
silence that cut more powerful than any
sound until I find you, blazing your beauty
in the darkness, soaring across the skies
of other worlds, trailing terrible, beautiful
songs behind you.

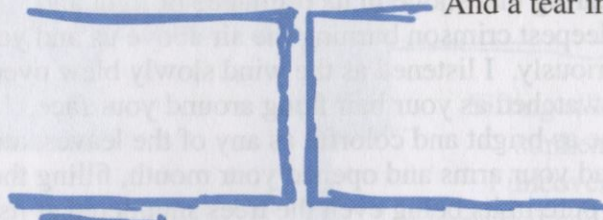




Someone once said our souls
Were made of particles, molecules,
Stardust and planets
That crashed together with the hope
That we may become great things.

I certainly don't feel
As if I were made from stardust
Or anything beautiful or important.
And this might just be speculation,
but I know I am not destined
for great things of any shape or size.

However, I do know what happens
when the soul escapes the body
and the will to live follows;
we fade away, nothing more.
And I will take comfort in the knowledge
That I will follow behind all great men
To dust in the ground
And a tear in someone's eye.



This is a wall
bound by brick.
Stone joined by
one or the other
or both or another.
The very being
that made me
untouchable.

Beautiful day
to be inwardly
lost. Fog on the
mountains, solace
surrounds them.
Thought streaming
that made me
impassable.

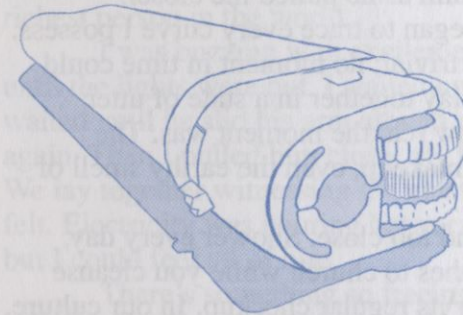
Such is a dream
tied to time.
Swirled in a
whirlpool, confused
and inconsolable.
All life lines and
different kinds
of beatitudes.

She prefers a line.
Trace the silhouette of her little boy's frown
Or that of the trickling tear,
Glistening as it cascades down his soft, fleshy cheek.
Such a line she does not embrace.

It is the line of convulsions and shakes
Burns, bruises, and whores that she prefers.
Like the claws of a talon, it seizes her soul
Rattles the primordial fiber of her being
And in this long, drawing moment
She feels alive.

She is not a mother and she is not a friend.
Bound and chained by her addiction
Ashes on her knees
She is no longer a prisoner
But a dwelling guest in the house of the profane
Like moth-bitten fabric, her soul bears the wounds
Of a physical adrenaline high
Borne by the attempts to revive the feeling of being alive.
She prefers a line.

Hear her little boy scream
Silent and still, he cries himself to sleep
Wraps himself around his dreams
Hovers there for what falls too short of an eternity.
At the barren window, he waits
A lonely sycamore,
Sap weeps from his pores.
Mommy lies.
At five he knows,
She will always prefer a line.



With the click of a lighter
And the tick of a clock
There she goes,
Falling through time
This won't be her last line.
She continually stabs a knife down her spine
Piercing, carving into mine
Twelve years younger, I am her well of advice run dry,
Grappling for one last drop of knowledge to supply
I once thought hope exceeded all demise.

Her self-destructive maiden is calling
Mourning for just once more,
A fit of soothing rectification in a twisted mind's eye
Her self-destructive maiden is calling
And I know,
Infinitely, she will prefer a line.

There's something about letting your body experience the cold, rain, sweat, odor, withdraw, and pain. There's something about arms intertwined. Skin on skin. There's nothing as alluring and seductive as tactile awareness. Slowly, following the small of the back to the hips, fingertips tracing lightly up the stomach, past the happy trail to the chest, finally resting on the neck can arouse more pleasure than an orgasm. Shape. Texture. Pressure. Shock. There's something absolutely beautiful experienced when wrapped in someone's arms. Epic poems are written on skin. There are a million words in a single touch. There's something about falling in love.

Humans are supposedly superior to animals. What is human nature? Ignoring instinct, we act with poise and grace to impress, to climb the ladder to higher paychecks. We wear ties to gain respect. We forget the freedom of grass between our toes when only following cemented walkways. What is basic instinct? We run on treadmills to please our bathroom scales. Save money for the bigger and better picture. Debt piles at our feet. Where does emotion fit in? We use sex to ease our loneliness. We use sex to ease our pain. We fall in love.

I'd never seen that much hair on any other human. Lying beside him in the dark, it was still vivid, covering his entire body. I wanted to reach out, to touch him as he pulled me closer. Following my spine, his hand began to trace every curve I possess. Everything up to this point was trivial; no moment in time could compare. Naked and warm, we lay together in a state of utter innocence, just holding on to how real the moment was. The beauty of our flaws, the lack of makeup, even the earthy smell of his skin fit together like our lips.

In our culture, don't stand too close. Shower every day, twice a day. Wear your best clothes to church while you cleanse your soul. Take your SUV in for its regular checkup. In our culture, make sure you criticize without a sense of solution. Men can't hold hands with men unless they're fags. They can't cry. In our culture, suicide is only for the mentally unstable. Abortion is death. Wearing the wrong attire is suicide. Aborting a family for a younger body in a tighter dress is sound. In our culture of neckties, meaningless sex, brainwashed hypocrites, and desensitized youth, what can save us? Who can hold us, lead us, teach us? In our culture, how do you make a connection? How do you see beyond the outer shell into the soul? How do you fall in love?

When my stomach gurgles louder than a lion, I can count on laughter meeting me, rather than embarrassment. Rolling to the side of the bed closer and closer to the edge, I know an arm will be there grabbing my waist and saving me at the very last second. He pretends to be dead until I pounce on his chest and tickle-attack him. He recites poor French words while kissing from my fingertips to my shoulder blade. According to Rose Dorothy Franken, "anyone can be passionate, but it takes real lovers to be silly." It takes comfort to be honest. It takes trust to be comfortable. It takes time to trust. It takes all of these components to love.

It was sitting on his lap with a cell phone attached to one ear and a pair of tweezers in my hand when I balanced a conversation with the risky task of plucking his random face hairs. It was when I clumsily tugged his hand and we skipped down the hill. We raced up the stairs two at a time; fell over our feet, laughing and out of breath. His arms transform me; I am free, infinite, and safe inside of them. Train spotting and getting lost in the streets of Philadelphia led to first moments that I knew it was real. I knew it was love. It had to be while driving an obnoxious yellow monster truck in the parade with our hands intertwined; he didn't let go the entire time.

The moment I was sure is blurry. It was driving on the streets of Coatesville stopping to kiss at each red light, slowing down just to get stuck behind them. It was eating at 3:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Wawa's. It was admiring Picasso together. It was breakfast with his parents and meeting his grandmother. I realized that I wanted to share my accomplishments with him, find comfort in him, be happy with him. He became my everything. When you have all that you desire, you're the richest person in the world.

I was buzzing with excitement but held my tongue all day. I waited until the lights were out. I waited until the covers were over my head. I waited until he slid his arm around my waist. I waited until I could breathe again. Then I pulled him close, my heart racing, and whispered in his ear. We lay together witnessing the most incredible energy exchange I'd ever felt. Electricity was pouring between us. Only his arm was touching me, but I could feel all of him.

There's something so freeing about pumping music as loud as possible, allowing the beat to flow through your veins directly to your heart. This music, this feeling, it's a new sustenance for the soul. Screaming the lyrics and moving in unison achieves the sweetest catharsis known to man. There's something completely complete about spending the day alone with your thoughts, in harmony purely with yourself. There's something about being scared, feeling the sudden rise in your pulse. Your heartbeat quickens, a hook pulls through your chest, goosebumps rise from your flesh, and adrenaline pours throughout your system. There's something about being in love.

Simply a phobia; I'm exhausted and sick.
Take a stab, if you will – or don't.
A catalyst for everything coming forth –
The old couple next to me forces me to exhale nausea,
Puke on their old matching tennis shoes
Fuck them for smiling so prolifically about
Everything. And a sudden eureka halts my
Need to strangle the naïveté for which they stand.
Our dreams smile out loud and
The reason for my dissonance hummed impromptu songs.
Until death...or insanity your poetic words that captured me
Set the bar and cut the rip of distance.
So time is winding down.
November. Sweet November.
I could transform into what the "P.S." was going to say.
If you wish to add your rain to my pile of celebration,
Please know please and begging won't suffice –
Don't you dare walk into me and open doors you cannot
Bear to look through. Get under me!
Throw me scream me breathe me dare me take me –
But don't even think for a fucking second to leave me.
The drops of rain that hit me and break away on contact
Will rest on your lips because you will only stand that close to me.
I'll kiss those lips as soft as the rain that meets them and whisper
"I feel it, too."



Joe Fedele
Classical Study
Conté on paper



E. Adam Day
Female Study
Oil on wood



Christa Burns
Male Study
Oil on wood



Dani Keith
Swashbuckler
Oil on canvas



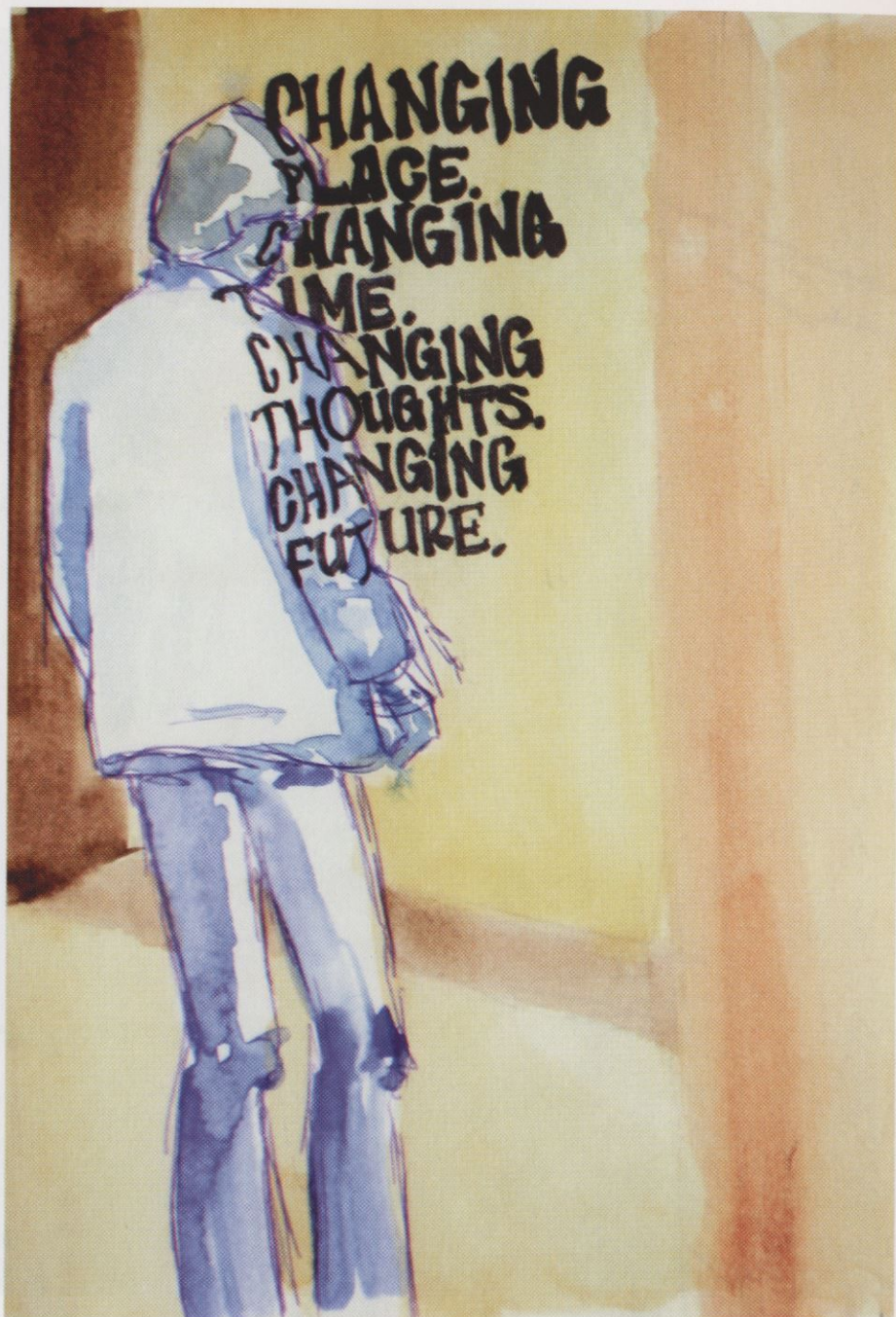
Joshua Powell
Questionable
Charcoal on paper



Jeremy Francis Silver
Bernini's David
Watercolor on paper



Gary Seymour
Male Study
Charcoal and conté on paper



Laura York
Combination
Watercolor on paper



E. Adam Day
Potatoes au soldat
Charcoal on paper



Jeremy Francis Silver
Michelangelo's Mary
Watercolor on paper



Laura York
Spring
Charcoal and conté on paper



Lily Calkins
Zoey
Oil on canvas



Christa Burns
Chiaroscuro World
Oil on canvas



Laura York
No. 1
Oil on canvas



Jeremy Francis Silver
Hand of a Giant Cyclops
Watercolor on paper



Laura York
Tightrope
Charcoal and conté on paper



Chico Cannady
Male Study
Oil on canvas



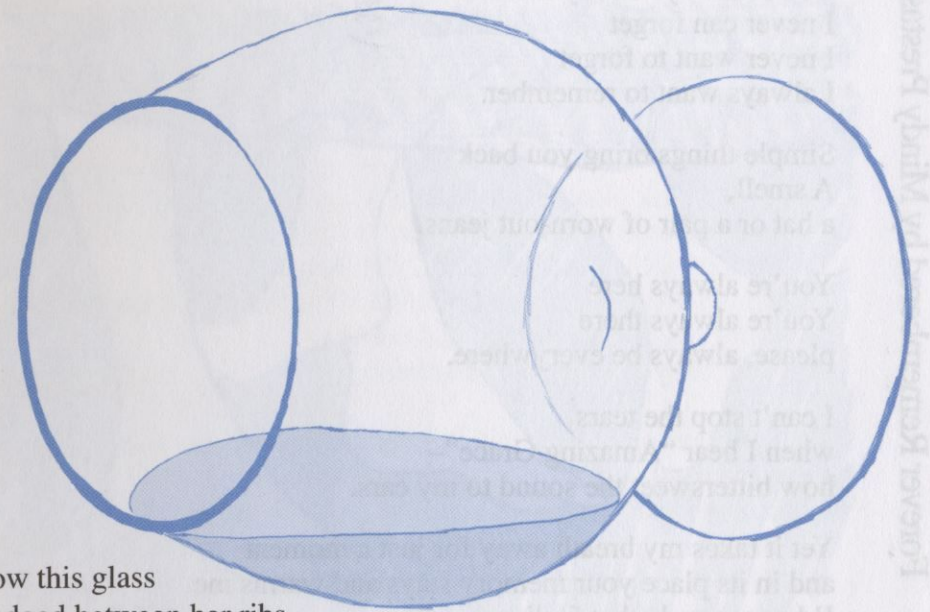
Chico Cannady
Female Study
Oil on canvas



Natalie Marsh
Composition: green and yellow
Digital print



Shanna Digan
Classical Study
Ink on paper



Now this glass
wedged between her ribs,
making it hard to breathe,
is beautiful in its tragedy,
despite the pain it bleeds...
because it is this glass
that taught her to walk tall;
that, in spite of what she's dealing with,
she must stumble and not fall...
and although on occasion,
on days that are rare,
the glass cuts so deep
she's left gasping for air,
she knows deep inside,
this is how it must be;
for them to understand,
this is what they must see.
For this is what happened
the day her heart shattered;
the glass fell into place
and nothing else mattered.
Now all that's left is her
gently whispered fear;
hoping soon the time will come...
the glass will disappear.

You're always on my mind.
I never can forget
I never want to forget
I always want to remember.

Simple things bring you back
A smell,
a hat or a pair of worn-out jeans.

You're always here
You're always there
please, always be everywhere.

I can't stop the tears
when I hear "Amazing Grace"—
how bittersweet the sound to my ears.

Yet it takes my breath away for just a moment
and in its place your memory stays and warms me.
I'd never trade that feeling.

Except if you could be here
reading the Sunday paper,
or telling one of your jokes.

No, it's just not fair.
No goodbye,
no more time to share.

I wanted you to watch me get married,
to dance with me,
grow old and give me advice.

But I know you're still here.
You'll watch me walk down the aisle,
dance with me that night.

Your presence surrounds me,
and reminds me,
fills me with your love.

At least I know you're always on my mind.
I never will forget
I never want to forget
I always want to remember.



There's a piece of me you hold.
I shiver in your presence.
And I tremble at the sound of your words.
I love how weak you make me
And I adore how I fall at your feet.
You're the only truth I know in this world.
Yet we lie,
Lie next to each other at night.
Our bodies touching.
I quiver every time you hold me.
I take a quick breath in,
And let it out,
And try to slow my heartbeat.
Yes, there is a piece of me you hold,
And you hold it as close to you as you can,
At night.

On her roof,
the sound of raindrops evenly spaced apart on the ground below
Lying down supine
looking straight up with her beside me
silent except for our breathing

Purple and pink blotches in the sky,
a rainbow forming before our eyes
Tanned and golden, no longer XL clothes
A clear head and face again (FINALLY) no bumps in the road
My heartbeats evenly spaced and healthy
Perfectly in sync with your heartbeats

No hypertension
no ambulances
in the near future as far as I can see
Our hands on the crumbling, comfortable portico that was built by a machine
or at least by someone who is dead now
Built before we were born
Us two

Full of energy, perfectly content lying here
(with you)

Not even sure which one of us was out here first
her presence so common and comfortable and welcoming
that it feels like it has always been here with me
(even though it really hasn't)
Her presence so encompassing that it widens and expands to take over the
past that is already overflowing into the present

Music through the walls
Coldplay, and Copeland
Bright Eyes and whatever we choose to listen to
through the slightly-open window
because it locks if it closes all of the way
Always open

Twelve to fourteen feet to the ground
We

No fear of us falling or becoming trapped out here and eventually
having to jump
because being trapped somewhere with her (anywhere) would be
enough freedom to choke me

No rescue
Come closer
Rescue me
Do not fucking touch me

Just as long as there was a vending machine
a Quizno's, sodium-free Wheat Thins and H₂O
so we could live up here together forever
finally free
because of our limitations

A pen and paper
canvases, books and art things
so we could discuss them to the point of insanity
Disagreeing and agreeing wholeheartedly
just as long as we were being passionate about something
A house built of leaves, every color but blue
A ¼ of an inch away from her or so on the inside too
The shapes of our heads on the pillows underneath them
because we have slept out here too
many times before
Together

Then as if with some buried reluctance
a breeze begins
An onslaught
Moves all the leaves below us into hideous circles and
it knocks her off of the roof and onto the pavement below

And she's lying there at an awkward angle looking up at me
twelve to fourteen feet below
The blood spreading all around the shape of her head
with faint seizures on all the wrong sides of her body

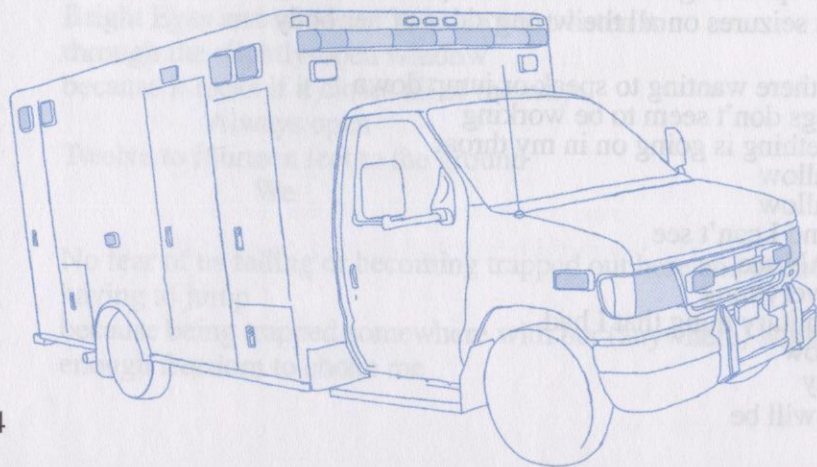
And I sit there wanting to speak or jump down
but my legs don't seem to be working
And something is going on in my throat
and I swallow
and I swallow
and pretend I can't see
only I CAN see
can see everything
the one solitary thing that I had
is gone now
or anyway
she soon will be

Her twitches slow as
she is eye-locked to me
begging for help
for mercy
(But, but I sleep till noon on Sundays)

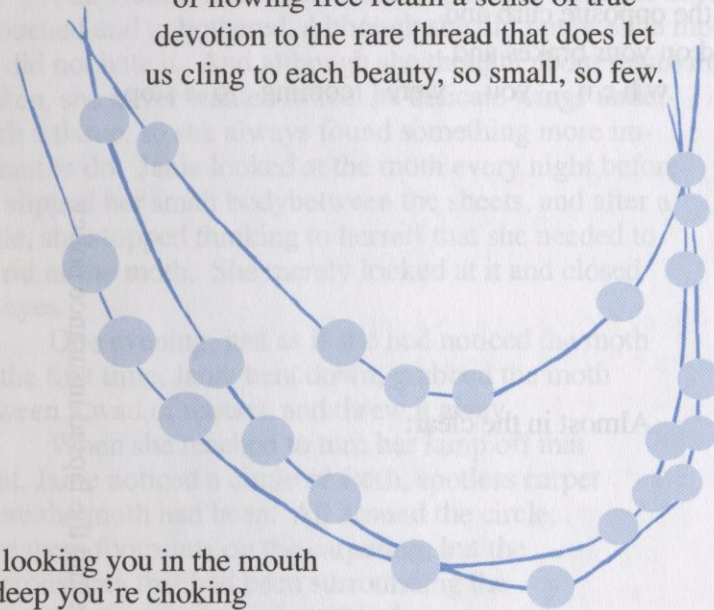
The breeze blows away
as she rises to my height
and then on to
solar systems and stratospheres
Gone
above me

Then another girl walks by on the sidewalk
A neighbor
And she smiles
And I smile back at her
Forgetting the girl in between us
Because love
is plastic
and temporary

Because if you wouldn't have fallen
I would have pushed her eventually



Like a necklace, a string of beads, perfect
and round, it weaves to and fro, in and out,
of the shadows and hollows circling about
the pale, silky beauty of a small neck,
but beneath beats a pulse the flesh reflects,
flushing and teeming at the beads, no doubt
searching in veins, not in vain, for a route
to release, to breathe, a scattering wreck,
cacophony and color bleeding through,
but no, there is no falling 'part, not yet;
an order must be maintained, must in lieu
of flowing free retain a sense of true
devotion to the rare thread that does let
us cling to each beauty, so small, so few.



I'm looking you in the mouth
So deep you're choking

My wishes and dreams clogging your airway
As I dig with my insatiable greed for more

The dollar signs are razorblades in your esophagus

Whatever I once had to offer as collateral
Has been smothered and drenched
Extinguished and dried and blown away

I'll make my aspirations your nemesis
My confusion is thick mucus
Clinging for life to all your vital organs
Trying to steal some oxygen

I traded the diamonds for rubies
And the rubies were fake

A car crash that came as a result of a surprise:
The man who cut you off

Then you overcompensated to the right,
Swerved back to avoid the dog
On a leash held by the little girl
In two perfect pigtails and shiny pink galoshes

Jumped the opposite curb and
Slammed on your brakes and
Just when you were coming to a stop,

Almost in the clear:

I am the patch of ice, the telephone pole and the lapsed insurance policy



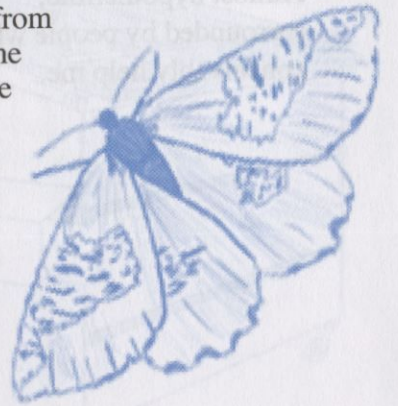
A dead moth lay on the unmarked carpet, just beside the nightstand and below the open window. It was slightly bigger in comparison to other moths Janie had seen, and it lay peaceful in the quiet light of the bedroom. It's still, brown body stuck out plainly against the newly laid carpet, but was inoffensive because it wasn't lying on its back with crippled legs in the air, the way most dead insects do. Instead, it displayed only genteel wings and looked as though it was resting serenely on a field of snow. The moth looked out of place, but Janie was not disgusted, so she turned the light off and went to sleep.

The moth remained on Janie's bedroom floor for days, untouched and unbothered. Although she did not like the moth, she did not hate it. And although she thought about removing it often, she never wanted to feel its delicate wings underneath a tissue, so she always found something more important to do. Janie looked at the moth every night before she slipped her small body between the sheets, and after a while, she stopped thinking to herself that she needed to get rid of the moth. She merely looked at it and closed her eyes.

One evening, just as if she had noticed the moth for the first time, Janie bent down, grabbed the moth between a wad of tissues, and threw it away.

When she reached to turn her lamp off that night, Janie noticed a circle of fresh, spotless carpet where the moth had been. All around the circle, there were footprints on the carpeting, but the generous area that had been surrounding the moth was unmarked. Janie suddenly grew annoyed that such a small insect had kept her from walking through nearly half of her room. She looked to the other side of the bed, where the floor unfairly bore throw pillows, clothes, books, and shoes. She realized that she had also changed which side she slid in and out of bed.

Janie sat with thin legs tucked beneath her comforter, marveling at her ignorance as she watched the soft light from her lamp spread evenly across the plush carpet, free to bathe every piece of it in a silent pool of radiance.



Beautiful people cross the street in the city.
I wait on green and walk on red, the cars
honking but not slowing.
I make it across to the other side,
and a Starbucks unveils itself right in front of me.
Free samples being handed out faster than how fast
ebola can multiply.

'You don't drink coffee?'

'No'

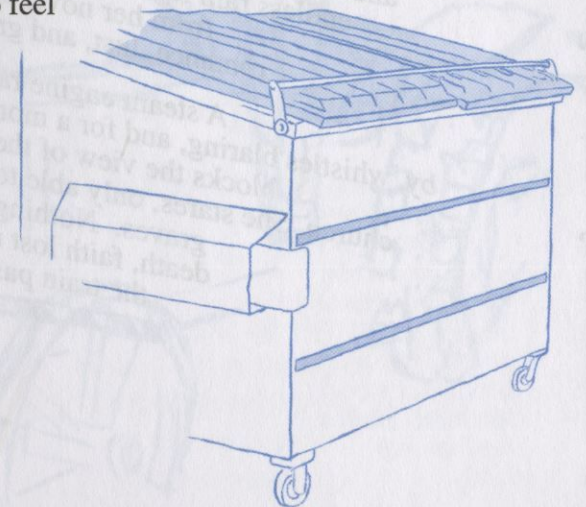
They laugh, like I'm joking,
hand a Styrofoam cup to me even
though I'm shaking my head no.
Open the lid, spit in it,
drop it when they won't take it
back from me. It melts
the snow, but there is too much of it.
Some of it gets on one of their shoes,
and this warms me more than the coffee.

My hands they feel like they are someone else's,
and I can not bend the fingers on them.
I left my mittens somewhere;
they must have gotten stolen,
or thrown away, there is zero difference.
only the effect that my
hands will turn green... fall off without them.
I'm snarling, angry, freezing.
Almost hypothermic,
surrounded by people who could
conceivably help me.

I stop at a RentWay to warm up,
and the salesman immediately selling me something.
"No thank you I'm just freezing."
"You're not allowed."
"Show me the most expensive VCR I mean."
"Sir, I can't; I already know that you're..."
"You're only calling me sir because you have to..."
I kick a couch I can't afford on the way out
"Fuck you."

Back into the cold
that's colder to me
This acute sensitivity
has nothing to do with the weather
There are enough gloves for everyone,
but never enough money
Not money, but caring
Not caring, but means
Not means, but sensibility
Not sensibility, but ability
Not the ability but
the not living up to it

I continue walking until my
legs start to feel like my hands did
By now my hands feel like something else entirely
They have lost the ability to feel
separate from me
separate from everything

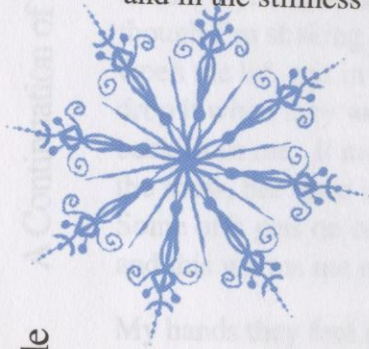


In the darkness of the night
its glistening radiance shines so bright
falling, no floating, freely down from the sky
adding a quiet beauty to this night.



Then, as if in silent reverie
it lies on the ground so perfectly,
coating it in a shimmering blanket of white.

And the moon up so high, shining down
covered the blanket in a pool of light,
and in the stillness of the night there is complete perfection.

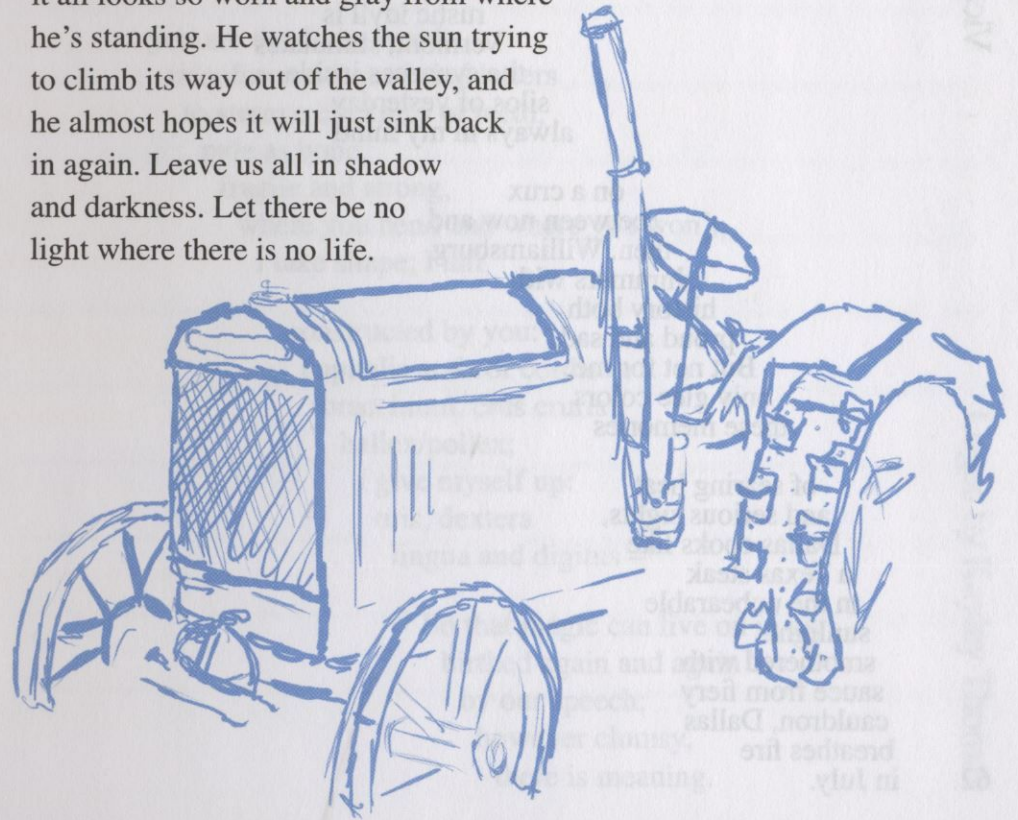
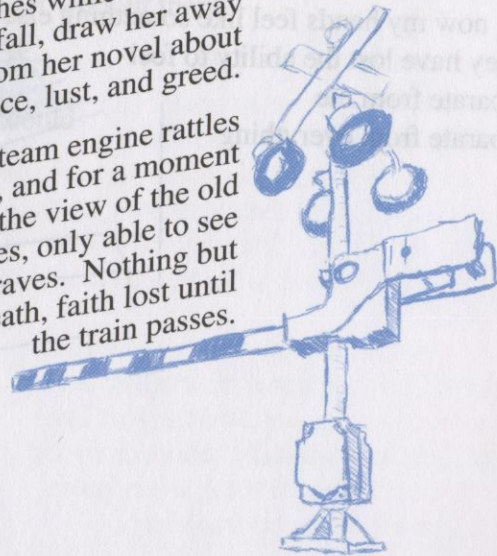


Staring out the picture
window of an old
diner once owned
by someone long dead.

She hailed from Renovo
a small town lost
in the middle of
Pennsylvania. Undistinguishable
amidst the tall cornfields
at dusk. Sweet memories

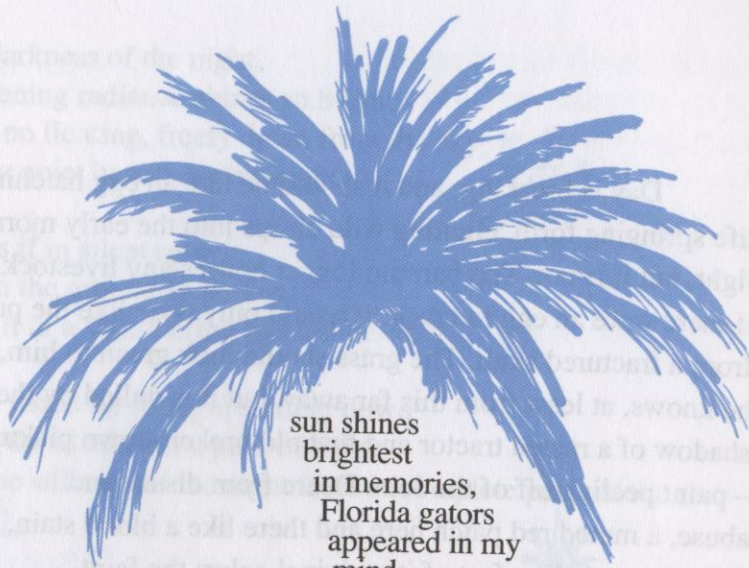
of dancing on rooftops
and washing dishes while watching
endless rain fall, draw her away
from her novel about
romance, lust, and greed.

A steam engine rattles
by, whistles blaring, and for a moment
blocks the view of the old
church. She stares, only able to see
graves. Nothing but
death, faith lost until
the train passes.



Day is breaking, and it should be like an egg hatching, new
life springing forth, eliciting wild chirps into the early morning
light, but it is not. The barn no longer houses any livestock, and
if there were an egg to crack, it would only ooze like the pus
from a fractured skull. The grass should look green to him,
he knows, at least from this far away, but it is dulled by the
shadow of a rusted tractor and that old broken-down pickup
– paint peeling off of the John Deere from disuse and
abuse, a muted red patch here and there like a blood stain,
the memory fading fast of its original color; the faint
sound of the Ford’s engine, sputtering and coughing
for life before finally giving out that one last
time, a mere quiet echo in his ears.

Dawn should be full of color, but
it all looks so worn and gray from where
he’s standing. He watches the sun trying
to climb its way out of the valley, and
he almost hopes it will just sink back
in again. Leave us all in shadow
and darkness. Let there be no
light where there is no life.

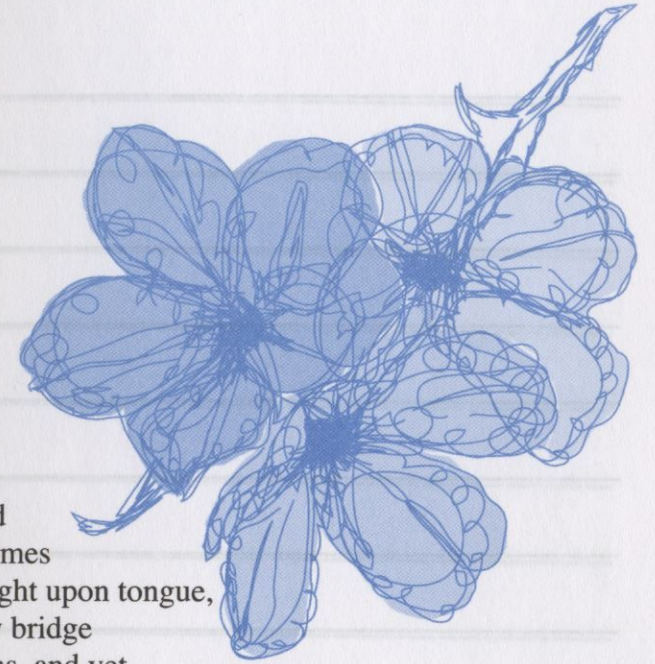


sun shines
brightest
in memories,
Florida gators
appeared in my
mind,
maybe from
waning
sun, or
unfamiliar heat,
but I saw them
anyway

rustic idyll is
Vermont, stimulates
the synapses inside,
silos of yesterday
always in my mind

on a crux
between now and
then. Williamsburg
shimmers with
history both
proud and sad,
But not for me,
only glee colors
these memories

of searing heat
and serious sights,
Dallas cooks like
a Texas steak
in the unbearable
sunlight.
smothered with
sauce from fiery
cauldron, Dallas
breathes fire
in July.



Emily said a word is dead
when left unsaid; life comes
from the touch of thought upon tongue,
where brain and belly bridge
and the mouth begins, and yet

you are dead, my words,
transformed from faded letters
to strange clickings of teeth,
pale as bone,
fragile and strong,
where you bend and where you won't,
I take shape; I am

constructed by you:
capitalis and cor cordis
bracchium, crus cruris
hallex/pollex;
I give myself up:
oris, dextera
lingua and digitus –

So that magic can live on in us,
birthed again and again
by our speech;
however clumsy,
there is meaning.

Artists:

Christa Burns

Male Study 31
Chiaroschuro World 41

Lily Calkins

Zoey 40

Chico Cannady

Male Study 45
Female Study 46

E. Adam Day

Female Study 30
Potatoes au soldat 37

Shanna Digan

Classical Study 48

Joe Fedele

Classical Study 29

Dani Keith

Swashbuckler 32

Joshua Powell

Questionable 33

Natalie Marsh

Composition: green and yellow 47

Gary Seymour

Male Study 35

Jeremy Francis Silver

Bernini's David 34
Michelangelo's Mary 38
Hand of a Giant Cyclops 43

Laura York

Combination 36
Spring 39
No. 1 42
Tightrope 44

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