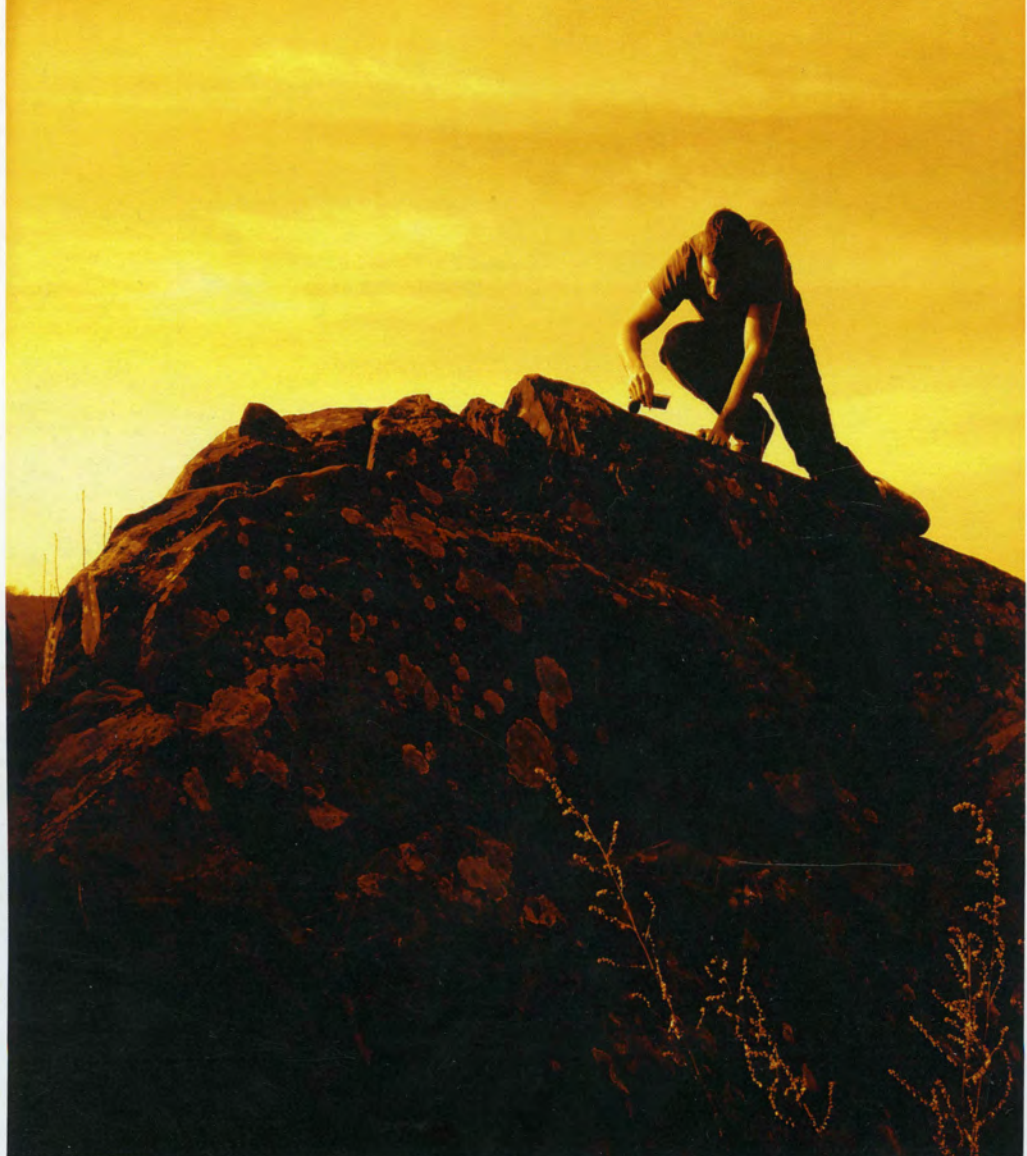


the
MOSAIC
Spring 2010



Spring 2010 Mosaic Staff



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Amy Wheeler and Nick Sweeney

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To Dr. Lea Graham and Bob Lynch,
for their dedication and support of the Literary Arts Society.

Cover Art by Jaime Bonventre

Marist College
Literary Arts Society
Presents:

The Mosaic

Spring 2010 Edition

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*Runner-up for the Fall 2009 Mosaic Writing Contest

**Winner of the Fall 2009 Mosaic Writing Contest

Why We Write (A Work In Progress)
Inspired by Marist's writing community
by Michael Cresci

We do it because our hearts break often.
Our hearts break often and with vigor.

We do it because when the world seems overwhelming
everything we feel melts into words which
swirl around us as if a tornado of language
will take us off to Oz.

We do it because if we don't
the chatter in our minds will drag us down like an anchor.
It will keep us stuck in one place.

We do it for the grandfather we watched succumb
to cancer for over a year.
The grandfather whose round stomach
always seemed like the perfect place to rest your head.
For the grandfather who made
us his "secret recipe popcorn" when we were young.
The grandfather who told us stories from the foot of
a pull-out sofa. Stories which took us away to someplace new.

We do it for the sister who never got the
chance to make a mistake.
Never got a chance to watch a sunset
or be afraid of how easily people break.
We do it for the empty space
every missing person leaves.

We do it with safety pins and knitting needles.
We do it with old newspapers and magazines.
We do it with the worn building faces of an old town.
We do it to raise the dead.

We do it to live forever.
We do it for Gatsby and Daisy.
For Stanley and Stella and Blanche.
We do it for poor Willy Loman.

We do it for our predecessors who came first
and showed us the world as they saw it.
The ones who we know we can never be
as good as. The ones who cast tremendous shadows.
We do it for Hemingway and Keats.
For Vonnegut and Bukowski and Dickens and Faulkner.
We do it for that bastard, Shakespeare.

We do it because we love all of mankind
and want to hold them in our breast
and whisper that everything will be okay.
We do it because we know that everything
can't be okay. It simply, and sadly, can't.

We do it because we hate all of mankind
and the way they make each other so miserable.
We do it because we contain multitudes.
We are bursting at the seams with contradiction and confusion.

We do it for the way a swinging pair of hips can draw
commas in the air.
We do it for the marijuana and the mistakes.
The cocaine and the condoms.
The cheap whiskey and the wine.
The bed sheets thick with sex and sweat.
We do it for the hangovers and the heart burn.

We do it because someone didn't love us
as much as we loved them
and we thought the right words could fix the unfixable.

We do it to create a new reality.
To start over and make it better.
We do it because we believe that lies can tell the truth.

We do it to fill the Hudson with rhythm and rhyme.
For the unsayable Hudson and how it swells.
We do it for the Atlantic Ocean and the sands of New Jersey.
For the childhood boardwalks, cotton candy scented
and not quite as innocent as we remembered.
We do it because everyone seems to stare at bodies of water.

We do it for the broad plains of the American Midwest.
For the skyscrapers of New York.
For the foggy streets and musty pubs of London.
For the brutal heat of the Australian outback.
We do it for Prague and for Paris.
For the grandeur of ancient Rome.
For the ironic ice of Greenland.
We do it in the hopes there are still places left to find.

We do it to be heard.
We do it because no matter how much
we talk, the words come out slightly wrong.
We do it mostly because we could never
imagine doing anything else.

But really we do it because
you don't need money or a nice house or anything at all.
Not to do it right.
You just need a pen.
And paper.
And some sort of silly idea that life can be captured in syllables and sounds.
You need only to think that the world can be made simple
and, for better or worse, true. Even if just for a second.

We do it because the world is too much to take silently.
And in the end, we do it because we must. Because we have to.

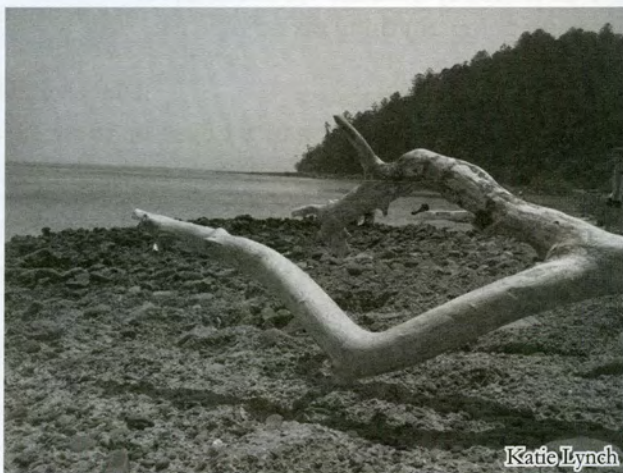
Don't Date Metaphors, They Break Like Mirrors
by **Florencia Lauria**

I was your headband,
 your dangling earring;
I was your synecdoche—a poet's lie
 and the Dreamcatcher's residue.

And you loved me like you love
 an abstraction:
a fallen eyelash waiting to become
 a wish.

Until I (humanly) ordered
a grilled cheese: American on wheat,
leave the pickle on the side—
 and I saw your mouth pop
 like a balloon with too much air.

You didn't stay for the literal—
 you walked right out, leaving nothing
but a heap of broken images
 and seven years of bad luck.



Katie Lynch

I'll Tell You What's in a Name

by Rachael Shockey

S-h-o-c-k-e-y. I try hard to be a minimalist when it comes to vanity, but oh, how I adore my last name. It's so crisp, so unique, so- *shocking!*

"Shockey- it's so zappy! It makes me think of lightning!" friends tell me.

"Indeed," I indulge.

"Any relation to Jeremy?" new acquaintances ask.

"Why, yes," I lie.

Shockey is beautiful, Shockey is strong, Shockey is mine. But really, what right do I have taking pride in my last name? What's in a last name anymore? They used to denote a distinct significance- they might have simply indicated one's job, status, or lineage. Last names today are much less clear-cut: they're multi-cultural; they're altered, hyphenated, traded and dropped. In the midst of all the ambiguity that exists in the modern world of last names, I've made an effort to define the significance of a last name for myself, and I believe that my last name is a reflection of my character.

Like most beautiful things, Shockey did not belong to me when I was first brought into the world; it was acquired much later. The day I was born, my parents presented me with my father's last name: Wilton. Wilton, like the thing a flower does when it prepares to shrivel and die for a winter season, just as my parent's love for one another shriveled and died after just a few short years of marriage. And when my dad moved out and drifted further and further away from his role as my parent, I was left alone to bear that grey name. Just uttering that name feels like swallowing a cold stone. People were always misspelling it or saying it incorrectly; Wilson, Walton, and Wilkinson were common attempts, all of which sound way too old for an elementary school-aged kid. Other kids didn't like it, and they didn't even know that it denoted my attachment to someone who was hardly around for me. Wilton is a hole in my stomach.

Back then, though, Wilton was also a lifeline- one of the only lasting links between me and my dad. I would only see him once a week for the rest of my childhood. He stopped involving himself in my life (outside of child support checks), but I still looked upon him as my parent, especially since he moved out of my home and distanced himself so abruptly. Since our time with him was so limited, when my siblings and I went over to his house on the weekends, he did everything he could to keep the peace, and ensure that we were happy. He never disciplined us, nor did he ever make us lift a finger while we were there. He fed us French

fries, and let us watch *Xena the Warrior Princess*. Hearing people call me Rachael Wilton made me feel abandoned, but the weekends reminded me that I was not entirely abandoned. My father still wanted to be a part of my life (a small part, but still something); so I repressed my complaints and sported his name. I continued wiltin'.

Meanwhile, my beautiful mother was flitting around with her very own last name, the one that she has worn and will continue to wear her whole life: Shockey. I love my mom like I love her name- strong, impressionable, one-of-a-kind. She is full of life, and is so deserving of her electric last name. She would change herself- or her name- for no man. Since dad was out of the picture, my mom was left without anyone else's assistance and hardly any money at all to care for four very young children, but she somehow managed to juggle all of it while still making our house payment every month.

I knew from an early age that my mom was the parent after whom I wanted to model my life, but oh, what a royal pain in the ass it was being a Shockey- that was a name that had to be worked for. Being the oldest child, I inherited, by default, many of the duties of the second parent. That bitch made me change diapers, bathe babies, feed babies, rock babies to sleep, and babysit before I even knew where babies came from. But I refused to throw in the towel; whatever tasks my mom had to take on, I would take on as well. I would work until the Wilton part of me stood out less than a miniscule clothing stain.

But that damn name was not something that I could work off. It stuck with me, and every time someone called on me, I felt detached from my momma. My friends asked all the time whose last name mine was, and it felt as though my efforts were in vain when I was forced to admit that it belonged to my dad instead of my mom- that I belonged to my dad. My two half siblings, who were born after my parents' divorce, were given my mom's last name. They were just babies, and yet they already had what I was still waiting for: a material identification with our mom. I had been around longer than those brats; I'd paid my dues; I couldn't decipher why I was getting the short end of the stick. It infuriated me.

When I was about ten, my mom was walking me to the bus stop, when she said, "I think you and Hannah [my sister] should really start thinking about changing your name to Shockey." "You want me to?" I asked, a bit taken aback. I realized then that my mother was not opposed to switching my name to hers. Being my sole caregiver, she felt it would only make sense for me to bear her name. My heart raced at the prospect of adopting Shockey.

Despite being excited about my mom's idea, I did not answer her right away;

for the next couple years, I prolonged agreeing to the switch, because I knew it would break my father's heart. That day at the bus stop, I semi-jokingly told her that perhaps I could take on a hybrid of both names; I remember suggesting Shockton, or maybe Wiltey. We both laughed at these, but I was secretly hoping that I could bring up the hybrid idea again, and my mom would miraculously have a change of heart and tell me that it was brilliant. The only person who was truly holding me back from becoming Rachael Shockey was me.

I had never been so terrified to make a decision as I was to cut my dad out of my identity. I could tell by the way that he desperately tried to maintain a connection with me-- the way he interrogated me on the phone, the way he waited on me hand and foot at his house-- that he was afraid of me choosing my mom over him for good. Still, with the physical distance that existed between us, his name was one of the few lasting impressions that he had left on me. I grew up modeling myself after my mom; I knew it would only make sense that if I must take the name of one person in this world, that it be hers.

When I was twelve, at the expense of all that was left of my sense of belonging to my dad, I finally mustered up the courage to let my mom claim me under Shockey. Owning that livelier name, whose roots I deeply admired, was a fantastic relief. I hardly cared about how baffled my naïve friends were when my name suddenly changed on them; eventually, I didn't even care what my dad thought about the choice. I dismissed my feelings of guilt, and replaced them with feelings of respect and pride for myself and my mom.

To this day, I value deeply the journey that I underwent to achieve my name; it taught me at an early age to be a free-thinking person. Not every twelve-year-old girl gets to challenge naming norms, and define what works best for her. Now, I can't imagine parting with Shockey, and I refuse to do so. Shockey is the snappy, blithe name that saved me from wiltin' my whole life through, and I will *never* shed my nomenclatural trophy of my earliest accomplishment.

soap
by Ariel Puccio

White foam on off-white tile
Teases the eyes,
Slips carelessly into distorted shapes –
 Smiley faces, a heart drawn by a kindergartener.

Clouds, when cushioned grass
Awakens my body
To the uniqueness of a pale sky-pillow,
Gaining new perspective from
My flat back.

Lying still,
 Feeling everything and nothing:
The post dew cool, the swinging breeze over
 One hip,
 Then the other.
Each hair yawns into sunlight.

Yet not –
Because I stand in chilled raindrops
Feeling claustrophobic.
Aiming eyes at the wall.
Each hair a cramp.

And the crayon drawn heart
(Diagonally down and to the right of the smiley face)
 Begins to slip.
 Crossing over soap-scum,
Grazing black tar bacteria, germs,
Reflecting me in each bubble eye.
 As it turns, still sliding
 Silently exploding,
 Until it is not itself.
 And I am tortured,
 Trying to understand
 the soap.

Hudson River Dawning
After Michael Anania's
"A Step At A Time"
by Isabel Cajulis

A colored flower,
the moon, I guess,
like a daffodil's center

and the sky, shimmers,
a hand familiar touches
mine, fingernails

bitten down, my hair sways
ebony black against
tan skin, lips like

fire, burning red
sunrise on the horizon.
This is the hour, isn't it,

subtle rumbles under
whispered breath, through
the simple sense of things,

the ordinary senses of sight,
sound, touch, and taste, like
heightened superhero senses.



Jaime Bonventre

E Tutta Da Scaprire
by Kelly Gallucci

You leaned back
I knew what was coming

Beat one
two
three

[He speaks!]

In your eloquent ~~old~~ thought-out scientific way

You tell me :

It's not me

It never was me

It will never be
me

Pause three
two
one

I speak

Slowly? Carefully? Cautiously?

Never

I say "I hate you"

Climbing out of your car

Three a.m. on a street corner in Jersey

Breathe
in
out
in

(*I never say what I really think*)

Far easier
to push
to hate
to ignore

Damn it.

We should've kissed.

You pushing me down into the passenger seat

Hiding beneath the early morning fog and the security of locked doors

The week would've been a whirlwind of us and your car

Climaxing with the cliché airport goodbye that you so wanted to avoid

It would've been worth it

We should've kissed

Instead,

I left

(before you could leave me)

(before I had to watch you go)

And we still talk

Why wouldn't we?

Swapping escapades like trading cards

You speak of the sun and your tan lines

Of salsas on the beach

Holding waists

And hands

And drinks

I talk of snowy hurricanes,

The dreariness of Poughkeepsie,

And men

(Who never make me laugh)

Breathe

in

out

in

Breathe
push
forget
push

You're the only one who ever dared me to *feel* something

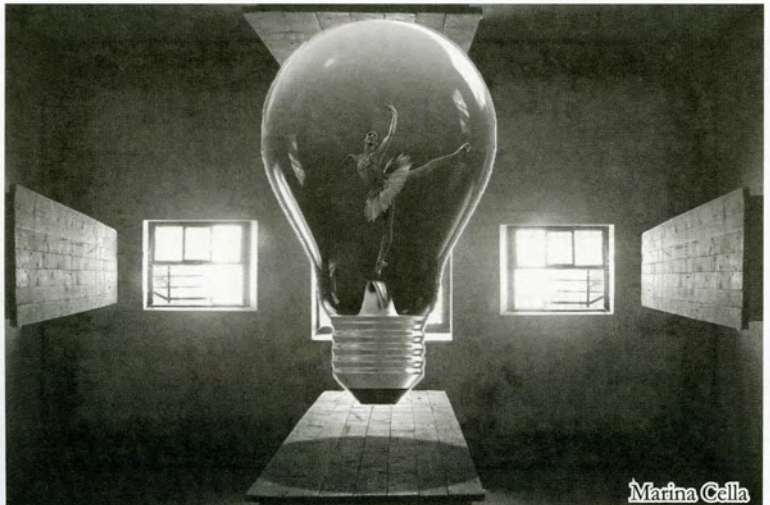
Heart
beat
beat
beat

Some days I wish to forget you

Breathe
in
out
in

Today I wish I could see the sunset where you are

All orange
Breathe
and yellow
in
and red
out
and alive
in
and you
Breathe.



Lightning Strike
by Olivia McMahan

Be the lightning in me that strikes relentless:
A brilliance that's merely observable,
And intangible.
It darts and dances
Like so many fireflies on an early June night,
Evading fingers grubby with grass stains
Escaping hands reaching with the earnestness
Of never having been told "You can't."
Be the lightning in me that leaves me whole.
Give to me a light that calls forth freshly unfurling leaves.
Resist in robbing life from this withering stump
Whose roots ache to pull a miracle from this saliferous soil,
Parched with the exertion of trying to overcome
And all the while not listening.
"You won't."
Be the lightning in me.
Just overwhelm me.

Acqua Alta
by Elyse Brendlen

I dreamed you were Venice, and I Italy;
and thought you were often threatened by
low-level floods and high tides
there was always enough of you there
to be considered a part of me.

But my efforts to keep you afloat
were too weak for the water beneath,
and I lost you to a wave and
the weight of everything your own.

When you sank, America offered me
New York with South Street and Times Square but
the cities of other countries will
never be mine in the way you
belonged to me.

Imitation of Mother by Christa Strobino

"And I will always love you..." *Ghost* plays on the television set. This song always makes me think of your father, my mother says. She grips her wine glass while I grip my pint of peanut butter ice cream. I know, I say. I've heard this tune once or twice before.

They were at the altar in Vegas. "Wise men say only fools rush in..." Another time my father promised to always love her. He dressed as Elvis and she wore an elastic dress with iridescent sequins. She was an elegant bride. Do you promise to love and cherish her, through sickness and through health, for as long as you both shall live?, the Justice of the Peace demanded. "Oh I do, give me a kiss my little lady," my father said. And with that he dipped her into the artificial lights. They took no pictures at the ceremony. *Nothing could capture the love that night*, my mother would always say.

We spent the night at the Twilight Motel by the boardwalk in Wildwood Crest. My mother went every summer when she was my age and her jaw still hurts from chewing on vanilla salt water taffy. I wanted a hermit crab, but my dad told me no as he gripped my wrist a little too hard. As a treat, because he didn't get any treats when he was my age, he bought my mom and I a funnel cake. We sat on the bench, the ferris wheel and its light exposed our faces in the shadows and children flashed us smiles and belly buttons. "I love you girls," he kissed our foreheads, "always," he said.

"I will always love you," he sang. And then he left.

"Zippidee-Doo-DA" my father sang to me at night to fall asleep. My mother would lean against the door frame and look past me, past the window, into New York City. She used to be famous, a Rockette. She'd kick her legs high and expose her soft, pale skin while the metal jingles attached to her ankles would squeal. Then she met my father at a pub she got into with her fake I.D and confidence from too much tequila. They left the city and moved to the suburbs; he had two left feet and they were in love.

They went line dancing at the Elks Club and they would eat bologna sandwiches for dinner. He lost his job because he had the same drinking problem his father had and could not afford cruises or candle light dinners. They never went to see the Rockettes because he thought it was tacky and she needed to pick up as many waitressing shifts as she could.

I still sometimes catch her kicking her legs up while she makes dinner,

alone, in the kitchen.

I leaned in my doorway one night and stared at them dancing in the living room. He dipped her low and let her head smash into the lamp, next to the empty bottle of Pinot. She only laughed. The same way she laughed when she found out her mother died or when my father calls her a flashy whore. They waltzed around the living room, around the coffee tables. Around and around and around, her straw hair always a few inches from his grip. Come out, come out wherever you are, he said. She shrieked and laughed as they tumbled to the floor. We all stood, staring in awe as the red fireworks erupted from the base of her head.

"He will come back one day", she said the day he left. While watching television, or eating dinner, or playing Scrabble, I knew her mind was always preoccupied with him as she stared past the meatloaf and *Ghost*, past the word quizzical, past the window, as her eyes laid transfixed on a ghost of a man who's never coming back.



Stephanie Figuccio

Mourning Light
by Rebecca Rotondo

Dedicated to my dear friend, Lexi Rogers
12/24/90 - 9/11/09

Dreams fade
Eyelashes flutter
Pupils contract
As a focused stream of sunlight
Slips through a narrow crack
Between panels of faded yellow curtain

Translucent flakes of dust
Hang suspended in time
Clinging to morning's first light
As though life itself truly hangs
On rays of golden warmth

Oh how naive
To believe such a preposterous lie

Angered by their ignorance
I retreat beneath layers
Of false cotton comfort
Hoping that I can recapture
Just a split second of peace
Through illusive images of your smiling face
Images that seem to be fading from memory
As fast as that shooting star
Fell hurriedly over the horizon
The night your soul was set free

Stop thinking
Roll over
Sigh deeply
I pray that sleep will quickly swallow me

Into the depths of its unconsciousness
The only place that I can be blissfully unaware
Of your painstaking absence

But specks of light seep intrusively
Through my not-so-protective barrier
To the outside world
And all its heart breaking mishaps
Sometimes I wonder if life'd be easier
If I were just completely numb all together

I'm not ready
To wake up and face mourning again



April Baton

**(gas station—quinnipiac avenue)
by Christopher Ceballos**

radio grayed he pulls
in the inside electric
lights are fluorescent
and dental the station
cliffed on some threshold
of streets draws moths
and other bugs that look
like devils sitting
in some solely car parked
crucified and outside he sits
been a while since the party
just ended off Mill Road
and Spring touches
radio it keeps him awake now
music then melted thaws
like an old 45 what did
those cats used to sing about
just lighters whiting
backdoor air and dying out
and feeling dry? fights
his eyes on the driver's
side, looks at 2.99 neon
like aftermath
like a 3 a.m.
end.

**Apology for Eve
by James Rizzi**

Imagine how lonely Adam would be
If he fell prey to Satan by himself;
Fallen sans partner, he remains unfree,
Wand'ring in misery to the Earth's far shelf,
Over hill and dale and most dismal lea
Seeing partnered pairs in all animals,
Contemplative of what it is to see,
Alone on rock stalk'd by moon's orbitals,
None other like him with female beauty.
Day follows night and dark follows light,
And ebb follows flow in every grand sea,
Yet none come to pity Adam's poor plight
As he moves along weeping his sad plea.
Nor is there Hope where there is not an Eve -
Mother of Him who for us did flee
Human form, our dire sin to relieve,
And gain us the Pearly Gate's precious key.

So shun not Her first Original Sin,
It opened worlds of opportunity,
Stagnant land and cloying pleasures therein
Woman rid to correct us, men, happy

Algebra to Appletinis to Algebra
by Julia Stamberger

I'd give anything to love the way I did in middle school
To giggle, to blush, to stutter
To be content just sitting next to you on the bus copying your math homework
To have my mom drive us to the ice skating rink on Friday nights
To neurotically apply chap-stick just in case today was finally the day
I don't know when I decided to trade in the Vans for stilettos
The glitter for pearls and pencil skirts
The pom-poms for cocktails and countdown clocks
The blue eye shadow for resumes and responsibilities
The thrill of truth or dare for just truth
But here I am insisting on roses when I used to swoon over carnations
Writing tuition checks instead of love poems
Eating salads instead of ice-cream sundaes
Playing hard-to-get instead of MASH
When did I grow up?
Was it a Tuesday?
Must have been around the same time I became a cynic
A heartbreaker
A teacher
I see them everyday
Sixth graders copying science homework
Seventh graders passing love notes
Eighth graders switching desks just to be closer to "the one"
I'll teach them algebra
The elements
The 13 colonies
As long as they can teach me how to love again

NY to VA
by Jennifer Sommer

"Not all who wander are lost."
– J.R.R. Tolkien

2:30 a.m

Penn Station is empty at this time. What is usually a pulsating center of life in a city full of people is now filled with a few hood-eyed individuals. I stand there near the Madison Square Garden's entrance in awe. The emptiness is unnerving. I used to think crowded rooms made me uncomfortable, but this absence of bodies makes me shift from one foot to the next. The amount of personal space makes me claustrophobic and jumpy. I can sense the irony.

I lick my lips and shoulder my green duffle bag as Danielle hands out our train tickets and tells us not to lose them for the 27th time. That is why she has been holding on to them, waiting until the last possible second to give them to us; like a protective mother she worries we'll lose them. I stare down at mine as Michael and Holly stuff theirs in safe places. I can feel Danielle cringe beside me as Holly's ticket crumples. I wonder if she'll have an aneurism if it tears. I smile at the thought and read my ticket; it has my name printed in bold type and the words NY, NY to Williamsburg, VA. I have never been there before.

We all sit down next to each other in the same universal dark blue chairs with silver metal frames that appear in waiting areas everywhere. I wonder why they do appear so often, why this color blue. I'm sure someone spent a lot of time comparing color swatches and materials, trying to figure out which color would be the most soothing or which material would be comfortable but not to the extent where the user would fall asleep and miss some important junction. Perhaps they keep them the same to add a sense of familiarity. That's important when you're going someplace new; you always need something familiar to hold onto.

Someone once told me about an old tradition where a person takes a potted plant with soil from his home when he travels. It's to keep him grounded, connected to his roots; it gives him the strength to wander.

These thoughts are fleeting as I curl up in my chair in a futile attempt to become comfortable and as Holly reads a fashion magazine, Danielle munches on Teddy Grahams, and Michael listens to his iPod. It is hard for anything to catch at this early hour. Everything dances around and none of us talk much. Instead we sit in the comfortable silence that characterizes worn-in friendship. I'm grateful for

the silence. It gives me time to think, time to listen, time to wander.

Across the waiting room, a small man fidgets uncomfortably in his seat, drumming his fingers. The woman sitting next to him frowns with displeasure as she rubs the back of the small boy who is sleeping on the chair next to her. A few rows over, a man in a business suit types furiously on his computer, working towards some deadline no doubt. I notice one man in particular.

He is sleeping with his mouth hanging open and his straw hat askew. His skin is a web of wrinkled creases from times of laughter and sorrow. It is stretched taut over his thin frame. I wonder where he is going at such a late hour of night and if anyone will be there waiting for him when he gets off the train. I worry what will happen if he misses it. He seems so alone until a young woman walks over to him and sits down. She has two cups of coffee and a brown paper bag in hand. She sits next to him. He is not alone; he belongs to someone.

2:55 a.m

The static of the PA system shatters the silence and announces that our train is now boarding. In response, various passengers begin to move to the platform like zombies -- they are unable to function at this late hour. Perhaps they have forgotten to caffeinate, had a busy day at work, or are one of the rare individuals who actually finds those universal blue seats comfortable and are displeased to be jolted from sleep.

I shoulder my duffle bag once again as I follow the others to the platform. We all move together like lost sheep, afraid to get left behind. The crowd shuffles along with a hurried sluggishness that can only be accomplished at this time of night. The four of us stick together. Danielle holds my hand in hers in an attempt to stay anchored in the crowd to something familiar as Michael leads the way, his tall head bobbing above the sea of people, and Holly lags behind, her stuffed suitcase nosily rolling across the floor in complaint. Each of my senses stay in tune with their actions: the weight of Danielle's hand in mine, the sound of Holly's suitcase, and the sight of Michael's carefully gelled brown mass of curls. I keep track of them. It is safer that way, as we wander to places unknown it is always best to be connected to something familiar.

We move through the crowd like this, down the stairs, and onto the platform. As the glass doors swing open, I am hit with a blast of July heat, balmy and sticky. I shrug out of my sweatshirt in order to compensate for the increase in temperature as we board the already crowded train. We desperately search for seats together but are forced to settle for two on one side and two on the other.

Danielle and I shuffle into one set of seats while Michael and Holly take those opposite of us. The anxiety this separation causes us is palpable.

I think back to the times we spent apart back home. No one panics when Danielle's little cousins sit between us while we watch a movie in her living room. It is never a problem if we have to take separate cars to go to the mall. I suppose it is the unknown that scares us. We're afraid of becoming lost in the shuffle so we hang on to what is familiar. It's similar to when you panic when you're lost and your phone is dead. You're scared because you're disconnected from everything. You can be in the same situation but have someone else with you or actually have remembered to charge your phone for once and because of those tiny details you feel free to wander until you find a familiar path.

3:00 a.m

Exactly on schedule, the train begins to move forward, dragging itself along the train tracks in an attempt to move away from the city. I try to stare out the window but all I can perceive is blackness. I turn my attention to the man sitting directly in front of me. He is facing Danielle and me and thus I am forced to examine him with my peripheral vision.

He is a bald man with deep brown skin who is munching on a box breakfast of sorts. The grease from his meal fills my nostrils as I catch sight of another man sitting across the aisle, directly in front of Michael and Holly. He is eerily similar to the man in front of me.

In fact, the two men could be doppelgangers except for one difference: where the former lacks hair, the latter has long dreadlocks. It looks as though they are traveling together and yet they choose seats opposite from one another.

Why one would willingly sit apart from his traveling companion is beyond me. The possibilities for this strange phenomenon roll around in my head. Were they originally sitting together or did they choose to sit apart? Did they have a fight? Were they related? Did they even know each other? Were they pretending not to know each other?

These questions plague me as Danielle covers us both with her Go Diego Go blanket, a piece of memorabilia she stole from her younger cousin. The man smirks at us. I suppose the scene would seem peculiar to most people: three teenage girls traveling with one teenage boy in the middle of the night, two of whom are covered by a children's cartoon blanket. If I was not part of the situation myself, I would find it a bit peculiar, (especially when Danielle pulls out her knitting). I can still see his Cheshire like grin as I drift off to sleep.

4:00 a.m

My uneasy slumber is broken by Danielle's voice. My eyes flutter open enough for me to notice her nervously biting her lip as she begins to speak to the bald man in front of us, "Excuse me, is this the train to Williamsburg?"

"I don't know."

She frowns, "Well, where are you going?"

He shrugs and lets out a small laugh, "I don't know."

I furrow my brow in confusion. Once again my mind is plagued with questions. Does the other man know where they are going if they are in fact traveling together? Why does he seem so content that he has no idea of his destination?

My mind begins to wander, catching on random thoughts as we fly forward. I know my destination. I always know where I am headed. My life has always been planned out. There is no time for rest stops or getting lost. For as long as I can remember I have been on a clear path from point A to point B: high school then college then grad school, a family. For all my life I have been on a non-stop train like this one. There has never been room for aimless wandering. For a moment, for the first time in my life, I envy a man I have never met.

That is until I realize something - being lost and wandering are two very different things. When you're lost, you have no anchor. It is almost as though you're free falling into oblivion, but when you wander, that sense of panic is gone because you're somehow connected to something or someone. You don't have to fear straying from the main road because if you have an anchor to something familiar then you'll always be able to find your way home. I stare into the man's face and then out of the corner of my eye I notice a small potted plant sitting next to him. I can't help but smile.



I'm Sorry I said I Was Going to Come Back and I Didn't
by Florencia Lauria

I got distracted with high school musicals,
with starred flags and infinitive tenses.
I got used to leaving Spanish underneath my pillow.

I'm sorry that after a while I started saying "godblessyou,"
and asking for doctor's appointments
three months in advance.
I got used to the handshakes and the high fives—
to the Fahrenheit cold
and the tireless
techno beat of a remix.

I got caught up in the oiled productivity:
The outlining and the figuring out
of a five-year-plan and a Staples calendar.

But sometimes I remember that before
Hasgate Drive there was Los Platanos and Almirate Brown.
I was your Nena that ate empanadas and Crema Americana—
and Buenos Aires was the center of a parallel universe
with a parallel ending that got lost somewhere in between
The *New York Times* and the Starbucks coffee.

taedium vitae
by Shelley Doster

the sky has been this dull, misty gray blanket for weeks
as the clouds seem to have settled:
fat, content and heavy
as far as the eye can see
until the view is obscured
by the clawing gray fingers of barren trees
scraping at the stillness of the blanket.

the tranquility is disconcerting
 the silence is pleading for a sound
 other than my own ragged breath
 and the hiss of winter winds
so I draw my hand upwards
and stir the frothy grayness with a trailing fingertip,
clockwise then counterclockwise,
hoping the movement will create some minor disturbance,
a ripple across the sky,
signaling something dangerously attractive to approach.

(I hope lightning doesn't strike)

My skin just keeps my soul from falling out.
(nervosa)
by C. Earnshaw

You can suck 'til my breasts grow into me
like the rest of my woman's body,
flaking my skin and loosing my soul
to dance in the sun.

It's dark under these
pregnant folds.

don't talk about your wife hold me
by Christa Strobino

Anyway

If the skin around my eyes a taut red balloon ready to burst and concave.

If your hair metal it would lock me to the bedpost: white leather jacket scar on my wrist.

Take the whorls of my fingertips against the ridges of your silence while you radial from your fridge full of Hellman's and Heinz.

If I were a book, I'd be Oh! The Places You'll Go during the Blizzard '96

If my taste beer, hint of nutmeg, all hopped-up, your

Indian Pale Ale sometime's a sweet Bavarian Ale not really.

If my finger's diner straws, they'd penetrate your iris and poke your optic nerve.

If my ears enormous pomegranate seeds spitting out Monte Carlo and Capri while you traced the veins on your forearm.

If underneath my fingernails a cool, dark cave I'd be Echo: Come, Come.

If underneath my fingernails a reason because it's 5:00 somewhere and mold grows when bread is old.

If underneath my fingernails the Hudson Valley Line, you'd get off at New Hamburg and only turn back to tie your Reeboks.

And if my skin were ripe fruit I'd break all of over your hands, while I cleaned up the matter.

Don't talk about your Wife.

I am not a church in need of candles lit, but a stanza in need of words.

And you are a flower narcissus, that gives me hyperkeratosis

Once children fell ill in Suffolk, England they thought your bulb was a red onion

Full of vitamin C.

I am remarkably like them.

I am half naked on the kitchen table because She would know if we slept in Her bed.

Kiss me on the lips, but you pass the salt.

And it burns.

Petrichor
by **Amanda Mulvihill**

On days like this,
where the milky grey sky is
perfectly reiterated by the water,
and the sounds of the passing trains are
amplified by the low-hanging clouds,
where the dim light doesn't provoke waking,
but is appropriate for Imogen Heap listening,
and precipitation is a constant threat –
the kind of precipitation that
disrupts the water's grey stillness
with thousands of dimples,
fills the sidewalks until they resemble estuaries themselves,
replaces the early-morning mist with
puddles shushing the vehicles driving through them,
and fools the unaware observer into believing that
they are inhabitants of Seattle like Derek and Meredith
instead of the Hudson River Valley –
on days like this,
I want to stick an empty jar out the window and
capture the very essence of the atmosphere,
because the air smells so pure and new
and I'm afraid no one will believe me.

Words
by **Nicholas Bolt**

I want to write down words,
That together sound sincere,
These words need not to rhyme,
But their sounds must please my ears.

Old consonants and vowels,
Birth new realities and dreams,
A stream of constant imagery,
Like the movies on the screen.

Elegy for Ralph
by James Rizzi

To have seen the lowest tip of the largest world,
And to have come back to dwell with us men,
And now to have gone away from us again,
To distant world fled

By Fate, Fortune, Chance, or Luck, we no more shall see
Our friend, whose life held such promise, such hope,
How then my friends are we ever to cope,
With that thing we dread

Can all this be but some horrible dream, brought on
To fit the horrid rain and dreary skies
Too right for when a loving mother cries
As some caress his head

Flowers now will not mask our pain nor cover love
Taken away. Ne'er shall we see life
Played out for him, daughter, son, loving wife,
As others have led

To have begun his journey and begun so well,
Met so many, seen so much, spread such good,
Who could have e'er imagined that it would
Be cut short—

“Weep not for Robert,”
Says the man in black, Charon, allayed
To take our friend, his long dark coat unfrayed
By little sister's tears or pallman's rigid hand

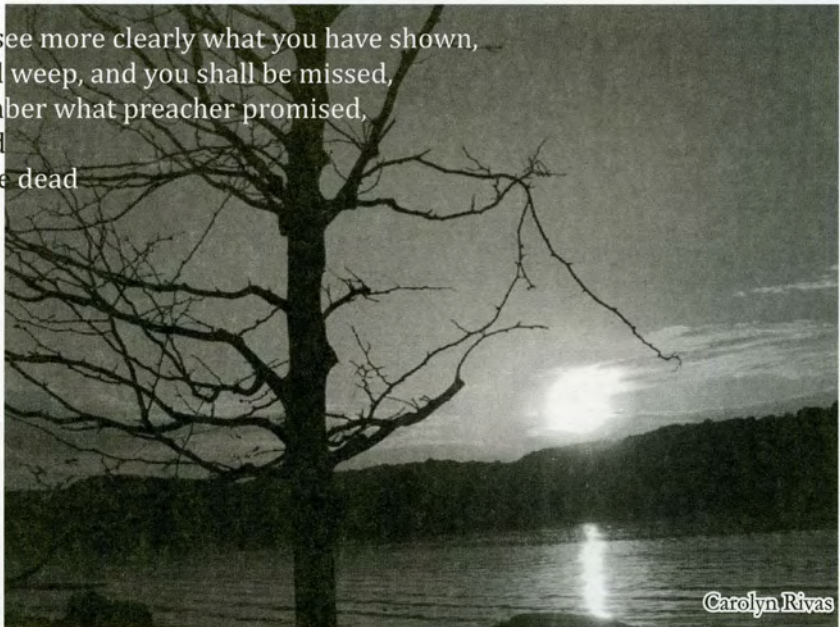
He has gone gentle,
The genius of the shore, across the sea.
Or, 'haps in Heaven, where else should he be?
Let us seek him there, yet not before our sand

For he is happy
And happier should we then be for him
Who no longer is subject to this whim
And the cruel world he witnessed and on which we stand

'Tis only a shame
That good men do pass before they have had
A chance to right the wrong, correct the bad,
To leave a light for those struggling to understand

Or perhaps this is
His vital lesson taught through our sorrow,
That happiness might follow on the morrow
Let then a dirge be played by this sad mournful band

Until we may see more clearly what you have shown,
We all will still weep, and you shall be missed,
And all remember what preacher promised,
After all is said
After we all are dead



Carolyn Rivas

Where She Lives Now
by Amy Wheeler

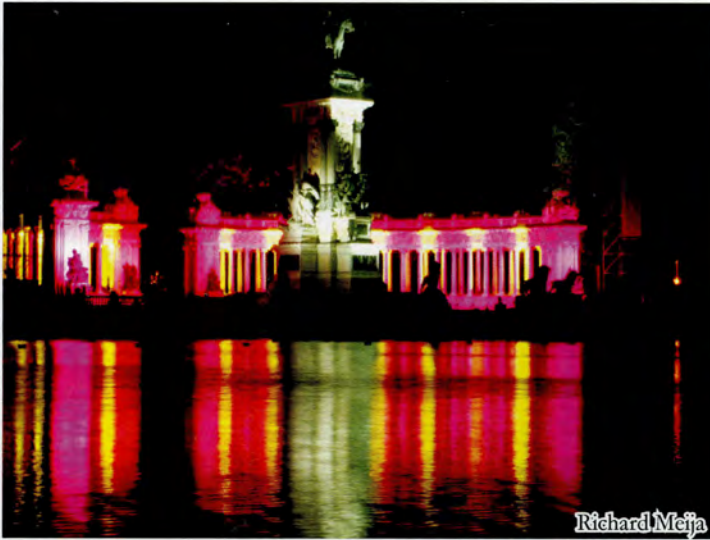
We used to sing show tunes
while dealing out playing cards
on chocolate-milkshake-flavored sick days
at the wooden kitchen table,
knitted placemats moved to the side.

Now, the rules of Canasta
have crept into some dark corner of her mind
hiding with her apple pie and potato salad recipes,
crowded out by obsessive calculations of
Ballston Spa National Bank account statements –
You know, I pay \$3,000 a month to live here, you know, where I live now –
an extraordinary sum,
considering this place will never be her home.

There are no toy soldiers on display
or organs with sheet music from Great-Grandma Julia,
no patio with an umbrella from Thailand,
and the bathroom is missing the Civil War-themed wallpaper
I used to study when feigning stomachaches.

Instead, they bring her 2:00 juice in a Dixie cup,
take away her fridge and white wine,
ration out her money in \$5 bills
and track her every move with a sign-in sheet –
destination predetermined.

But when I close my eyes
I can hear the whir of the blender
over my seven-year-old voice singing –
The sun'll come out, tomorrow,
and I wonder if she can hear it too.

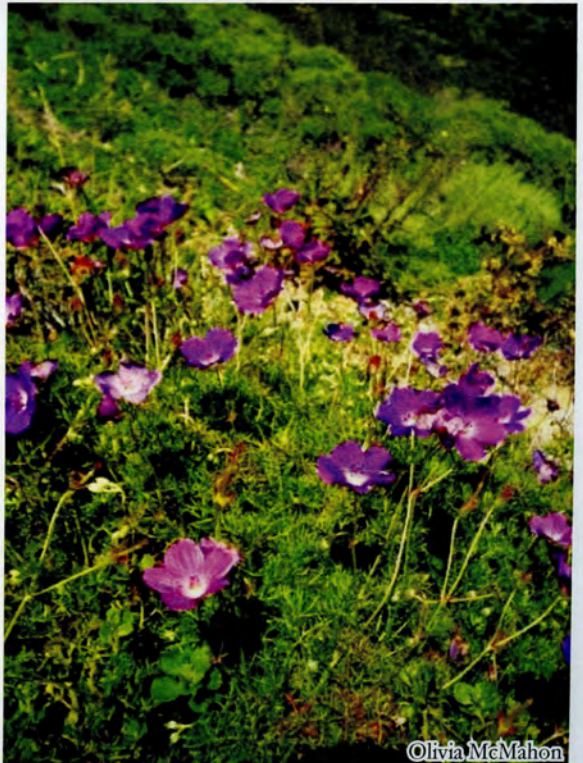


patience
by Danielle Ferrara

below—where souls lope—
you're resting letting lay your teeth
i hum, follow fins and rays
of light, to drip ink from the
inkpot into water from
the well.

your fantasy is fallen birds,
no matter whether drift or drop,
stark white against a copper sky.

i imagine dragons,
curls of fire chasing stars,
tasting embers and bowing
tongues that flip like little demons.





A Cartographer's Dream
by Maxine Presto

Everything is: nonsensical,
we are natural - heretical
creatures
are you
not?

You are me
I am you
We are brown boots, spirits
adventurous:
a cartographer's dream.

You are a mild breeze, ukulele
plink pluck, a tongue limited
by language, skin sticky and
ephemeral,
a silent chamber, a bed
unmade
you are



It's Your Fault: I'm More Crazy than Sexy or Cool
by Tahara Roberts

in some kinda,
crazy sexy cool, caught
up in the moment
would punch a wall if my fists weren't so small
just wanna let my hair out or better yet
cut that shit right off
& get a fade.
stain my nails with black nail polish

M!!

A

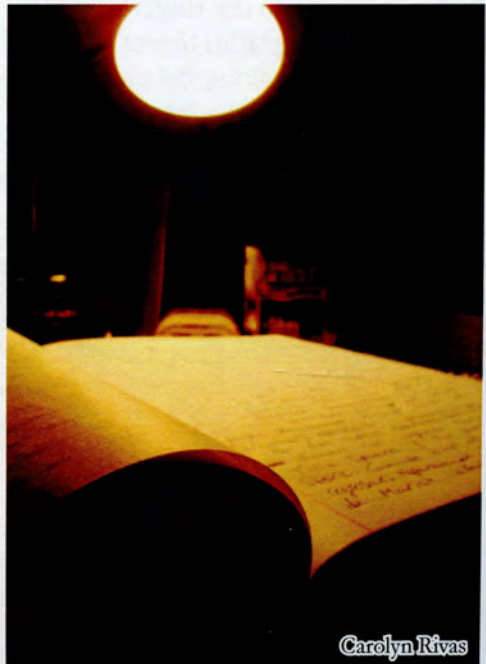
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S

at the top of my lungs 'til the bottom give out.
hand you a rose, take it back,
like an indian giver,
pull off the petals
and leave you with the thorns,
mood.



**“and the final secret of Istanbul – it is grey,”
by Katie Warren**

whispered Firat into my ear
as he held me close in the Middle Eastern wildness of Taksim Square.
Traffic streamed and life pulsed within our young hearts in an old city.

The old city lived a thousand lives
under conquerors, sultans, and kings.
Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul,
nicknames and dresses for the lady
who lays with her head in Europe and her heart in Asia.
Her layers of petticoats and burkas
knot against one another,
a bright Western garter now hidden
in the age-old tangle of garb.

Christian gold mosaics appear from beneath
mosque plaster in the Hagia Sophia.
There is Viking graffiti there;
run your fingers along the marble railing.
Even burly Norse men felt compelled
to leave their mark on the ancient city.
The city covered Constantinople’s glittering,
content in her minarets and deep carpets.



In the modern lights north of the Golden Horn,
bright Beyoğlu and Karaköy throb
from the rooftops as crowds swell to frenzy.
Raki fuels terrace-top dancing,
sex thick in the air.
Opposite sexes must never touch,
but they'll do anything but.

In this, the old city lies quiet and grey
behind the ruins of her old walls.

Days when the world's greatest armies and riches
were marched through her streets are long gone.
Glittering remains lie in the Topkapı Palace
For outsiders to file through the harem to see.
Below, the same grey old men have sat with those
fishing rods on the Bosphorus for all of time,
sighing with the sea.

"Listen to the sound of the Bosphorus and you will understand,
my little friend, küçük arkadaşım,"
Firat murmured as he gently placed me in a cab
to return to the ancient, sleeping side of the city for the last time.
"This is not a city for lovers,
for you are forever with the pain of having leave.
Trust me in this, no one in love is happy in Istanbul."

A boat bore me at dawn across
the eternally grey Bosphorus.
I closed my eyes to hear the melancholy of ancient Istanbul.
The old soul of this place will never rise again.

Natural Preservatives by Isabel Cajulis

I.

My family is centered on rice. These white grains are part of every meal, even breakfast. During the holidays, we visit my aunt and her family. At breakfast she makes the best tasting *longanisa* (Filipino pork sausage) and the fluffiest scrambled eggs. I wake up early just to learn her cooking secrets. I sit at the kitchen counter and hear uncooked meat crackling in hot oil. The steam rises from the large rice cooker as the smell particles of simmering jasmine rice and sausage combine. My mouth starts to water and I admire my aunt's fearlessness in front of spitting hot oil. I'm the first to fill my plate with the steaming rice, followed by several *longanisa* links and scrambled eggs. I devour everything on my plate like I haven't eaten in a year. I scrape the last rice grain and my stomach ache's satisfied. The appetizing smell seeps through the kitchen doors, overtakes the house and my cousins come running. The smell lingers in the coordinating den furniture, the heavy cotton curtains, and the faded carpet, becoming a permanent part of the house.

On Christmas day, my aunt and I spend the whole day in the kitchen preparing for dinner. I watch her prepare ingredients and effortlessly go through each recipe without a cookbook. She guides me through preparing sweet honey ham glaze and chicken macaroni salad, all family recipes and each made from scratch. Individual ingredients line her pantry shelves waiting to combine. She pays attention to each pot on the stove and keeps time for each dish. Her chubby fingers take a taste every now and then. She adjusts each dish accordingly. While I pull apart boiled chicken breast, she tells me that I'm growing up so fast. She laughs and jokes that I am getting too skinny. She asks me about what I eat at school. I answer her with anecdotes of skipped breakfasts, Easymac dinners, and the rice I make but rarely finish. I tell her that I long for some *sinigang* (tamarind soup) or *adobo* so my rice doesn't go to waste. I long for satisfying meals at school. She promises to teach me her recipes and her tasting techniques. I long for her taste buds, and the ability to perfect any dish without exact measuring. Our relationship is organic and raw like the ingredients in her dishes, and held together because we are a family based on food. A different smell rises from each pot on the stove. Each smell adds to this morning's breakfast smells and reminds me how satisfying home can be.

II.

At school I live on microwave meals. I live deprived of the fresh vegetables in my *sinigang* and the crackling sound of meat hitting hot oil. My cupboard contains cans of Campbell's soup and boxes of Kraft Easymac. The choices in my freezer are limited to Tyson's pre-cooked chicken breast, Steamfresh vegetables, and boxes of Lean Cuisines. Sometimes, I use my small rice cooker to make a cup or two of rice to eat with microwaveable chicken breast—my pathetic attempt at a real meal. I see the translucent steam rise from the simmering jasmine rice, and it reminds me of home. I know this dinner won't satisfy me, and I'll resort to junk food later tonight. The smell is never strong enough to wake the house. It remains in the microwave and doesn't last, especially not in the hard wooden chairs, the linoleum floors, or the polyester curtains.

One night my housemate asks me to share dinner. She tells me she has rice that we can share; the thought of a real rice meal excites me. As I walk into the kitchen she brings out a packet of chicken flavored Knorr Rice Sides. She pours the packet into plastic Tupperware and just adds water. I watch the powdered flavoring clump on the water's surface and my mouth turns dry. I'm reluctant to believe that seven microwave minutes can produce anything worthwhile. While the rice spins and cooks under invisible rays, my housemate asks how my day went and I tell her about the weird conversations I overheard on my way to class. I ask her how her boyfriend is and when he is coming to visit. The microwave's tone sounds and she pulls out the artificially yellowed rice. We split the rice evenly and I share my microwavable chicken breast. While we eat, we make plans for Friday night. We talk about how difficult this semester is turning out to be, and our apprehensions about senior year. At this dinner, we share secrets and plans. We share crazy dreams and help each other solve problems. Here, we become an instant family. Seven minutes opens conversations and instigates laughter. We make fun of our attempt at a real meal. The smell that rises from my plastic bowl is nowhere near organic, but it preserves our friendship. It quickly turns us into family.

The Gods That Make You Reach For Gods by Raven Baptiste Holder

I have a spiral staircase that's slippery
with all the spit shining on a bottle lip,
and dusty with all the old skin from knees
bent against the stair, raw in clumsy prayer.
God listens even when you're lying,
asleep in the pew, or on the floor
of the bathroom.

And when I reach as far as I can
and poke my fingers through the night
that is thinnest near the earth,
darkest under all the feet
carrying the dizzy into deeper vertigo,
I can touch the edge of his gaze.
I can hear the soft descent of angels
woven like tinsel into the roar of a toilet flush,
their fingers cool against the blush
of my cheek, sweeping into my hair
to hold it back.

Tomorrow, I'll try to forget the god I saw,
bright on the fragrant wings of vodka.
That god was white and shining,
in pieces of the stars, lining
these dark winding streets
like too many broken bottles,
sparkling and cast down
like angels who swagger in beauty
and reach only for crowns.



Jaime Bonventre

Fiction Contest Runner-Up: As the Papaya Queen

by Molly Mihalcik

Clancey Boyle makes me sweat. I become anxiously aware of this as I stare hard into my also perspiring hotdog. Above my knee, I am tensing the heavy of my flesh to the beat of unintelligible Spanish music scratching in the background. There is a sty developing on my right eyelid and I can feel its lumpy heat digging into my eyeball. My hair has not recovered from the night's events, as it is matted in unattractive thatches at the nape of my neck. Kneading my fingers into the cusp of my palms, an uneasy clamminess becomes evident. I hyperextend my legs nervously as I grapple for a napkin. My chest is knocked into the rim of the standing table accommodations along the window. Something gummy yet fluid in my throat rattles as I release a surrendering, white flag of a breath.

Before me in a Styrofoam container sits a hot dog with ketchup and another dressed with sauerkraut. I am unable to commit to a singular style of hot dog. Toppings offered at the Papaya King include zesty chili, cheddar cheese, sautéed onions, sauerkraut, New York onions, tropical relish, coleslaw, sweet pickles, peppers, and raw onions. I can barely keep loyalty with a beverage. I often teeter between a familiar papaya juice and the newer Tropical Breeze, a mango-strawberry drink.

This hotdog is patented as "tastier than Filet Mignon." Zagat's lauds it as the "crown jewels of hot doggery." For me, I say it is pretty tasty. Outwardly meager in size, the Papaya King hot dog is not boastful in appearance. Char marks humble its reddish skin. The actual product is a far cry from the lush frankfurters displayed on the picture menus above the counter. This hot dog supersedes all others wholly in taste. Its innards cannot be duplicated. Composed of oregano and spiced beef, the Papaya King hot dog is contained by German sausage casings which are said to give a brilliant snap at first bite. I can attest. An unlikely pairing, the stand's papaya juice perfectly complements this hot treat. More of a pulpy slush than a juice, Papaya King extends a tropical selection unrivaled by competitors—coconut, mango, banana, grapefruit, apple, cherry, pineapple, papaya.

Clancey Boyle's mouth is heaving and ridiculous. Upper lip extends awkwardly over the lower one. What was once an acceptable haircut has slowly regressed into a defunct pompadour. Hanging at the sides in sloth-like strips, his arms are capped by unusually slender fingers. The drum of his stomach is thick and enormous. As straightforward friends, we thrived off of impromptu mischief, traipsing the streets with our loud antics. Together, we knew how to ruin the sleep of others using youth and hard feet. It was at a first-time momentary calm: after the evening wailing had stopped, once our cohorts had found their own beds—would we find

ourselves unslept, tussled on a crude bean bag chair. Sex did its usual job: Clancey Boyle and I no longer enjoyed simple rapport. Our frequent interactions slipped into sick tradition. Each morning we would rise from our mistakes and process towards Papaya King.

The corner of 86th and 3rd—this was Gus Puolo's dream. He stepped onto the docks, still stinking of Greece, with a taste for tropical drinks thick in his spit. While rising through the ranks in the deli business, the immigrant kept berries, oranges, and papayas, prominently within mind. Supported by a single blender and two waitresses dawning Hawaiian skirts, who is now the Papaya King was weak at its beginnings. Gus did not relent! He took the rough and the waning—he stuck around, sought out resolve. Soon enough, New Yorkers were lining up to lap down the King's nectarous concoctions. Unknowing then, the young Greek's dream was only at its crest.

After a roller skating accident, a bed ridden Gus was quick to find pure love with his attractive German nurse. Apt to the neighborhood in that age, his nurse would bring German delicacies to the injured entrepreneur. It was during these immobile hours that affection struck Gus twice: the frankfurter. In 1934, the hot dog was added to Papaya King's menu and a New York City dynasty took flight. FDR's sips here are said to have influenced ideas for the New Deal. The Beatles made Papaya King a primary pit stop before the bulk of their American television appearances. Seinfeld's Kramer won't swear allegiance to any other hot dog. Papaya King went on to satisfy not only Gus Puolo's ambitions but a smorgasbord of New Yorkers hungry for yummy juices and hot dogs.

Disrupting a pickup line that curves around a corner of the shop, a man kneels over a baby carriage. His fingernails are noticeably dirty and his hands are tan with filth. Engulfed by ink, finger to shirt sleeve, the man gently opens his purchase and dissects the links, bird-like, precise. In slow approach, he places a sliver of lukewarm meat on the baby's equally pink tongue. This process continues gingerly—the man's gray bicep retracts to-and-fro in loving frequency. Tight fist, the baby simultaneously coos at each tender hot dog tear.

Earlier in the line, a short woman with gristly, teased hair pounded on the counter, palm flexed. She demanded to know why the price of the Home Run Combo has risen to a staggering \$5.18. The betrayal startles her. She demands explanation yet succumbs to the King's ransom.

"Who the hell!" Her mutter came as a petit shout while she rustled through her worn handbag. Her elbows were pointy and jabbed up violently at pending search.

"Own that, Girlfriend!" another woman who also preceded me in line does a

strange hip twist. The magenta beads that end her hair click alongside her encouraging pitch.

I am not Clancey Boyle's girlfriend. Her name is Katherine. She is about my same height, has little hands, and wears fashionable glasses. I do not think Clancey Boyle brings her to the Papaya King.

Outside, the corner of 86th and 3rd is dimly illuminated by the indoor hot dog stand's fluorescent lamps. At night, this light crosses the faces of its entering clientele in guilty, burnt orange strips. A crowned melon grins and wields a hot dog alongside the purring tube lights. Customers surrender to his gaze entranced as they foray into the stand. Inside, everything is tinted gray by an inexplicable layer of city murk. Fire engine red, dark green, and gleaming yellow—all seem a little less majestic and a lot more muted under their cape of soot. The wall tiles remind me of multicolored piano keys. Along the shelves of cups and extinct blenders are tropical fruits that have also fallen victim to the store's dusty cast. The central counter is divided by a window full of hot dogs twirling in their own drippings. Pineapples everywhere. Music is kept low in here to oblige the bustling orders and the insufferable, screaming signs that hang at all angles. My favorite leers from the left wall and bluntly asks, "HAVE YOU EVER TRIED CELERY JUICE?" These posters are insistent; I never thought I'd find myself slugging down celery juice. Just so, I never saw myself living through more than several hot dog dates with an already girlfriended Clancey Boyle.

The aroma here is smarmy and acidic. It seethes through the nasal passages into the eyes, attempting to twitch the optic nerve by sick delight. It sinks into the pores causing one to lower the eyelids in ecstasy a little bit. I can feel it on top of my skin, wiggling through the fibers of my clothing and tangling in even the finest of hairs along my neck. Other sharp smells can be made out--grapefruit, seasonal Carrot juice, searing chili, however; boiling pig product is most foreboding. This is not a smell that one becomes adjusted or accustomed to; however, it is not a scent that one can easily expel from the smell catalog. Papaya King Smell sits as a yellow fog profound in my lungs, clawing up my throat. Months ago, when I met Katherine for the first time, I spluttered a little of this smog on her face as I introduced myself.

Right in front of me in line is a cab driver, small indentations from his beaded seat covering spot his t-shirt and pants. As he quietly orders and goes to pay, first flicking over his cab accreditation, he warmly pauses at a photograph of a woman. The photo is from the shoulders up, she is wearing a yellow sari and her eyes are sunken, ghoulish, striking. A purple flower hangs nonchalantly where her ear meets long hair. Withdrawing some money from the leather pouch, he thumbs through bills with one hand and clutches the wallet in the other. With the grasping

hand, his thumb circles the pictured face, lingering fondly at the purple flower, and then continuing clockwise, routinely until he closes the wallet.

The midday pilgrimage to Papaya King is unspoken. Today, on our succinct lag down 1st Avenue and up 86th Street, Clancey Boyle stops before a man selling toys on the street. Wooden snakes, teddy bears, a wind-up dog that chirps, wax eggs full of confetti, small mancala sets, whirligigs. There is a mechanical baby laid on its stomach, feet propped in the air quaintly, it can kick and giggle. It wears a pink nightgown; its cheeks are glowing red. Clancey Boyle shoves this toy in my face. His expression widens beneath his unkempt eyebrows and light knotted hair mingles in his eyelashes. He guffaws with an idiotic grin. I have never loved anybody more in my entire life.

Sometime last May, the Health Department came through Papaya King in dreadful torrents: accusation, distrust, inspection. After flooding the place with 88 supposed health violations, Papaya King's fluorescent lights went black.

"Rats!" Clancey Boyle chirped and waved his hands in alarm.

"Mice are a city-wide problem," I responded dryly, staring at the deserted hot dog giant.

Two days later, stuffed mouthed children dawdled on the corner of 86th and 3rd again. The hazy glare of the smiling melon reflected off the sidewalk in triumph. Lines disrupted the general street traffic. The deep stink of steaming pork lapped the faces of Upper East Siders once more. Papaya King prevailed as if nothing had ever dared to question its legitimacy.

Looking from the inside out of the Papaya King, a business man is propped against the window so that I can see the rumpling of his stern jacket against the glass. He is sipping a large sized drink and staring intently at a girl whom dances wildly by a phone booth. On top of the payphone there is a small, shabby boom box. He is close enough so that I can see the professional gnaw the thin plastic of his straw, slurping up pulpy liquid in sync with the bass. He is gripping the drink tightly. The paper of the cup is slowly denting, submitting where his wedding ring sits among his curling fingers. Although this business man is still, his face twists up simultaneously in tune to the girl's stomping legs. Her arms begin to move hypnotically, chopping the air, hewing the business man's tidy logic. His eyes are faithful to her rhythm.

Behind my eating head, there is a steady chorus of orders. King's Combo with chili and cheese. Banana Daquiri. Knish and Coconut Champagne. For your smoothie you can request non-fat yogurt, honey, wheat germ, or soy protein. Two franks with New York onions. Most regulars stick to what they know no matter how worn and scratched their taste buds may be to the tang. Clancey Boyle always

gets two hot dogs with tropical relish, a side of Cajun curly fries, and a mango juice. His order curls off his lipoid tongue, as if he too has forgotten how to choose.

I want to hear reciprocation. I know it well: Clancey Boyle's oafish fingers run the slope of my lower back, lovingly rubbing each digit down my hard spine. Dragged at clasped arm to the counter area, I lace my own fingers over the strong, balmy webs of Clancey Boyle's hands. This still, my ears do not believe what my body has come to know. With spoken words would come solidarity, an air of explanation. My validity as a loving being lingers between oily wafts, the starving demands of strangers. Aloud, I become real. Instead, Clancey Boyle and I resign to the dull hiss of churning juice, poor radio reception.

In the righter line, a girl who appears to be about my age waits to order. Brassy haired and awkwardly shaped. Her hair is loosely braided—little wisps peek out of the patterned knot defiantly. Pulses of door breeze cause one of these stray hairs to fishhook her mouth into a slight smile. I notice our similarly tiny hands—hers dutifully trace the pocket seam in a pair of jean shorts. Her eyes dart around the shop frenetically as if she is waiting for a bit more than a hot dog and a juice. I knew this girl once as myself on a night that has since stretched my moral fiber to mere threads. All too easily, I transpose her back to the evening Clancey Boyle first slept with me. I can see Clancey Boyle's firm hands weaving through her hair as he lowers his face overhead, the girl's scalp stinking of nighttime. Her nubile, untouched body melts into the bean bag chair. Their weight, compounded, shifts on the lousy stability of contained polyurethane beads. I want to part the air, muddled with panting gusts and tell her—Stop! You are going to do things you'd never imagine you'd do. You'll hurt tiny handed girls not unlike yourself. You'll suffer. Instead, I breathe in the tart wind that surrounds; I have always been fierce for myself and I want this to live. I let them do what they are going to do again and again.

A shouting man divides the throng of Papaya King Goers to deliver a case of mangoes. The crowd's constant chatter lulls for a moment. I reach diagonally across the Styrofoam boxes dividing us and wipe the remnants of Clancey Boyle's tropical relish from the crook of his mouth. The gesture is habitual and unnoticed. Clancey Boyle's clean lips purse forward first, and then turn upward at the sides. Head cocked at a slant, he blinks knowingly towards me and raises the hot dog to his face once more. I cannot see beyond this—I cannot see.

Fiction Contest Winner: Attica, Heaven
by Nick Sweeney

The angels are at it again. I look out the window at the raging thunderstorm outside and wonder if the angels know better than to fight each other. I was supposed to be sweeping the floors of the house, to keep the tenants in check, but I'd rather watch a war unfold. Momma told me that every time there's a thunderstorm it's because of the angels fighting up in heaven. The clouds become dark, the lightning and thunder comes in and shakes the earth to its core. These storms were merely clashes of good and evil. An inconvenience for us all, it goes back as far as the Good Book itself. And that's just how the world works. Attica was always known for the holy fights, but they were also known for other things. That's what Century Long tells me anyway. The old man who's been a tenant in this house for at least a century tells me that our little town of Attica was war-torn by the Northern Invasion. He teaches me history every Wednesday, when Momma goes out to the market for a few hours. It's a secret. Momma, or Momma McCall as some call her, keeps a sharp eye on me. I don't go to the Attica Grammar School because she doesn't believe in it.

"Nate McCall, if there's anything worth learning, I'll tell you." She says time and time again.

So I learn the basics around the house. I do all sorts of things: I learn how to write and read by rewriting sections of the Bible, I learn how to do math by counting up the rent from all the tenants, and I even learn about nature by taking care of the garden. Mostly, I water when they need it, cut down the common weeds that find their way in, and I take care of the snakes. Momma says no snakes in the garden. That last one's almost a job though. History is a secret lesson and she doesn't know about it. She doesn't even trust the old man, says he's an old artifact who loves to fill young boys' minds with useless trash, but he keeps paying the rent on time. The man doesn't work anymore, so the source of it is a mystery to us all. Momma thinks he gets his rent from the Lord himself.

But today, on a rainy Wednesday, Century Long is telling me about how Attica was made. In the beginning, he says, it was just an outpost, a place to stay for travelers in the old times, but eventually the people decide to stick around. So they made a town and called it Attica. And soon they started to make streets and give them names. Street. Avenue. Road. And then they called the small creek connected to the Ohio River, Catfish Creek. And then everything started to get names. The stores. The houses. The people. I suspect this was the beginning of our Eden.

This is how the McCall boarding house came to be. It was a place for travelers with no place to go. It was passed down family by family, from the original owner Reverend McCall who was a priest, to the hothead cavalry officer Amos McCall who died valiantly in a charge against the Union Invaders nearly a hundred years ago and down the line to Momma McCall. I've come to believe that Century Long has lived here since the dawn of Attica, since the time things were named.

Momma takes pride in everything she does. Century Long tells me that she runs a tight ship, whatever that means, and that she keeps everyone in check. And she also lets everyone and anyone stay in, as long as they pay of course. When she's not busy running the boarding house, she prays to the Lord himself nearly every day since I can remember. At least twice a day. That's when the garden started. She told me about the thunderstorms one day when we were tending to the garden.

"So why do the angels fight?" I say to the old man. He's in his old reading chair surrounded by dusty books showing me pictures of the old times. There are pictures of the boarding house over the years as it grew and I see pictures of some of the old tenants and I swear I can see a younger Century Long in one of the older pictures.

"Because they have to I suppose."

"Do they fight like the South did?"

He mumbles under his breath and then coughs and it smells like caramel candy. I look out the window and see the winds push back the tree out in the backyard. I look around to see how the garden's doing, and see that it's in one piece. I know I'll have to beat a snake or two when the storm lets up. I wonder why angels fight so close to a place like this. But I figure that Attica's a battlefield, and there's no questioning it. Attica will always be Attica. I ask him again but now he's sleeping. Century Long teaches me a lot of things, but I know it's time to go when he goes to sleep. That means Momma is coming home soon. I go downstairs, past some of the other tenants and go into my room to grab my notebook and the Bible so I can start copying Second Thessalonians. The storm outside continues on and I wait for Momma to come back. And that's when I hear the crash. I look outside and there's a man lying outside near the garden. I'm the only one who hears it and I run downstairs. Momma will kill me if anything happens to the garden and then it hits me. I go back to Century Long's room and wake him up. I show him the man outside on the ground in the soaking rain.

"Century, what is that?"

"Beats me."

"Could it be an angel?" I ask as we stand there looking out the window and the storm outside.

"Maybe he fell out of the sky," he says and goes back to his reading chair.

It makes sense. The battles in the sky, the angel falling. There can't be another reason. This is Eden after all and maybe he came here to help guard against the snakes. I look around and Century Long is again asleep. I decide to invite the man who fell from the sky into the house, figuring that Momma would want me to be polite to a guest like the holy messenger. The storm starts to let up for a few moments and I run outside. I always wanted to meet an angel and now this is my shot. So many questions, so many things to talk about. I wanted to ask him what it was like to fight his own brothers, and if he believed in fighting.

I slowly made my way to the garden, arming myself with my wooden stick used against the snakes. These days you can never be safe enough. Never know where a snake will come from. The man on the ground is on his stomach and he looks tired. His wings are gone, probably destroyed in falling from earth. Wings are the reasons I love angels, and I wonder how they fight in the sky, with the thunder, the lightning and the darkness. If there can be any light at all. The man finally moves after a long and wet moment. He looks like every other man, yet I know he's more. He hides his wings because he is among us now. Wings are a dead giveaway to see an angel. I hold my snake fighting stick firmly as I stand my ground. Momma will be coming home soon and she can't see me all dirty and wet. The man looks at me and I'm not sure what to do.

"What's your name?" I say.

"Michael. Who's asking?" He groggily says as he stands up, completely soaked and dirty. I thank the Lord for letting him fall just a few feet away from Momma's garden. And it hits me. I'm talking to Michael, the archangel. I don't know who else it could possibly be. I remember Century Long telling me that there was a warrior angel called Michael was the general of the angels and he's a tough son of a bitch, but I can't say that to anyone. Momma will kill me if I ever say that to her face. But Michael, this angel, leads the good angels against their rebellious brothers. I stumble over my words now that I realize I'm in the presence of a warrior of the Lord.

"I am. My name is Nate. Want to go somewhere dry?"

He merely nods his head. The storm now vanishes. The man who fell from the sky looks dead, a sign of a long battle overhead. All soldiers must look like this, so tired, so worn down from battle. No wonder he fell, he's been fighting for the longest of us all. Even longer than Amos McCall from the Northern Invasion.

"Of course." I say. We walk back into the house and into the kitchen. He sits down and I give him a plate of crackers and a glass of milk. We're running low on food and I can't wait for Momma to get home. Although I'm sure she will love to help an angel, I don't think she'd like the dirt we brought in. We sit there silently eating and I just watch him. Losing his wings must be hard; he looks like he's taking the pain well. But Michael is the archangel of the Lord; I imagine he lives up to the son of a bitch status he's received down here. Maybe he's seen Amos McCall around up there, and my thoughts lead me to think that the crazy cavalry officer is bringing all kind of hell up there. I look outside and the storm starts up again, as quickly as it stopped.

"Well Nate, I have to go now." He puts the plate down in the middle of the table in our kitchen.

"Why?" I say. I want to ask him to help me with the snakes in the garden. I want Momma to see that I brought an angel home. Momma prays enough to the man upstairs, I might as well be polite to his most faithful soldier. Just like the McCalls were to their renegade Confederate relative Amos.

"Because I have to go back now. It's getting late." He says.

"Are you going back to the clouds?" I ask him, wondering where his wings are. Back must be the heavenly battle overhead. Michael doesn't respond, and simply smiles at me. He fights the rebel angels- his brothers- and smiles. I want to ask him about the rebellion, about his brothers, about the Lord himself. While I wonder of heavenly things, he leaves without a trace. He must fly back to battle, I suppose. And while I look out the back window at the garden, thinking of having another guard for the garden when Momma comes in with two bags from the market.

"Nate McCall, why are you so wet and dirty?" Momma says. I know she's mad and I look back with nothing to say. Century Long is probably taking his nap still, and I can't wait to tell him the good news. I can't wait to tell him about the archangel Michael. But she's still yelling at me about being a dirty mess and I can't stop but to smile.

I wonder if Momma knows how close our Attica is to Heaven.

Poetry Contest Runner-Up: That's All You Get Today
by Gabrielle Albino

There's a dead man who won't leave me alone.
I wouldn't mind him coming around if he was alive.
When he visits he's impossible
to get rid of, so I welcome him unwillingly.

Sometimes we have fun.

Four nights ago we got drunk
and laughed about how amusing we think we are.
Dancing at red lights on Genesee Street.
Driving golf carts to gas stations.
Who do we think we are?
Last night he saved me from a sinking ship.
But the baby blankets, no! They were lost.
Why come around when you know you can't stay?

Sometimes we're just in line at the grocery store.

Tonight I'll go to bed afraid he'll crash
the party I wish I was having.
Tomorrow I'll wake up
feeling like I killed someone.



Poetry Contest Winner: Delusions of Being Deceit
by Michael Cresci

I.

There's more hair than ever
and even less desire to remove it.
Eventually it will render me an
Adam's Family character and I'll
suffocate in maturity: The suit I'll wear in
my coffin. And my tie
will be made of responsibility and gas bills.
Motherfucking fuel economy.

II.

Is it that we get wiser or
that we grow to accept that
wisdom is unattainable?
Perhaps we simply need a warm up?
Who wouldn't like that?
In junior high basketball, the warm up period
before each game was when I came closest
to playing, and subsequently,
when I felt the most alive.

III.

When staring at a diploma or
photo albums filled with accounts
of your college liver damage or
childhood vacations and teenage love
or the zealous inhalation of cleverly named drugs,
it can seem that time flies no matter what
the level of fun.

IV.

It seems I'm lingering between young and old.
Drunk and hung over.
Who knows?

That, I imagine, is the right thing to say in most situations.
But then again, who knows?

V.

Then comes the day you realize that
you've been riding an awful lot of trains lately;
while sitting next to a man wearing an unmatching
blue suit.

The jackets and pants from two different
outfits. Both blue, neither the same.

He sees you as young even though you feel ancient.
Older than your age since you love quoting Brando.
I could have been a contender, you say. I could have
been somebody.

Then there's the day you realize there's enough
passion in the world already.

Everything *trembles* with it.

VI.

Trains are for the old, as are long distances.
For the young there are only suburban streets and
the distance between basements.

Basements complete with beat up red
make out couches, old exercise equipment,
poorly done horror films and an undeniable lack of context.

VII.

During a stroll by the water you wonder
if there is a more evocative word than "brackish."

Probably.

There is always a more "something" version
of everything.

VIII.

I remember how it feels to be young and
drunk in the summer;

I remember how every
autumn my head spins with nostalgia
until I shrivel like a leaf,
floating unnoticed to the ground.

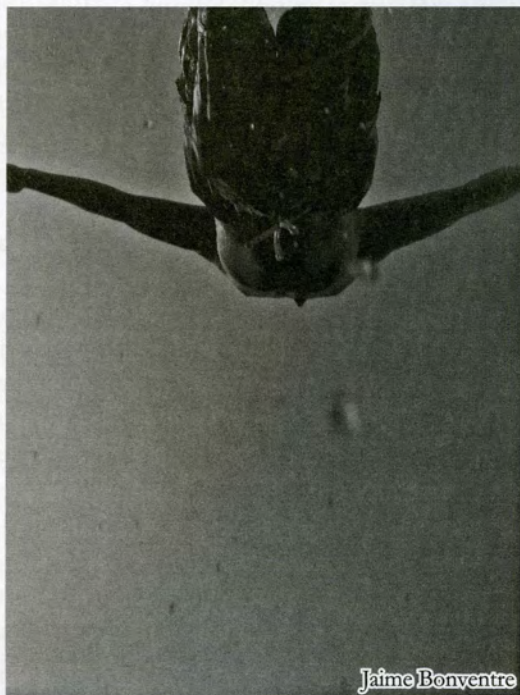
I remember being old and hung over
in the winter.

I remember how things thaw come spring looking
like they always did yet altogether different.

IX.

Not old, not young, not anything really.

Craving the days of mandatory blood work
when I'd weep and my infatigable mother would whisper,
"It will all be over soon."



Jaime Bonventre

**Non-Fiction Contest Runner-Up: Ever Concerned With Forever Ago
by Michael Cresci**

All time is all time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber.

-Kurt Vonnegut

Nothing ends. Nothing ever ends.

-Alan Moore

I'm full of shit. I can think of no other way to start this story. I don't know where to begin. I'm full of shit same as every other person. We all lie and say things we don't mean and convince ourselves of things that aren't true but I'm especially full of shit because I'm trying to tell a story which clearly has a beginning yet I'm unable to find a point at which to start. I could start in my kitchen with my mother. She could say something like, "Time heals all wounds honey. She wasn't good enough for my baby anyway." I can look at her with infinite disgust and say with certainty, "There is NO ONE else." And I can believe it. I did believe it. And she and my friends can tell me that I'll get "over it" and I won't even have the slightest idea what those words mean. I'm still not sure what they mean or if they are even real. And they were right. I'm as over it as I can be, but how much is that really? What's "over it?" I could start like that. Or I could skip it all and start with a poem I tried to write. I suppose I've never "gotten over" that poem.

It was titled "Ever Concerned With Forever Ago." It was an attempt to reconcile my then current location, which was a hotel room in London, with my inability to stop thinking about a past relationship from which I'd already moved on. Sometimes it's impossible to not feel trapped with yourself and your past. I was sharing the room with a friend but he was gone for the day so I sat completely naked, listened to Elvis Costello "Greatest Hits" albums, and wrote all day. There were 5 mirrors located throughout the tiny room and as a result I was everywhere. At the time I wrote, "I've got me cornered!"

The window had no screen and if one tripped one could easily find themselves dead on the street. The very idea dizzied me so I got up to pace. I walked back and forth while my head spun and I thought about too much at once. I tried doing pushups to distract myself. It was too bizarre to see five other versions of myself doing the same thing. An eerie game of follow the leader. I began to realize

that the mirrors were reflecting other mirrors. It creates an endless loop of the same thing. Everything existing at once and endlessly. It was too much so I turned away.

The curtains were red and green with touches of yellow. I have the urge to describe them as faux-Victorian but to be honest they were just ugly. A snot covered Christmas, if you will. This information overload became too much so I laid down. Each bed came with two pillows. Unfortunately they were the kind that looked big and soft only to reveal that their appearance, of providing neck support and head elevation, is an elaborate illusion. The kind where you feel like your head is stuck in between all of the softness rather than over it. This was not helping at all so I spun my head to the foot of the bed. At the foot was a small brown blanket that seemed to serve no purpose whatsoever. It was too thin and short to provide substantial warmth. It was too plain to provide decoration. At the time the room layout seemed oddly important as things can when you're naked and surrounded by mirrors.

And then I looked into one of them and I could see myself on a street corner with a girl in a blizzard and we're fighting and screaming until we go hoarse and not really saying anything. The people who walk around have flushed cheeks from the cold and from drunkenness. In another mirror I see me at my kitchen table telling my mom, "There is no one else," and my younger brother rolls his eyes and walks out the room. In another I see me meeting that girl in a dance club that we both don't want to be at and discussing the upcoming presidential primaries. She has a Long Island Iced Tea. I have a Jack and Coke. And I see us out in a gazebo surrounded by music watching the boats float down the Hudson. And I see the two of us in a McDonalds ordering a McFlurry from a comically overweight cashier, giggling like idiots.

I sat and wrote and wrote and wrote. I tried to explain when all these moments took place and why they mattered. Tried to decide if they mattered. Then I crumpled up the pages threw them against one of my reflected doppelgangers and wrote all over again. I kept coming to the same idea and losing the ability to continue. I wanted to write about the human tendency of acting like goldfish in regards to love. We forget so quickly that we could destroy ourselves if not properly taken care of. I tried all my nifty college writing tricks and none seemed to work. I went through half a notebook before I jotted down a final attempt. "We get burned. We get over it. Then we reach back into the fire convinced we'll eventually end up fireproof." And when the poem was finished it still wasn't any good. But I didn't crumple up the page.

That night I had just seen a production of *Waiting For Godot*. It had been my first experience with Samuel Beckett's brilliant mindfuck of a play and it made me feel like I was thinking for the first time. For some reason this had started me on a drawing kick so I sketched a self portrait. Now I say sketch as if drawing is one of my skills, but it is not. Regardless, I was happy with the result. The top of the page was just below my eyes and the bottom was the end of my short beard. My eyes and the top of my head didn't make the cut. I decided to draw some missing teeth because it seemed appropriate. In reality my teeth are pretty nice by tooth standards.

At this point my friend returned to the room saw me sitting there naked and said what most of us would say, "Um...dude?" He grabbed whatever it was he had forgotten --maybe his iPod --and left. But before leaving he saw my drawing and asked why there were teeth missing. "Because that's how I feel," I answered. Thinking back that was a really cryptic and unnecessary answer but it makes more sense now than it did then. At the time I thought I was being deep because sometimes I'm just a pretentious bastard. But now I realize that in a way I *am* missing teeth. Everyone is. I feel like me and life are having a fistfight and I keep getting more and more bruised and getting more and more teeth knocked out. In this "fight" I'm holding my own but in the end I'm gonna be worn down. Even Mohammad Ali went down eventually. And I may float like a butterfly but bees scare the shit out of me. The point is that even the happiest guy in the world has his fair share of scars. And that brings us to the girl from the poem. Lauren.

I'll always associate Lauren with corny and romantic rambling. Sappy and unrealistic pontifications which I'd provide to anyone who'd listen. Especially her. It was a staple of our relationship and one that now embarrasses me greatly. Still, I imagine those are the things that make love so great at the time. We all have to have our heart torn out at some point and I suppose we should thank the person that does but goddamn did I ever make a fool out of myself. She had long brown hair that started near sandy blonde when I met her but ended up dark and pushing red by the time we were dating. It would always end up in my mouth no matter how hard I tried to avoid it. She was pale with green eyes and that combination used to make my knees weak. She complained that her nose looked "like a snout" and wished she had been named Lorelai, like her parents had considered, instead. We'd argue over whether or not Michael Buble sucks or not- he does- and pretended to debate politics but in reality just agreed loudly. I'd make fun of her being from Buffalo by insinuating she lived in an igloo plagued by an angry Yeti. She donned a "near Canadian" accent which was exemplified by her statements

ending with a question mark or as she put it “questioning myself.” She didn’t say “eh?” but she often made declarations and then said “yeah?” immediately after. For some reason this accent drove me wild.

We spent most nights attempting to do something we could classify as an “adventure.” This usually consisted of driving around aimlessly arguing over what music to listen to. Once she went online and found a list of things to wish upon. Assorted superstitions that supposedly contained magic powers, so we set off to do all of them. We wished when the clock struck 11:11. We picked green M&M’s out of a McFlurry and picked the seeds out of a watermelon we bought at a 24 hour supermarket a little past 4 a.m. We threw pennies into a drinking fountain because it was too late to search for a real one and we fell asleep holding each other, fully dressed, our shoes still on.

The funny part is we hardly dated at all but we acted like we were for a long time and broke up for even longer. In a sense, she was the culmination of years of senseless idealized romance and foolish ideas about love. She was the transition between the silly high school puppy love of the past and real world adult love that I was just discovering. She was both wrapped up in one. A lesson. A guidebook on how to fall in love.

How To Fall in Love

2009:

Think for the first time you might be better off, despite your best efforts not to. It’s been plenty of months since you last saw her. Tell everyone you are completely over it. Be pretty much over it unless someone mentions her name or Cornell. Wholly despise Cornell and the word “transfer.” Start hating her for vague reasons. Look at old things you wrote about her and feel embarrassed of them. Occasionally let a dizzy nostalgia sweep over you like a disease when you smell that distinctive swirl of coconut and lime. Wish you had seen her naked more and then feel like a pervert for thinking that way. Get over it for good but remain angry you never got any real closure. Start pursuing someone new. Begin to suspect that life will keep getting harder from here on out.

2008 Part 2:

Find that dating is even better than you expected it to be. Jokingly tell each other that you are the best kissers of all time. Really mean it. Get frustrated and wonder, more, what she looks like naked but take pride in not pressuring her. When she asks if you still like her even though she’s “not a whore” know she’s

using the joke to mask insecurity. Answer "I'd wait forever, babe." Really mean it. When she blushes kiss her nose and fall in love. When she gets sick and can't sleep get her Nyquil pills. When she can't swallow them search the whole dorm for cough syrup until eventually someone provides it. Sit up with her stroking her hair and face until five in the morning, when she can finally fall asleep. Hope that she's dreaming of you. Consider your cliché feelings original and previously unknown to the rest of the world. Spend the next month incredibly happy and consider all the long buildup to dating part of your relationship. Use this to justify the intensity of your feelings. Be convinced that things will keep getting easier from here on out.

Out of nowhere find out she's still transferring. Pretend you support the decision and bury all the anger it causes. Lose the foolish delusion that she'd stay for you; it will be like being the last kid in the class to find out the truth about Santa. Get dumped a few weeks into the summer in order to be "spared of getting hurt." Keep talking everyday and pretend nothing's different. Fight...a lot. Say things like "I'm sick of caring more than you do." Convince yourself she doesn't know what she wants and that persistence will win out because this love is "too real." Visit her and have the best weekend you could have ever imagined. Proclaim that kissing her after a long separation is heaven. Realize the situation is a ticking time bomb. Kiss her for the last time.

2008 Part 1:

Flirt furiously and often spend nights talking until four in the morning. Talk about your hate of dance clubs (say they're for "mindless idiots") and your love of the word "whippersnapper." Begin sleeping through morning classes and spending the whole day plotting ways to see her earlier. Catch endless crap from your friends about "not making a move" and get angry when they ask, "Have you fucked her yet?" Start thinking of the ways she's perfect for you. Scold yourself for being too sentimental. Be stern with yourself to secure your masculinity. Worry vaguely when she says she has been thinking about transferring. Assume that once you are *finally together she will have a reason to stay. Lay awake thinking of cheesy poems comparing her to a flower or calling her hair "a jungle."*

Tell your friends from home that you've met the most amazing girl of all time and it seems like she might be interested. When they say they are happy for you say, "So am I." Begin to suspect life gets easier from here on out. Start increasing your music inventory to include things she likes in an effort to pretend you've liked them all along. Contemplate what she looks like naked. Invite her to your

room saying, "I need to tell you something." She'll reply coyly with, "What about?" Decide you don't love her yet but know you will soon enough. Say, "You know I'm crazy about you, right?" Kiss and let the room spin. Worry, for the first time in your life, that you're not as good a kisser as you think. Giggle like idiots and say, "I've been waiting a long time to do that." Believe that it can only get easier from here on out.

2007:

Meet drunkenly in a dance club. Talk about Barack Obama and how much you hate the club you're in. Slur your speech and decide you want to kiss this girl. Part ways after five minutes assuming you've seen her for the last time. See her a week later in your dorm and strike up a conversation. Begin going out of your way to see her. Tell her you like her and get shot down because she "just got out of a relationship." Tell her you respect that. Go on a few dates with another girl to move on. Compare the new girl unfavorably to her and decide you don't want to move on. Begin talking until early hours of the morning almost daring the sun to rise and ruin the moment. Hide the overwhelming excitement you feel when you overhear her friends teasing her for always flirting with you. Get excited for the future.

2005:

Get your first "serious" girlfriend, Danielle, in high school at the age of 16 and marvel at the breathtaking coconut and lime scent she wears. Foolishly say I love you within a week of dating. Think you really mean it. Start planning your future together. Decide you're practically an adult. Know it can only get easier from here on out.

But our story doesn't explain why I'm thinking of Lauren in London, 3,000 miles away, quite happy with my life. It doesn't explain why when I look in the mirror I see Lauren and I in a McDonald's eating M&M's and trying to decide if the old man at another table is sleeping. Or why I see us sitting in dorm room on a bed discussing past relationships and people who are terrible kissers. Our story doesn't explain why the mirrors show me sitting in my kitchen depressed while my mother gives me a sandwich that she took the crust off of because that's how I ate them when I was a kid.

The story doesn't explain those things and it also leaves out one crucial part. The end. It's the part I can't stop thinking about. Somewhere in between "**2008**

Part 2" and "2009" I went to Cornell to visit her and see a performance she was in. She had invited me and, from my perspective, played up the fact that we'd get to spend some time alone which was long overdue. I had convinced myself that this was going to be the point when we got back on track. Long story short, it was an agonizingly long day in which she rehearsed the whole time and I sat around alone in her dorm room. After several more obstacles prevented us from spending time together, I asked her if we'd ever get to. This, as it turns out, was a mistake. What followed was the kind of fight that feels as if it will never end. The kind where you get dizzy and talk in circles. It took place on a street corner in Ithaca, NY in the middle of a snow storm- it was intolerably cold because we'd been walking to a party and as a result didn't have jackets on. Drunken college kids were walking around and occasionally stopped to watch the show we were putting on. As the snow fall increased so did the volume of our voices. We screamed every hurtful thing we could think of at each other. Our voices became hoarse and our points remained pointless. Eventually I stormed off and tried to find my way back only to get lost for over an hour in the snow storm. I walked with nothing but questions and tears. Who was this person telling me that it had been over for a long time? How could I believe something that now seemed to be such a monumental lie? Why, oh why, did I not wear gloves?

When I finally got back to her room some of her friends were there drinking and I had the pleasure of explaining that it was only me returning. Finally, someone broke the tension by offering me a beer. It was warm Miller High Life Light. A very collegiate drink. Having eaten nothing that day I was substantially buzzed after two and this is about the time Lauren returned also drunk. We proceeded to engage in another heated, and now heavily slurred, battle in which I was told a few choice phrases about why she could "never love me." Being able to take no more I got up and began to walk away prepared to collapse and sleep it all away. As I walked down the hall I said, "You can't blame me for loving you." She answered, after a moment's pause, "And you can't blame me for not." When we returned to her room, where I had to sleep next to her due to space limitations, her friends stayed up talking until around 7 a.m. preventing any real sleep. The next day I drove off, delirious from lack of sleep, into yet another snow storm and I haven't spoken to her since. On the ride home I fell asleep at the wheel, twice. My car drifted into the ridges on the side of the road jarring me awake. BUH! BUH! BUH! BUM! It served as a jolt but soon enough my eyelids drooped because I'd been tired for so goddamn long. No more emotions. No more delusions. Just damn tired.

The failed poem I tried to write nude in London was about that night. The title came from this line: "If I ever see her again and she asks if I remember that night I'll answer, 'I remember every detail. The Germans wore gray, you wore blue.' I suppose I'm ever concerned with forever ago." Of course if I really did have that conversation with her I doubt I'd quote *Casablanca*. I hope I would, though. I really do.

Back in the room in London I looked at the mirrors and could see everything at once. I saw Lauren and I sitting in a gazebo overlooking the Hudson; me sitting up against an arch with her between my legs with the back of her head resting on my chest. My arms are around her sides with my hands on her stomach. She slips her fingers through mine and we take it all in. To the left a college choir is practicing. They're singing gospel songs which I don't recognize but she does and she critiques their lack of range. It serves as background music and it all seems a bit surreal. To the right, rowing teams are gliding through the water as I find flaws in their form. "It's like we're surrounded by our two worlds," she says. Then we wander down to a dock and get sun drunk talking for hours about our family secrets. Our schizophrenic aunts and alcoholic uncles. Surrounded by our past hobbies and past lives, not caring what comes next.

I tried to write about that too but I was too worn out. As my mother always used to say, "All nude poetry sessions must come to an end." And just like that I was clothed and outside with my friends scouring Bayswater for a bottle of wine. These things come and go quickly when you think back on them. Why we had chosen to look for wine after we knew everything was closed is still a mystery to me. As Estragon says in *Waiting For Godot*, we always find something "to give us the impression we exist."

We passed pub after pub and all were closed. Then in the distance we spotted a shining light coming from a doorway so we followed it. The "pub" was tightly packed and was undoubtedly violating multiple fire codes. The staff was dressed in full lederhosen and Austrian trinkets lined the walls. The name on the drink menu was incomprehensibly German and we all attempted to pronounce it the entire night. The waiter promised to get us a card so we could return but he never did. Right next to us was a tiny booth in which sat an old Italian gentleman. He sang a mix of Frank Sinatra, Billy Joel and Rod Stewart songs while forgetting at least a line or two in each. He also seemed to be playing piano but we couldn't see the piano for the life of us. Three angry old men sat in the corner looking displeased as they drank their beers and sat on the same side of their large table as if waiting for guests. No one ever came to join them. We started with the bottle

of wine we had been seeking but after that we took notice of *everyone* else's drink choices. Everyone was drinking one of two things. Either Austrian beer- mine was a pale malty draft called Reininghaus- or the incredibly Austrian brand of tequila: Jose Cuervo. You look for wine and you find Tequila. That's life for you. Either way, though, you still drink it.

A man of indeterminable age at the table next to us introduced himself to me as "Italian" and then turned away never speaking to me again. He sat at a table with a young British couple and a middle aged man. The middle aged man was extraordinarily drunk. He asked my age and when I told him he got quite upset and ordered more tequila and another pint. As the night when on I got drunk and danced and sang and the man said very little to me until right around last call. He turned and said, "I've been coming to this place for years and it hasn't fucking changed a bit. That bloke still doesn't know the same words to the same goddamn songs. The pints are the same. *Pints never change*. But somehow the place still always seems completely fucking different than it used to."

During my trip we took a side expedition to Stratford-upon-Avon and I found myself at Shakespeare's grave which, naturally, had a gift shop. I asked the cashier, a charming old Brit named Irene, if Austrian themed pubs were common. What followed was a twenty minute conversation that at no time even came close to being about pubs. We discussed world politics ("all politicians are rubbish"), American politics ("George W. Bush was rubbish"), the United States actually being more like several countries, New Hampshire's relative worth and right to exist, and a rental car she once used to cross America that had no "petrol gauge." She recommended some sights to see and failed to remember the number of her favorite Shakespearean sonnet. I promised to come back and recite it for her. Then I left never to see her again because I'm full of shit. That false promise has stuck with me, not because I feel guilty, but rather because I left someone. Completely and totally left her like I've done to so many others strangers. Same as so many strangers have done to me. I had taken the time to talk to her. And I only left because I had to. But I still left.

I try and think of when all these things happened in relation to each other. When Lauren told me she could never love me and when I was sitting naked and when I met Irene and when I wrote these words. They all seemed to have happened yesterday. Just out of reach but clearly detailed. Again *Waiting For Godot* has the right words for my wondering. "Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one

day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." And how true that is.

In fact traveling to London fully convinced me that time can't possibly exist. I left from JFK for Heathrow at 6:00 p.m and eight hours later it was 7:00 a.m. Now technically this makes perfect sense. But it is *really* fucking confusing. I didn't actually lose any time from my life yet changing some clocks around literally altered time. Then on the return flight we took off at 8:00 a.m and, again eight hours later, we arrived at 11:00 a.m. Somehow I gained five hours. Perhaps the fountain of youth lies somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean floating unseen by us ground dwellers.

Time doesn't exist the way we pretend it does. That's why I'm still thinking about a girl I'm completely over. Because I'm not completely over it. I'm not *completely* over anything that has ever happened to me. Nothing ever really ends. When I say my trip to Cornell was "the end" of the story, I'm full of shit. We saw each other again briefly. No greetings were exchanged. Then another time we smoked pot together on friend's boat after everyone had fallen asleep. We sat on the dock and talked for hours. We talked about my Cornell trip. We talked about good times. We talked about what went wrong. We talked about the moon looking animated- this may have been the result of the marijuana. I told her that my mom refers to her as "Voldemort." And I forgave her as best I could. In my head it was an important and cathartic moment. Once again I decided it was the ending. But life keeps teaching me that there are no endings, happy or sad.

Hence I can't stop thinking about being naked in London and therefore I can't stop thinking about Lauren and therefore I can't stop thinking of Humphrey Bogart-and how all my problems don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world- and therefore I can't stop thinking about angry old Austrian men and so on and so on. There's no difference between if it happened yesterday or five years ago. We experience these events in order but when we look back on them they're just a collection of experiences representing something. Or nothing. It's all in the past and the things that stick remain in detail and the things that don't simply don't. It's not always an issue of what's important. Just an issue of what you remember. When I claim that I'm fist fighting life I really should be saying I'm fighting the past. Whenever someone talks about life they're speaking in past tense. "Life" isn't the present. The present doesn't feel right or wrong. It just is. It's an amalgamation of the past events that are constantly replaying in your head. So actually I'm fist fighting "forever ago." And "forever ago" isn't really any different

then yesterday. So I guess that means I lied again.

The point is that, in a way, I'm always going to be in that basement bar drinking too much and laughing and dancing. Dancing away all the memories that can't ever really be danced away. Dancing and singing and considering telling everyone how full of shit I am and we all are. I want to tell them no matter how much we dance through the flames that we'll never be fireproof. And I want to tell them about all of it and everything because it's all still with me and I have so much to say to them but I don't know where to begin. I've never known where to begin.



Brianna Rosamalia

Non-Fiction Contest Winner: The Coming Out Waltz
by Molly Mihalcik

Once, I dreamt of a twin. Long legged, featherweight arms that fluttered at heavenly frequency—she transcended my femininity in all natures. While recognizable as a pair by our facial features, she ruled sight by beauty. Her reign was wrought with belly-grazing shirts and skirts which exposed thighs that did not stick together at the flesh. Where she careened airlessly, I preceded, heavy bodied, in a topsy-turvy strut. My mass was incomparable to her twig physique, as if I had remained too long in the egg.

Then, my younger sister was born. Her infant limbs would quickly develop into milky branches. A soprano from conception, her well-tempered singing voice would often compete in our hallways with my begrudged door slams. I turned seventeen only to find my family gaggled, eager to hear my sister sing the time old birthday tune. Fanning her lush hair out in preparation, poisoning her petit core, she let out a melody that wrapped about my mother in adoring trance. The staunch rivalry of my dreams had been realized.

Now, I am taken to a musty office building in the ominous shadow of the Empire State Building. The elevator rattles us up to the 8th floor. As the metallic doors peel back, I become increasingly skeptical. A dust slathered beam reads “La Crasia Gloves.” My mother excitedly sashays past pillars of boxes, cutting the filthy air with her erratic movements. Small humans are puttering away on sewing machines, unperturbed by our presence. I turn to find a man named Mr. Ruckel who is lounged at his office desk of a throne. White gloves hang as bones in multiple black cases along the walls. Rusty shears, opalescent buttons, and corroded picture frames are piled unceremoniously to the left of his desk top. He extends his withering hand; my mother abruptly pushes me forward to share my hand with his. Wiping the skin flecks and oil from a pair of glasses, he places them on his gritty face to examine my fingers, palms, and so on. My forearm hair surrenders to his sour, inspective huffs. Eyes rolling back briefly in prophecy, he declares my glove size.

This is my first step towards becoming a debutante.

My mother grew up on Murray Hill as a redheaded child actress. Although her print ad and commercial repertoire were glossed with luxury, her family’s lifestyle was not. Brushing my hair down to the tiniest ends, her resentment made itself known with each jutting brushstroke. I was raised through guilt laden comparisons. Textures of sweaters, the proportional worth of foods—all were up

for juxtaposition versus those presented to my mother at childhood. She often recalled the wintery debutante seasons she did not get to participate in: laughing girls flurrying out of the Waldorf in satiny drifts, tuxedoed boys—a mastery of refinement she had not been privileged enough to seize.

Brassy haired and awkwardly shaped—I was not the gleaming princess the tradition called for.

Surprisingly, my private school pedigree and father's profession had been testimony enough to receive a nomination for the 71st Annual Infirmary Ball. This news reached me, by way of raspy, anticlimactic phone call. Colliding in a lengthy hug, my mother and sister chirruped with delight. While I was extended no affection, my mother's next words radiate through me still. Each syllable seethed through her teeth with willful advisement and an undertone of envy. She tensed her lip at the end of every full letter. *You will be the first.* This seemingly flouncy extracurricular of society, my pending status as a debutante, quickly became a tool that I kept close to me. To these two women, I may have been a vessel. Unknowing then what I would gain other than the chagrin of my leggy sister, I submitted to the frivolities.

You have to get the dress in advance—for the program photos. My gown was an absolute mutant. Spliced from three different gowns in order to accommodate my gauche physique, the white silken Frankenstein arrived three days before I was due in front of the camera. The bodice boning fused with my ribs, the taffeta underskirt gnawed at my waist. I strained my neck upwards as my uncle, the photographer one, frowned behind his lens. He instructed me into several hokey poses. Smell the bouquet! Purse your lower lip! I am unable to execute either with any kind of composure.

The ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria is a masterful chamber flanked in red velvet. Vast tables spot lush carpeting and the quaint dance floor is outlined by a fence of chairs. Rehearsal for the ball takes place on alternate weekends before the event. Flocking to the center most part of the ballroom, old women heaved by gold and silk scarves examine us. We rehearse dances that force aerial views of snowflakes and evergreens. Our legs work automatically beneath us. We tweet out carols and muffle laughter between verses.

Concluding our final rehearsal, tea and small cakes are served in a foyer winged from the side of the ballroom. Assembling my cup, an elderly committee member meets me at the refreshments. Reminiscing almost inaudibly, the crinkly woman removes my hand from my teacup; she clenches my arm and ends her story, "You will change. You will come to know beauty about yourself." Her rice-pa-

per skin rubbed against my palm as she drew away. The small lady shuffles to an empty table and sits with a pleased grin. It is the afternoon of the Infirmary Ball. She closes her eyes for a moment as if to breathe in deeply, lapping up our electric anxiety, inhaling our ready youth.

At the night of the Infirmary Ball, girls dawning hotel robes skulk in the doorways of their suites. Other girls heap themselves on top of the stately furniture, sucking down Pinot Grigio in their strapless bras. Retiring to my room, a fellow debutante blows cigarette smoke into the toilet bowl, rises to her feet and applies a final coat of mascara.

Before you are presented to society, you are made to wait in one of the Waldorf's kitchens. The floor is slick and the air is similarly unaccommodating. Our glossy skirt tips rubbed edges with half-bitten burger patties or hardened napkins—the puffy lining peeked from beneath our dresses to fishnet soap sludge. Slumped against the walls, our bare backs melded with the tile in the midst of nervousness and dish heat. Among the pan clanks, we are no longer divided by the prices of our dresses or prep school rivalries. Our cheek muscles and noses scrunch in sync: we are young, we are beautiful, and we are becoming women—all at once, in the same muggy kitchen. Our girlish chirps ease us through the procession. The birth canal for New York's social elite is lined with room service debris, plate shards, and the abandoned skins of uneasy teenage girls.

I wiggled between two giant topiaries and the spot light blinded me. The announcer bellowed my name into the microphone. December 22nd of 2006 rushed through me in a vast gust. However, when I go back to that majestic night—it is not the regal dinner spread, tireless assembly line or Dionysian after parties that pang my heart most. Lowering into my curtsey, parting my eye level with the gleaming lights, I saw my mother, rapt in the coo of the announcer's voice. My sister hastened her clap with adoration. What was once the meager of two sisters stepped forth transformed: a precedent, a gowned swan, an open door. I may have come in as a passage for my family name but, I had come out as a woman. This was not my debut into society but, my foray into a sisterhood of stern, irrevocable pride that I had not grasped until that glowing point.

As I reached the final velvet stair, the band capped "The Coming Out Waltz" in musical fervor, "Tomorrow may be just another day, but tonight we are part of a dream!" Finding my place in the ballroom, I wanted to find that girl—brassy haired and awkwardly shaped—I want to tell her: yes, I never dreamt of happiness such as this, when I was an ugly duckling.



The Spring 2010 Literary Arts Society E-Board



Top: Amy Wheeler, Amanda Mulvihill, Olivia McMahon, Florencia Lauria
Bottom: Nick Sweeney, Kelly Mangerino, Kelly Gallucci

Dear Readers and Writers,

You rock. Without you, this wouldn't be possible. Thank you for your support, your dedication, and most importantly... your writing! This semester yielded the largest number of written submissions to date: 143. We've gone crazy narrowing it down to only 34, but we hope you go crazy while reading it too. This of course, is all for you.

Love,
Your Editors-in-Chief,
Amy Wheeler and Nick Sweeney