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The Laureate, 2nd Edition (2003)

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THE LAUREATE

Literary Journal

THE LAUREATE

Literary Journal

2003

The Laureate's mission is to allow undergraduate students at Western Michigan University a place in which to publish their works of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and other creative works. The Laureate strives to be a professional and engaging journal that appeals to all.

The Laureate

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This issue of *The Laureate* marks the second year in the new millennium that creative writing by undergraduate students at Western Michigan University has a forum in which to be published. Last year, one of the most creative, talented, and courageous people I know, Jill Winkler, founded this journal and I had the good fortune of working with her on *The Laureate's* inaugural issue. I am honored that I was given the opportunity to keep Jill's vision for *The Laureate* alive by serving as managing editor for the 2002-2003 academic year.

The Laureate features a compilation of some of the finest undergraduate creative writing found within the WMU community. This year's issue includes (how many more pages/pieces than last year?) and it is my hope that in the future years *The Laureate* will continue to grow in the quantity and the quality of the work therein.

This journal is the direct result of the enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work that my great staff consistently demonstrated throughout the publishing process. I applaud not only the authors on their beautifully written poems and short stories and their willingness and desire to share their work with others, but also *The Laureate* staff who gave this project, and me, their all.

My staff and I greatly appreciate the generous support of the Lee Honors College—both financially and through the good counsel received from the deans and staff— that made the founding of *The Laureate* possible. We also thank the Design Center, Department of Art, especially Emilie Oswald, for the design and layout of the journal, and Margaret von Steinen, our graduate student advisor.

The Laureate is my most favorite project in my time here at Western. Everyone who has been a part of it, and everyone who will continue to be a part of it's future, must be congratulated. This edition of *The Laureate* is something I personally am very proud of, and I hope you are too. Enjoy!

Melissa A. Matlewski
Editor-in-Chief

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Social Taxonomy

Kyle Sanders

“Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of the old musty cheese.”

—Henry David Thoreau

first
calculate
compute
assess
gauge
rate
-then-
sort
class
label
arrange
pigeonhole
then, only then,
extend your hand
and introduce yourself

A Small Girl's Reflection on a Means to an End

Rob MacInnis

It spoke in volumes, thick and heavy like the stench
Of the restroom the morning after St. Patrick's Day.
Or maybe that time he had to clean out the
tampon dispenser in the
Ladies room that had been left there by the last crew . . .
21/2 weeks old.
Some things are just more pronounced than others.
But this time it didn't smell, or wash over the body like a
Demonic perfume of old saliva, penetrating between
Every little strand of cotton in your clothing that made you feel
Like you might as well be
Bathing in it.
A little girls creation, a symbol of affection, a recollection of
Who he was, what he did to meet ends, putting his life into it
So the artist would make it out. Make something better
Of herself in the real world.
It spoke volumes.
Flat on the dining room table, anticipating his arrival,
crayon scratches
Across a white page . . .
It moved mountains,
Divided seas, raised the dead, spread a plague and cured
all wounds at the same time.
Her name . . . on the bottom, violently etched into the paper.
A vision of a small hand gripping the crayon,
Putting her mark for the father to know and understand.
But she didn't know what she did.
Naive to his feelings.
The picture was naked, a portrayal of himself, a reminder of
Unrealized dreams, unspoken truths, unsatisfied lifestyles.

Why . . .

Hadn't he tried College? Wasn't this *not* the life he wanted?
But not washing the undesirable things away from the place of
Peoples behinds plopped on porcelaine buckets.

Where random pubic hairs were just as common as
the astray piece of

Paper towel with someone's snot in it.

That's why rubber gloves were worn,
so the feeling of what was being touched
Would never sink in.

An unbelieving Janitor,

Hovering over the dining room table, looking

At a multicolored, chicken-scratched reflection,

A 5 year old girl's creation, that *angel's* creation,

Pondered a life in a small fleeting moment, dismissed

It with a wave of a hand, picked up the drawing

Posting the sore-spot of his life on the refrigerator door.

A small magnet, thing that clinged to the coolers wall
through paper,

Holding it up for all to see.

Growing Home

Emily Zak

It doesn't make sense on
an open road
with nowhere to go but forth and
back and
back and forth,

After awhile it all looks the same,
broken trees and tiny
homes,
all with windows in
simplistic rows,
And not one of them is lit, you say,
Not one of them is lit.

We think about it. We think about
things like
turning back and growing down and
moving up and
we think about ways to
figure out
those endless winding highways.

Someday,
when our hair is 300 haircuts long,
and our hands have
held and worked and waved,
we'll stop and say—
The homes we've left
were wrong turns made,
but we found our way,

and it's all up and down from here,
It's all up and down from here.

And the millions of maps that we've misplaced,
and the Norths that ran East and
the Easts that ran South,
and all the music we played and played,
trying to figure things out,

Will all make sense, somehow.
And I'm not sure how,
But

Someday it'll come down to bare feet on
yellow grass,
back bones bent from looking back,
wrinkled hands that know so much,
they speak a thousand tongues.
And we'll find we're nothing but

Two more souls going home,
A place of our own where
we're neither near nor far,
just there. That's it.
And it won't matter a bit
if the windows aren't lit,
because we'll have the stars.

Solitude

Ryan Sprik

A man drives down a lonely Iowa
Highway maps can be so damn confusing
Sometimes directions can get in the way of an ego
Especially for a man in Iowa
If he only knew which way the corn stalks were
Marching bands parading out here
Rows upon rows of soldiers standing their
Ground hogs make trenches within the soil
He makes out the silhouette of a crippled barn
With no tractors or hay stacks to harbor
If he could only see which way the weather vane was
Spinning he could figure out which way was North
Again he drives through the night
In the pouring rain it is hard to see straight
Especially when you don't know where you
Are going or where you've been
Doesn't matter much when you're lost
All that matters is where you end
Up in the sky clouds cry for him
He is lost in his own self-solitude
A storm cloud begins to take shape
Of a bowl of pea
Soup is for the soul
Or perhaps it is a soggy bowl of corn flakes
Either way it doesn't get much lonelier than that
Especially in Iowa

Retraction

Marcus Wicker

The ring slides off her finger
like civil rights, VCRs, and history.
“do I” is stuffed into her mouth,
inhaled through her lungs, and forced from
her brain like perpetual yoga.
Crab-walking from
the sanctuary in slow
motion she slurs,
“?here doing I am What”
Rose petals ascend
from the floor, floating
through the aged air, falling
pitter patter back
on the bush.

A series of openings.

Church doors, car doors, eyes—
A tinted limo speeds south
towards darkening skies
and red lights turned green,
past Division, near Clear View, next to home.

A series of openings.

Car doors, worn doors, arms-
Humble astrologist views her
heart like constellations,
“.him marry to want don't You”
Her green eyes turn pink with passion,
“.to have I but, No”
They kiss for hours like
school kids under monkey bars,
never stopping to think straight,
only backwards.

She dashes from
the house
toe to heel, like a
mad woman.

An opening.

Her limo swings wide
she hops inside, foreclosing the door,
like bank accounts.
Traveling in reverse through a.m.
streets she reaches his lofty lake
house, carefully clamping
her wallet.

A series of openings.

Car doors, ornate doors, purse strings—
She grits her teeth in death
while speaking of life,
“?grand a have I can, Honey”

The smoke goes back in the slim
towards a pack in Virginia.
She vomits Vodka back in the glass
with juice and ice, frowns
like dice
gets fully dressed claiming,
“.stressed really I’m”

Her alarm clock rings,

mere moments before
her love struck husband
laid lost in la-la land
dreaming,
“If I should wake before I die,
marry me.”

Iris

Carey L. Fries

You will wilt several times
before I grow fond of you.
While placed in this vase,
be neglected,
victimized by immaturity,
delinquent of nourishment.
Your stem will fold
and disintegrate into the bottom
suffering in stagnation,
but all flowers
this vase has held before
withered
as does tenacious beauty
when most unnaturally plucked.
You, my brilliant blue iris,
will similarly succumb
to your confinement.
So drink
to sliced raw throats
and fading flushes of radiance.
Drown yourself in this intoxication
until you are inebriated,
bloated,
and bleak with pallor.

I will then realize your rueful existence,
grieve,
and hang your frail remnants
to shrivel upon my wall.
For once I had intentions of purity!
And seeing it within you,
attempted to preserve a dying grace.

Josh Meets the Family

Rose Hoelzle

My young Italian cousins
Bundle themselves to his ankles
As he drags them with screaming delight
Across the tan kitchen linoleum.

One on each foot,
One on his back,
Like a human Christmas tree
Adorned with flushed chubby arms
And muddy feet.
He has never looked so beautiful.

Baggy jeans sag on his thin hips
As the kids climb his shoulders,
Sneak the slim wallet from his back pocket,
Shrieking each time he tickles them,
Thwarting their plans.
His upper lip sweats
From the exertions of front yard freeze tag,
He even play Barbies
But gives up when he realizes
He will have to change the clothes.

My aunt said
Meeting the family
Would be good birth control
For my 23-year-old lawyer-to-be.
But he turns to me
With eyes that speak of the future
And I can almost feel
My belly swell.

.Reach.

Katie Raddatz

Microscopic diamonds of broken
mirror hiding in corners
with dust, for months.
Pieces brooms could not reach
[Your mother is not here to clean up for you.]
This city is a museum
of broken things
and you a shard of glass
looking for others to become
mosaic with.
A boy on his bike yelled
"I'm going home to get drunk"
his audience laughed
[we watch as you become him
and lose your mothers love.]
Your belt circles your waist
but does not hold your pants up.
At the 7-11 a group of
sophomore girls circle a single
Marlboro light and pass it between
tall skinny fingers.
They smell like hair spray and too much
make up. Their face seems like yours
Only younger, and calmer
And much more loveable.
You reflect everything because,
Inside you're nothing.

Second Skin

Laurie Cerny

Beige breeches
let panty lines
shout out to the world
"middle age".
Still,
I pull them on . . .
one leg at a time,
over saddle bags,
thunder thighs,
and matching calves
too fat to care
about the cotton
and Spandex sheaths
that encase them.

Folding Chair

Katie Huey

have a chair that once was yours –
chipped brown metal and cracked leather
that snags at my clothes
and creaks with the years inside.
But the screws are still tight
and the legs still clutch to the seat
not ready to let go just yet.

In the mornings when I awaken
I eat my breakfast in your chair
Curved back digging beneath my shoulders
Seat's edge cutting into my thighs
I look at my soft couch
but here I stay.

I don't know why I miss
a hand never held
a smile never given
So when will the screws loosen
and the seat collapse onto the legs
the years giving their final cry . . .

Musings

Alex Watson

It was the final dance of the final year of the beginning of John's life. After wringing his hands and agonizing for almost a week, he had struck up the courage to ask a certain girl he knew, a beautiful muse with whom he had a nascent friendship, to a dance.

She accepted.

The dance itself was a study in ecstasy. John donned the finest tuxedo he could afford, the girl wore an alluring peach dress, and together they danced the night away in the company of each other and friends.

After the last dance number had worn down, after goodbyes had been said, and after the last light at the Eagle's Crown restaurant went out, John drove his date home.

Her house was a modest two-story affair, with a simple brick porch and a well-kept lawn. John escorted her across the damp grass, and led her up to the front door.

John stood there for a moment, indecisive. Passions and inhibitions flooded his mind. *Do it . . .* he told himself. *Kiss her . . . you'll never get another chance!*

"I had a great time," he said.

"Me too." Her face was perfectly neutral—John couldn't see a hint of what she was thinking.

His heart leapt into his throat. *No, I can't. I don't know if she's ready. I don't know if she wants to . . . I just can't!*

"Well, I'll see you, uh . . . later." John said. He regretted the clumsy phrase as soon as it left his mouth.

She smiled. "Yeah. I'll see you around. Have a good night." With a flutter of amber fabric and a click of dress shoes against brick, she was gone.

Later? Later? How could you . . . how could you do

something so stupid? John thought as he walked away. The utter ridiculousness of what he'd said followed him to the car, like a lingering ghost of the moment that could have been. It trailed him back home, through his mother's inane questions about the night's events, and hovered around his head as he lay, sleepless, on his bed.

Involuntarily, he began to go over the night's terrible scene in his mind, analyzing every aspect of his failure. If only he'd had something to say. If only he'd had the courage to *do* something. If only . . . if only . . . if only.

John thought long and hard, as if hoping that by sheer force of will he could project himself back to that moment, and get it right.

"W-would you mind if I came in?" John said.

"Uh, sure. Why not?" she answered, but her odd expression instantly told John that he'd slipped up. He spent the rest of the evening there, chatting with her parents and playing cards with her father. Yet he was all too conscious of the sideways glances, the furtive whispers, and the uneasiness in the air. When he felt he'd completely overstayed his welcome, John excused himself and slunk away.

No, not like that.

John looked into her eyes. "What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and you are the sun. Such beauty is the envy of the heavens."

Her face twisted. "What? What the heck are you *talking* about?"

"Well, I . . . Uh, I was trying to . . . uh . . ."

She gave a disgusted snort. "I can see *that*. Good night!" Before John could make another move, the door had slammed.

No.

John reached out with his hand, and brushed a strand of hair from her face. "You look beautiful in the moonlight." he said. Before she could reply, he quickly bent forward and kissed her lightly on the cheek, savoring the smooth satin of her skin.

She angrily pushed him away. "What are you *doing*?"

As John stammered for a reply, she slapped him across the face, turned on her heel, and walked into the house.

Not that way.

John turned to her. "I'm not tired. Are you tired?"

She shook her head. "Not really, I guess."

"Great! Let's go out and do something else. I know a restaurant that's open all night—and they have pool, too!"

A confused look crossed her face. ". . . what?"

"Let's go and have some fun! The night is young!"

"Uhhh . . . no thanks. I . . . I don't want to get my dress dirty." she said.

John wasn't taking 'no' for an answer. "Why not? You'll never wear it again."

"I really just think I should go now." she said firmly. "It's too late to do anything."

Is it? John thought.

"Okay, then. Uh . . . umm . . ." *Not again. Don't say it again!!*

". . . later."

That's not it.

"What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

To be honest, John didn't really know himself. "I don't know what to do. I love you so much, yet nothing I do seems to work out right. I can't even . . . even . . ."

"You what?"

John choked his words out between involuntary sobs.

"I love you! Don't you have a clue where I'm coming from?"

Why do you think I asked you out tonight?"

"Because we were getting to be friends, I guess." She didn't look angry when she spoke, just slightly concerned and confused.

"Maybe we were. But not now. Think about it: I bet once school is over we'll never see each other again."

"What does that have to do with it?" she asked.

"I don't even know. Maybe it means that I can't bear to be without you."

She shook her head. "John, you're cracking up. Come on in, and I'll call your parents to come and pick you up."

John only sniffed in reply. *What an utter loser I am.* he thought.

But he followed her inside, and was attended to by her mother until his parents, worried into a frenzy, arrived.

That can't be it.

John sat down on the swinging bench with a creak.

"Wait a second."

She turned around. "What?"

"I need to ask you something."

Somewhat apprehensively, she walked over to him.

"What?"

"I've known you for some time, and I consider you to be one of my truest friends." John said. "But there's something more. I'm in love with you, and I have been ever since I saw you. But . . . I saw that look in your eyes all night. Not unfriendly, or disgusted. You just looked sort of . . . distant. It's not going to happen, is it? There isn't anything between us, is there? I just need you to tell me, honestly."

She sighed, and sat down next to him. "Well . . . no. There isn't." she said quietly. "You're a sweet guy, but . . . no, there's nothing there." Her voice was tinged with sympathy and regret. "I almost wish there was."

John looked over at her. The bright, silvery moonlight lit up her face and hair from behind, like a kind of celestial backlight. She was as radiantly beautiful as he had ever seen her. "And there never can be." he said ruefully. She only nodded, slowly.

"We've know each other for a while." John said at length. "And it occurs to me that we're not going to see each other much anymore. After tonight, there's just two weeks of school left, zand then summer jobs, and then college. This may well be the last time we can really talk. I'd like to end our friendship on a high note."

She cocked her head. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Have you ever kissed before?" John asked.

She nodded.

"Well, I haven't. So, will you do me a favor? For just a moment, pretend that you've never kissed anyone before. Pretend that we're in love, and that we'll never see each other again." John gently put his hand on her shoulder, and drew her toward him. She didn't resist, didn't cry out. She simply closed her eyes and gave a little half smile.

They kissed. Not a short, impersonal peck on the cheek. Not a vulgar, lingering wrestling match between tongues. Not even the passionate culmination of a wedding vow. Just the simple, pure essence of physical contact. They lingered there for what felt like an eternity, locked in a tight, personal embrace—the most perfect, innocent, and pure expression of love that the cosmos had ever seen. Perhaps because it never really happened at all.

Yes . . .

That was the evening John preferred to remember, the one he described to his children years later. He never really talked to that girl again, but he heard second-hand of her happy marriage. John knew that his cherished memory was a fantasy, but he clung to it nonetheless; an inner monument to mistakes made, painful lessons learned, and redemption.

Ryan Remembers Our Mischief

Johanna Blanchard

I wrote you a long letter, but it started with "oh how I love life" and
Ended with a word I made up
You must think I'm only made of sarcasm
But nobody can see inside me and that's why I'm always alone
Actually I only write you when I'm sad, sometimes twice a day
Reading two books and smoking all night is my idea of a
fun evening

Suddenly I can't distinguish between me and you
Do I want to?

Is it my fault that everyone is boring?
She was obsessed, she was uninteresting, she never let me show
my crazy side

I let you show your crazy side

When I start to seem strange, they are ashamed
When I am quiet, they are afraid

You think I'm bad for you

You take my mind off being miserable, I don't know how
to act otherwise
Sometimes you keep me from my reading
But I'm glad you give me candy and laugh at me, why did I leave
that town?

I can remember our mischief, someday we'll climb
a thousand roofs

We can eat Chinese and watch a bad movie
Steal a car just to go get coffee
I'll spend my pill money on cigarettes
It's no fun to swallow my tears with prescriptions
But drown in the smoke with you here beside me

A Father's Loving Touch

Amanda Hurley

Stolen moments are lost to my memory
The urge of a jaded past floods my soul,
Tormented with grief, I sit still
Beaten by my own will to live,
My life becomes a charade.
Exhausting myself with blameless shame,
My conscious begins to fantasize
Of times that were, of times that should have been,
Of times that never come.
Eaten alive, my soul begins to corrode
The difference between wrong and right
Dissolves into thoughts of love and hate,
Drowning in a sea of your lies I scream for help,
Help that will never come
You ripped a tear into me,
One that will never be mended.
A scar will forever have your mark.
A putrid guilt is bestowed upon me,
You have given me the ability to hate myself.

Gene Kelly

Nicole Lawrie

It's 1:09 AM and I'm here alone with
A Kahlúa—a white Russian—
Vodka and milk.

I drew some lines in a notebook—one on each page—
But when I flipped them it all went backwards instead.
I think my hands are set on rewind, or everything is.
Lately I've been feeling like I've been standing around
Outside of myself, saying *Speak up, Look up,*
Fuck up.

Yesterday I got brave, and I strapped on
High heels, stood on my desk and started singing,
And I was louder than the fax machine, and louder
Than the printer, and louder than the phone, and a
Million red voicemail lights blinked behind me like
Hollywood, Broadway, and Gene looked up
From advertising schedules and program copies
And said,
"Enchanting.
What?"

I leaned over the cubicle and complained
And told him how I've been moving backwards
For five years, how when I leap forward and look
Behind myself,
It's the present that recedes.

Tonight he let me trace the outline of his arms, hands
Stuffed into pockets. I think I've been crying
Over his cuffed khakis and white socks,
His strong jaw and dancer muscles,
Because he's pointing his body to
The left, looking left, and even though he hangs
Like that, I know that sixty years ago he landed right,
Where he wasn't looking.

And I tried to dance,
But all I could do was pull blankets over my eyes
And roll over
And face the wall.

Visions of Relinquished Dreams

Tanya Zarzecki

Wisps of smoke unravel into
strands of brownish red.
And the leaves of yesteryear
still clutter my vision.
Shades of gold and brown
fall before me, but the rain
has not washed me clean.
For the river has changed its course
and no longer flows in my direction.
I still feel the warmth of the sun
upon my face.
And the taste of salt
upon my lips.
But the sand has slipped
through my fingers.
And scattered as dust
in the wind.
The season has changed.
And this remains proof
that what I had is no longer mine.
And perhaps it never was
to begin with.

What we generally refer to as beautiful:

The grain in oak and the cellular patterns of sight;
an exit sign that points to splintered wooden doors
and looking out windows again an 11:30 sun and
seeing through your reflection on the spotted glass.

Seeing someone you know but not saying hello and instead
watching them and how they watch other people and
wondering if someone else is watching you.

A dead man's sweater, cream and soft and the way it clings to
your skin like cellophane.

Looking at a pretty girl's legs, golden like well-worn brick and
wheat fields and smiling at her without realizing that
you have a burnt popcorn kernel in your teeth from the
night before.

A bloody nose, leaking like an old roof; shingles worn from the
storm and the hail that pelted and welted your skin.

A soggy box, sitting by itself, with pictures of relatives you
never knew.

The day you didn't shower and woke up at 2:00 because there
simply wasn't anything better that you had to do.

Barren, dying lawns where you play with your dog and smile
knowing that deep down, you both think the same things.

And who really cares about lawns?
Or if they are botched by the laughing and careless sun?

We have songs with only piano in _ and
pottery and poetry that we can read.

And makeup that dashes in the rain down your face and
short hair held with aerosols and sprays;

And we have purple peeps at Easter and sweaty, tarred men
working on cars and my dear,

didn't you know that we can laugh?

Didn't you know that we can laugh because we have
annoying, nasal alarm clocks that will wake us up
in the morning so we can do it all over again?

The Alph Lake Fair

Kevin Kinsella

A drop of her saliva vaporized the pink cotton candy like a virus;
dead and mobile.

We leaned into each other and the old wooden handrail, twitching
in the autumn breeze.

She slid her finger along the fresh and wise stitches inside the
back of my mouth.

A small tearing sensation like breaking a cherry;
I tasted my own candy; a pleasure like ripping off a daddy's
long legs.

"You know Zen monks live in haste?

They walk at a trot and never think about us.

Nothing else matters when only meditation produces Nirvana."

"Nop bery many muounks in Mishagun."

She took her finger back as the carnival sun set on the lake;
the brilliant fire eaten away by the bright lights of the rides already
saturating the surface.

Carp in grey suits splashed below us;
instinct reacting to our forms, and commanding a frenzy for
our attention.

"I suppose reincarnation is a good punishment."

I tongued the gum gash and spat into the polluted
and churning water.

The carp sucked me in.

She wiped her finger off on the handrail. I shuffled my feet,
Kicking dirt and rocks into the melee, soon swallowed
and forgotten.

If I let them, they'd eat until they vomited me back out.

"We should leave.

The season's almost over.

Finish the candy, please."

She watched wheels spinning in the air,
the passengers only silhouettes against the starburst color
scheme of their rides.

Rocking back and forth, or heads on shoulders, they were all
rising and setting, rising and setting.

She dropped her fluff on the gasping faces.

“I hope you choke.”

Dead leaves crunched under our feet, the carnival music fading.

We searched for where I had parked as schools of people rushed
the other way,

licking their lips in anticipation.

A small streak of my blood and saliva next to the initials of lovers
ascended into the night sky.

A Definition of the Colour Blue:

Rachel Heliste

Tastes like swallowing mouthfuls of air or
the disappointed sigh
at the end of a night, which was nothing
less than what you expected.

Queen Of The Rodeo

Laurie Cerny

I

In 1974 she was crowned a rodeo queen.

On a cotton candy pink colored straw hat perched a brand
spanking new rhinestone tiara.

Taking her solo ride, a victory lap, around a dirt filled arena
outside of Kaycee

she flashed a Pepsodent smile while fuzzy pompons on a the back
of a hot pink saddle blanket cadenced in rhythm to a rocking
horse canter

strided by her big mare. A Palomino. The color of a new
copper penny.

The same untired shade as her youthful golden locks . . .

In less than sixteen seconds she had beat the game and reigned;
Queen of the Rodeo.

II

Round three barrels she turned fifteen years of highs and lows.

A bad divorce, cancer that left its ugly signature
scrawled in cursive across her chest, and a son who keeps
walkin' on the other side of the law have all slowed her time.

So has a life that's ridden her hard and put her up
wet on many sleepless nights spent on a coffee stained
bench seat

of a '79 Chevy that has cradled her broken heart from Laramie to
Colorado Springs, and from to Sheridan to Oklahoma City....

She has paid her lifetime dues but now barely makes the day's
entry fee.

III

In a watering hole on Main Street she tastes middle age
wearing a trophy silver belt buckle and tight Wranglers
to keep what needs keeping together while she makes the rounds.

A rusted out pickup truck's parked out front.

It houses what's left of her world; a world champion saddle
from 1982

hand-tooled flowers crusted with yellowed saddle soap,
an old wooden tack trunk filled with faded show bills,
dirty currycombs, manure stained leg wraps, and a tarnished
rhinestone crown.

On the other side of town, a broken down barrel horse stands
forever idle . . .

And her two-horse Rustler trailer lost its bearings long ago.

IV

In between tepid glasses of beer
she reminds anyone who might still give a damn;

"I was the Queen of the Rodeo in 1974."

**If I wrote a song for you, it would be
swanky and smoky and melancholy. It
would be whispered. This would be it.
This would be it.**

Brenna Moloneya

I like where I'm staying.
The bed is soft and the ceilings are high.
The light is just right
And the windows are wide.
I open them
And look at the trees
And the tops of the buildings across from me.
I hear the sounds of the tires
As they roll in the street.
I hear the sounds of shoes walking
And carrying feet.
I hear the train going by
And its sound is so lonesome.
Yes, I like where I'm living.
It suits me,
just fine.

Once, someone said something
About firsts and forevers
and silent roads and
words wasted on wooden posts
and I remember something
about a million different directions,
and not one of them leading us home.
None of it made sense—
Not the leaves scattered like bones,
or the cold wet smell of
September in Michigan,
Not the wind, spreading your hair
like fingers across my face.
Maybe it goes without saying—
I know there are holes but
I have yet to see stars,
And
none of us know where we're going.
Once,
Someone said something
about a million hours spent like
this,
And what's so terrible about
waiting,
What? Two people combined in
a moment so small,
it doesn't exist. And that's it.
And I remember something
about hello or goodbye,
not sure which,

It's this coming and going I still
hold on to,
not understanding a sky so vast
we can't even swim across it.
And you said something about
hands so small you could hold
them forever,
but once I realized the world was
spinning
nothing I did could keep me
from turning
And it's still on my mind, if it matters
at all—
tiny veins twisted through leaves,
rain so cold it chills our bones,
And our feet—
tangled together so perfectly,
a million different directions
quietly fading,
And I'll tell you one thing I
understand,
There's nothing like
time when you're looking back,
And we've all said it—
I should have known
But for some reason, the sky on
our shoulders, so full of holes,
let's us know we're
too late, and the later it gets,
the farther we are
from home.

Summer, 1990

Laura Winther

I am so close to the tree,
the Frisbee lost in it's arms.
Sole flat on top step, tip toes on paint can board.
The ladder trembles and sways beneath,
warning me.
But I clench and spread my fingers,
and it is nearer all the time,
pink and green circular swirl bouncing on the branch.
My little brother is below,
head tilted to the sky,
blonde baby curls jumping,
shouting "grab it!" and when my fingers touch
the bobbing nylon fabric, I am relieved,
at the same time the ladder
wobbles and shudders, sighs and gives way.
The sides spread like opening arms,
a dead tree finally chopped down,
rings of the stump telling as age spots.
I am holding the disc in my right hand,
safe between white knuckles.
It is too late for me, but I have saved our Frisbee.
Shaded wet garden soil is waiting below,
and my arms are laid out before me like a landing strip.
I am not confused by the pain.
Only to see my left arm in all that dirt, cocked like a periscope.
Bone broken clean, two ends looking for each other,
lost inside the spongy insides of my arm.

Untitled

Aaron Fleckenstein

I'm going to die. Not big news considering that most of the people I know are going to die, but to me this was a shocker. I always thought I was going to live forever. But what could I do? I decided to go eat lunch.

Chicken with mustard on white. That is the meal one eats when he finds out that he is mortal. Mortal. The word itself sounds terminal, full of disease. Well then again, it is. Few people survive being mortal; fewer still come out alive. In fact, I only knew one person who came out with his life, Alan Spirdunkle, a farmer in Motlee, Nebraska. He was killed last year by his 300-pound wife when she shot him in the head for taking the last donut.

After the last meal of the rest of my life, I went for a walk on one of New York fine streets. I tried to think about what I wanted to do with the short time I had left, learning how to swim or becoming a boxing hobo were on the top of my list, but I kept being interrupted by pot smoking prostitutes offering me a good time. I escaped these working women by ducking into a train station. So much for the big decisions.

On the train I was finally able to get some real work done. The lady across from me was reading the obituaries looking to see if she was in them and had the crossword section turned to me. At the 5th street stop she finally realized she was not dead yet, I had just finished 55 down and was about ready to solve 70 across when she took off for what I could only guess to be the rest of her life, at least until she looks again tomorrow.

At 22nd street and Monarch I got off the train. I had been told by a tie salesman on the train that 22nd and Monarch had the worst tasting whiskey this side of Montreal. This had to be an indisputable fact considering I never asked him about whiskey or Montreal, but I have learned that one does what a tie salesman says. Mrs. Spirdunkle's father made his fortune selling ties. I went looking for this bad tasting whiskey figuring that while I may never learn how to swim, I could always be able to tell people that I have tasted the worst tasting whiskey this side of Montreal. When I got out of the station I realized the tie salesman set me up, 22nd and Monarch was a school district, there was no bar for miles. Then again, Montreal was always a scotch town anyway.

After the tie salesman stole my seat on the train and got my hopes up for bad tasting whiskey, I really had to go to the bathroom. Any true New Yorker would tell you to hold it and wait to relieve yourself at home since all the bathrooms are taken by pot smoking prostitutes making money, but I really had to go and didn't want to waste my life holding it until I got home, so I went into Paprewski's Turkish Cuisine and used the restroom. Inside the stall someone had written "Death to all, for Joseph is king." As I relieved myself, I thought about why King Joseph never told me this earlier. It would have been the kingly thing to do. I would have learned how to swim.

Aerosmith and Chocolate

Rachel Bennett

I go to sleep
To escape
To dream
I run away
From term papers
From romance
I think too much
Of past
Of choices
I try to cope
With chocolate
With Aerosmith
I don't have courage
To escape
To dream
I always come back
To term papers
To romance
I keep thinking
Of past
Of choices
I become dependant
On chocolate
On Aerosmith
I have to realize
It's all in the game

THE GLORIOUS MAN

Robert MacInnis

Cameras and lights and cords and microphones and . . .
Mr. Henson. THE GLORIOUS MAN.
Tall, bearded, smiling, charismatic and . . . GLORIOUS.
And all the T.V. screens would know his glory because of another.
The novice—the holder. The human microphone stand.
The microphone was held, grasped by
An early learner, a novice with big dreams.
That maybe some day, when the time
Was right, he too would be able to stand
Before a camera like THE GLORIOUS MAN, and
Have a microphone take his words and spill them
 across T.V. screens.
But the Boss wouldn't let him.
He couldn't do what Reporters do—talk to the screen.
For now he is just the microphone holder.
And as he sits in some dimly lit broadcasting control room,
Only hours after he had seen the man, he is watching the screen.
He sees only his own hand, jutting out at the bottom left corner,
Invading a GLORIOUS MAN's triumph of fame witnessed
 by a camera.
A man in a shirt that was too plain for the face. A face that
Was almost too exciting for the lens on the camera.
A moment so big on T.V. that the box holding the Picture
 might burst into flames.
At least that's what everyone else thought.
The novice still could only see his hand.
His hand—strangling the microphone.
Making it choke on the words being forced down it
By the glorious man.
And maybe someone would notice that, hand, marvel

At its wide fingernails, its texture, its few freckles
splattered on the top

Like paint.

He looked onto the screen again, watching the glorious man
speak his glorious words.

But he was deaf to the glory.

His hand would extend out

To Millions of viewers now, be seen by the unsuspecting.

Would they recognize that hand? Would they know that it
belonged to

A novice, new at the game of putting images

On screens and controlling squares in peoples houses?

Would they see that his hand belonged to a father and a husband?

Could they see a wife or a dog or a house or a garage with things
lining the walls?

The novice thought not.

So he looked away from the screen, let the reporters do their
Reporting and the cameras do their capturing and the forgotten
to do

Their forgotten "behind the scenes things," whatever forgotten
things they might do.

The novice decided that he would be a hand holding on to
a microphone and that's enough for now.

And he would let THE GLORIOUS MAN keep on talking until
the novice got his turn

To be glorious.

On the Beach

Sarah Henry

If I could describe
the velvet blackness of thy sky
with its dusting of firefly stars
that winked down at me
and shot jagged streaks of light
along the horizon,
and the moon
that left a watery dripping path
on the tranquil lake,
then maybe I could tell you
how my toes curled and dug into the sand,
how my flesh raised with goosebumps
from the chill of the air and from
his fingertips that were butterfly wings
against my skin.
I could tell you
that his eyes were smoldering blue embers
as he tenderly took my body
deeper into the still, quiet night
and the friction of our souls
ignited more than kisses and parted legs.
If only I could describe
how I arched my back
and embraced my own surrender
as we traveled as one
to a place where there were no doubts;
only our blazing intertwined spirits.

Stillness

Lydia Anderson

There is beauty in stillness,
in unspoken word and calm.
A frozen pond before first footfall shatters
has no need of sound.

There is beauty in stillness,
grace in flights of birds that do not flap but soar;
A shadow against the sky that leaves no mark
but memory

There is beauty in snowfall's still result
Beauty in the wind that does not sigh
Beauty that defines perfection
with no motion to disfigure

There is a beauty in stillness;
Few will ever understand
Its gentle softness calls
and sometimes peace answers.

Sometimes it does not.

I did nothing to you,
Don't take it out on me
I try and understand you
Yet you scold me for trying
You say I could never really know you
But then you tell me I should
The confusion of your words keeps us apart
The distance between us must be met with a bridge
Yet you seem content to burn it down
I can never be like you
I can never know the journey
I can never feel your pain
Well let me tell you something
I feel pain too
We aren't that different
I feel ashamed of my ancestors,
While you feel proud of yours
My ancestors have never broken any chains,
Mine created them
I hurt for your people
You feel resentment towards mine

Hypocrites shade the world gray
Our colors will never mix
Watery pastels are created only to be separated
On paper by your hand
You claim to want equality
Yet you strive for division
I chain myself and throw away the past
Content on reminding me of my faults
You continue to progress in society
No one is perfect
In repaying you for what I did not do
I have become a slave

My friend once saw
the Holy Mother Mary
in an onion.
She was buried in the luminescent lamina,
concealed until sliced in two.

I wonder why she would hide there?
Why not some other produce—
spelled out in a strawberry's seeds,
like a constellation in the sky,
or cloaked in a corn kernel,
anticipating her pop.

But she chose an onion,
which stings the eyes,
and lingers, stinking,
on the hands for hours.

Perhaps Mother Mary
has kept her human vigor
but lost her heavenly zeal,
grown tired of tears and miracles,
and gone on holiday
to the onion's coated sanctuary.
But sanctified seclusion never lasts.

I hope it is not sacrilegious
to eat the Holy Mother in a stew.

Hiding

| Katie Raddatz

A young girl closes her mother's closet
door slam, her face is tickled with flowery
dresses up in the veil her mother wore when she married her
father sends her a Christmas card and sometimes one for her
birthday party was a bad fight for them, the kitchen
walls trembled with their screams.
one by one she watched her friends call for rides
home is not supposed to sound like this.
Maybe more like a soft bell ringing, a familiar voice
an old jazz record.

How do you like your coffee?

Karolyn Glowe

Black
And White?
Alone
Do you like it alone?

I never want to fall asleep again
To wake up to clouds of gray that keep moving in,

Life is fine
As long as it exists as some piece of the dream you hold
each night

But you'll fall apart
If you wake up to see
There isn't anything you want to see
In sight

Cry on the pillow
In hopes
You'll wake up
From this nightmare
Surreal
But real
Or cease to feel

I remember when I kissed you
Lips so perfect
Caged in a feeling
On the inside
Of me.

But the bird
Was you
And you flew free
Untouched by love
Or something like it
Something more

We were clinging
Because I was clinging
To you
And how it was
Always believing
That in an instant
It would die

As everything alive with potential does.

So it seems your kisses were lies
Fairy tales pressed in my flesh
By the one that I trusted
You were a wolf
In my grandmother's bed

I was naïve
And wore a hood over eyes that would have known better.

I believed in you
And us
Like I believed in Santa Claus as a child

Because I trusted the world with my innocence
And the thought
Offered me some promise
That life truly had the potential to be amazing.

I heard you say
As you walked away,

Maybe this is fate.

But what if fate is human
And fate,
Like humans,
Makes mistakes.
He breaks things,
Because he's clumsy,
And then regrets the things he breaks

What if destiny
Is accident
And accident undone
When return me
To my happiness
And you back to your fun

The truth is
Sometimes I wake up
So I can throw up
And let go of thoughts of you

But like a deer
I regurgitate every taste
Of your essence
And my mind is so filled with food for thought
I might never keep a bite down.

So I call you.

A more confident woman would yell
"All or nothing" into the receiver
And hang up the phone.

I breathe a whispered plea
Of anything
But nothing

And hope for any sound of you
Larger than silence.

You always seemed lifeless
On the line
Like if you let me hear you breathe
Or feel your care
Your life would be
On the line
Instead of you.

This is the worst way to reach you.

I always get your voice mail
One of those
"Hey, leave me a message" recordings.

No promised calls in return.

So I place my request

Give me a call,
Begged into an empty box

Mechanical
And inhuman

The same voice you carry.

I don't know anymore if I loved you
I only know
I do.

I'm trying to leave you behind
But I'm running backwards
Into already folded arms.

I remember that look in your eyes
When you said
I care about you
You know I would do anything for you.

There is a world full of men
Willing to promise me that

I told them all,
Like you,
What I need,

A gift
I cannot give myself.

And they look me straight in the eyes,
Emotionless,
And say
No,

I cannot love you.

Dad |

Sarah Henry

when I see you
trudging up the steps
with the invisible ball
and chain dragging behind you
the years pressing down
and when
I hear you
groan, a tired, rattled sigh
stress mounting in your breath
laboring,
toiling,
I worry
when I see you
your graying wispy head
that used to shine reddish-brown
now hunched and bent
I stretch my hand and clasp
your weariness
and I pray

Missionary Man

Shaun Wayman

Mr. John F. Kennedy- I's the man with the New Testament Bible
given plan.

Hallelujah, walk on down the aisle,

Don't matter 'bout my soul jus' so long as they smile.

Named from a King—went across the pond to this land

To make it true.

Who saved?

You saved?

Probably not.

Yees sir, Mr. John F. Kennedy.

Strap on a collar, use it to choke you with. Don't worry 'bout
me 'cuz I'm already dead.

Come join the play- I'll use you to pretend I'm actually
doing something.

Yeah, sho' nuff heard about some of you folks doin' weddins jus'
for the cash—

Shame on you!

I's doin' real evangelizashón here.

Meets 'em bout 15 minutes before the weddin' so's I can ask fo'
dey names.

Do it all in Japónese too—so we can communicate on the same
level, see?

I treats 'em like a brother and sister—Bet you jes' memorize yours
from a script.

Not me- I looks 'em right in dey squinty little eyes and speak to
they heart.

Gets paid real nice too.

Yees sir, Mr. John F. Kennedy- Named from royalty

Now I's here makin' it happen.

Those little people address me as 'dey "High Teacher"- 'cuz that's
what I is.

Brings 'em the revelation of they errant ways
without even tellin' 'em in 10 minutes or less.

Did I mention I gives 'em a New Testament Bible?

Sometimes...

I

Even

See

Them

Afterwards.

I don't like to be seen if I haven't prepared my personae though.
I know they can see right through me. The money they give me
soils my hands. The saliva that splashes from my lips as I feed
them the lies fed to me soils the purity of their ignorant search
for a Christian wedding. I trapped myself within my own search for
the fulfillment of my name. But, I can't stop. I AM SHAPING LIVES.
My work matters . . . yet its dirty—I am dirty, as dirty as the Shinto
Nationalists ruling this country. I speak to their hearts . . . But only
to search deeper within mine. I know they are as lost as I am. I
practice my religion every day, but I have been forsaken because
I have forsaken myself.

64

65

Yeah, I marry 'em into purgatory
where we's all jus' waiting' to see what's *really* goin' to happen.
Yees sir, Mr. John F. Kennedy.

Side By Side

Robert MacInnis

The two brothers sat side by side. It was symbolic in a sort of way that only family would understand. They never would stand together. They never agreed on anything. So it was appropriate that they sat, slouched and confined by the walls of the vehicle as if made to be in such close proximity with one another.

Scott and Abram.

Abram and Scott.

The millennium falcon flew out side the passenger window in the shape of a hand, the wind blowing the hair of the attached head in such a way that gave Abram a come-over.

Scott wore his way-too-expensive sunglasses like a novelty and his hat, ripped at the bill to show a certain weathered character, as if he had *been* somewhere—the hat was proof. His clothes were the type he would set aside for a day of hard work, making sure to bring a change of nicer, more appropriate, clothes up with him so the night life would never finger him as a working class patron. *Heaven Forbid.*

Abram is angry. Sometimes he's not clear why. Anger seems to swell within him because of spite and fear of being a little brother his whole life, but he loses his reasons, his forensic note cards drop onto the floor, out of reach. Scott was always better at arguing anyway. He was smarter, but dumber at the same time. He'd always do great in any classes he took, but never went to them so he almost failed. He was the wittiest guy Abram knew, but the most irrational too.

Abram had vocalized things about the tension between the two and words would be slaughtered upon entry of Scott's hemisphere, never missing a chance to argue anything and

everything. Scott never changed, not wavering for anyone, except behind close doors where he might cry to himself, raising his hands to an uncertain vision of heaven, "Why am I here!?"

The thought made Abram laugh inside. He'd pay money to see his bigger-than-life brother cower down before invisible air, worship-ing the wallpaper, or the mantelpiece, or maybe a chandelier—whatever happened to be in front of him at the time that would play a vision of God.

Abram hated the idea of an omnipotent being that got inside his head. He didn't want anything up in there. "If anyone put their hand inside my brain, they'd be lucky to pull it out again," he'd said to his mother once. 6 months and two days ago to be exact. He remembered that day; because it was last time he'd ever spoken to her before . . . before *it* finished devouring her innards.

It was a common thing to make the analogy between his brain and some sort of foul, medieval torture device...like maybe an iron maiden, the body being made into a sieve. The brain, when consumed by self-loathing, is easily made into a condemned household, a poverty stricken sty that no one but the most romantic of tenants could possibly understand. That day that he sat talking to his mother it was in a hospital. A place he never liked to be. It reminded him of the two things he hated the most—ugliness and mortality. His mother wasn't ugly, though it was the worst Abram had ever seen her. She had always been beautiful in that reassuring, motherly way. It seemed to Abram that the relationship between a mother and a son, like that of a father and a daughter, was something special. There was an air of openness that he could never get from his father.

"I know that the two of you fight." She was talking about Scott and he . . . *again*. "We'll work it out, don't worry about it Mom." "Don't give me that. You know as well as I that you two never stop playing king of the fuckin' hill all of the time." His mother swore. Abram wasn't sure if he liked that.

"Life is not a zero-sum game." His mother went on.

"A what?" Abram looked at her as people, doctors, nurses, patients, whoever, passed by outside the door.

"There doesn't always have to be a winner and a loser. Everybody can win, you just have to stop believing in this 'winner take all' crap."

Abram resorted to the look that he would have used in Kindergarten when he didn't get his way. "But he always wins." He pictured himself stamping around the room, his shoelaces untied, acting like a small child.

"He only wins because you think he's winning something. Deal with it." Abram knew that his mother's situation made her more honest than usual, a quality he much liked about her.

* * *

Today was a different day, because Abram had never spent that much time with his brother. He wondered what it would be like to be a Siamese twin. *Abram and Scott, attached at the hip.* That wouldn't last too long. That's not because of medical reasons, but because one day, one of them would fall off and kill the other. Sleeping one night in bed, one would hold a pillow over the other's face or maybe try to beat the other to death with a blunt object.

Abram thought about that day with his mother. He was *still* always losing. *Losin*g. He always lost. The two brothers sat there listening to the radio, letting whatever bad, techno-based, pop song the DJ said was "today's hottest music," come into their head involuntarily. They had been driving for some time now . . . "Almost two hours now . . . wow." Abram thought to himself, while his brother fidgeted biting his nails while driving the Brown Ford Taurus northward. Abram was glad they were going north, even if it was to see family.

"Whatcha reading." Scott was making an effort. Abram knew this because his brother loathed books, completely loathed them.

"It's for a class."

"What is it?"

"You've never heard of it."

"*What is it?*" Scott also never liked to be undermined by someone else not including him on whatever they happen to be doing.

"It's called *How to Avoid Conversation with your brother.*"

Scott grabbed the book, Abram still holding on to it, and lifted it up slightly so he could see the title. "Robinson Crusoe. Is that so hard?"

The car got quiet again. Even with the radio on blaring, the car was quiet. It was that contrasting music that made it a sort of irony—kind of like when you see a fight scene in a movie and they play classical music in the background to give it an almost comical quality.

Abram went back to his book, feeling somehow spited. Communication in the past months had been difficult between the two, probably because of the immediate injection of reality of losing someone important. Neither of them liked reality.

"So what's it about." "A guy stranded on an island who uses utilitarianism and white supremacy to prevail over nature and the native savages." "Oh, yeah? Sounds right up your alley." Scott paused. "You know, you being white and all."

Abram went back to his book, smugly. *He'd won again.* He thought bitterly about his brother. *He always wins.*

All of the times the two had shared any space, some sort of conflict had been there. Abram could still remember his Mother, before Cancer and pills and hospitals and obituaries and death. He missed her. His mother was like the ingredients in those chocolate chip cookies, his father was the nuts he could never stand. Abrams grandmother would mean well when she made those cookies, but she'd always forget that he hated nuts—the taste, the texture, the crunch in his mouth. If only he could pick those out.

He could see a lot of his father in his brother. That bothered him, because it was like his father was there right now. Domineering. Always having to be right.

"It's not a zero-sum game," Abram blurted out. He surprised himself with the words.

"What?" Scott was more surprised by the silence being broken.

"You don't always have to win, you know."

"I don't think that I do." Abram hated his brother for these moments of clarity and maturity. He'd play the Dalai Llama for the rest of the fucking conversation and Abram would lose again.

"Yes you do. You always get the last word, the better argument, the right answer."

"Have you been thinking about this for a while...you seem bitter." As a cartoon character, Abram would have steam coming out of his ears.

"Never mind." Abram resolved to silence. Unexpectedly, Scott responded in kind, not saying a word. Thank God. *I'll try again next time*, Abram thought. I figure I owe her that much.

Dad Likes Sardines Straight From the Can

Kyle Sanders

And fried bologna sandwiches.

It was always dark when he got home from work

Still I'd listen every night

For the familiar jingle of keys lost in pockets, and the sizzle of
bologna on the grill.

Pair-A-Troopers

Rose Hoelzle

I stood at the front of the church
To read the short Bible verses
About rejoicing in loss or some such crap,
Staring at the coffin,
Adorned with stars, stripes
 - A World War II paratrooper -
And Grandpa, you were so brave.

If only I could speak here,
Frozen in this church,
Fixated on your casket,
My numb feet afraid to jump,
The Catholic ceiling fan
Rotates steadily above my head,
Its dull swish like roaring chopper blades
In this silent battle.
I accepted this mission two days ago,
Two days ago I was fearless.

Now I tremble,
Dressed in my best jumper's gear—
 A pinstripe suit dress with new cheap shoes,
To perform my hallowed duty.
My thick tongue sticks
And granite fingers clutch
This wrinkled piece of paper
Like a heavy chute strapped to my back,
 What if I can't pull the cord?
I trained for this day,
Last night in front of the mirror

After we finally left the funeral parlor,
I rehearsed my technique:
Two feet, big breath, SPEAK.
Nothing.

The angry tropical winds beckon me
To the edge of the chopper door,
Testing my courage
As the congregation fans itself
With a thousand fluttering programs.
Lush, violent Philippine jungles wait below,
Pew upon pew of mourners,
Their salty drops fertilizing the stale blue carpeting.
Japanese man-serpents raise their
Oval heads
To lick my flesh with bullets.
 You would later cuss "Damn Japs"
 At slanted eyes on TV, Grandpa.
 I was embarrassed for you then
 But I had never parachuted into war,
A church filled with rifle-cocked eyes
Aimed at me,
My mute 15-year-old form
Locked in their red cross-hairs,
I'm sorry, Grandpa.
I can't do it.

A calm hand reaches out,
Pulls my shaking form back from the chopper's edge,
Off the church podium,
A light arm rests around my shoulder
As the verses are read for me.

Defeated, I sit down,
Embarrassed by my useless jumpsuit and pack,
My goggles steamed with futile anxiety.

I'm glad you can't see me, Grandpa.
I'm glad they closed the lid.
Your granddaughter
Isn't a jumper
Like you.

Letters Written with Erasable Ink

Dan Frayer

In a letter of two pages or less I could
show the ways I
think unlike most in these situations,
feel something missing,
dream of ways to correct your mistakes,
relive every day before we left,
disappeared,
died,
subtly departed to another world

I will choose one or more of the above
and two of the following.
I said I would wait long enough to forget or
until you never returned, and
I am still here, pen in one hand,
common sense in the other.

Telling this little story and exaggerating if absolutely necessary,
deleting where I see fit.
Scratching off and blacking out what makes you feel uncomfortable,
make you want to call the police,
make your mother feel uneasy,
the same one that said I was her absolute favorite,
for her I'll revise.

The first and final draft,
torn and erased,
all the bitter details of our journey,
from confusion to disgust,
pen to paper, then your backseat.

Delete all the unmentionables as you read on,
under lamplight walking your dog,
the cute one belly up in your pool,
I just meant to say I was sorry.

All in all I would scrap the whole piece,
start over with
Just writing to say hello
Love
Erased

Fall Again

Nicole Lawrie

Riding between cars named after rich girls
Are impatient at left-turn lights, kissing bumpers
In the dark, their headlights burn

Into my mirrors, but I see my pen move across the windshield
Fogs over only on the driver's side, and the blinker refuses
To keep time with the radio

And I hate that.

I'm racing the moon home because the way she's
Always kept up with my car makes me doubt
Science that says she only hangs in one place.

I used to imagine myself running alongside cars
With the moon, skating on top of power lines, but she
Rolls faster, always gathering her halo
Is bright tonight and we both smile and watch for snow.

I need the blank paper of winter, I need a white moon-sized eraser
For my constant motion and my think, think, think, I'm sick
Of seeing double yellow lines and leaves and girls

With fake yellow hair, I'm sick of all the yellow sun and all the
green

Arrow light finally comes,
So I turn.

Pins & Paper

Emily Zak

I can't believe we're saying this,
a thousand hours spent
dancing on paper so incredibly thin,
our feet are pins,
and all it would take
to blow us away,
is one hollow wind.

And one time it came down to
desperate begging
and the stars in the sky were
so far away,
we switched from wishing to praying,
and it goes without saying,
nothing felt real at all.

And all the time we've spent
believing,
is coming back to haunt us.
Below us, our toes make tiny etches
on the perfectly angled edges,
and pins are all we are—

so delicate and easily lost,
we can't be found at all.

Life is Beautiful

Tom Watkins

Driving down the road with a friend
The rain knocks on our windshield, sneering at us as it
 touches down
Everyone knows, but they won't say it
We pass a homeless man: haggard, gaunt and disgusting
We laugh and turn up the music

The \$200 amps creating mellifluous hard-core rap
It shakes the mirrors; the bum is quivering in the rear view
Get a job
Get some nice clothes
Life is beautiful
And I think of Marx' dialectical materialism or material
 dialecticalism or whatever
Who gives a fuck; he was an asshole

Now the rain is racing down the rear window
The bigger drop winning, smiling
I put on my sunglasses, White Sharks, \$119, turning the world
Green
My friend makes a joke about women and how
Incompetent they are
Then he rear ends Mr. Foreign Asshole in front of us
We get out and he starts flapping his tongue:
"Que tal, ¡chingada! ¡Qué lío! Mi coche, es nuevo...¡Retrasados!
Aye aye, mi hija, mi hija . . ."
"Hey motherfucker, tell your ee-hah to suck my dick,"
 my friend says

We

Crack

Up

I could have died

Laughing

He glares at us with his beady eyes and his tiny, foreign fingers
clench up into fists

“¿Hey, where’s your Tequila? Should we tell the cops about that
you drunk fuck?”

“¿Es una broma? ¿Este es lo que la gente aquí cree ser un chiste?
. . . <a pause> . . . Bueno, me voy entonces . . .”

He wrote down his information

Big Otto (that’s what we call him; he’s fat and his name is Otto)
exchanged his

Here’s what it said:

Abe Miento

1964 Civil Road

Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301

We smirked and departed

His car was pretty bad:

Defiled, polluted, corrupted

Paco’s was fine:

Pure, bright, beautiful

Big's mom would cover it though, no problem
We slammed the doors and made the music pulse through our
veins again
We were listening to Top Hat Eeveryth
It was good shit
We saw two guys holding hands so Big Otto, on instinct, rolled
down his window
And chucked the beer he had just finished at one of their heads
The crimson juice percolated down into the red earth
Where the souls of so many have gone
We honked at an old bitch for walking too slow on the sidewalk
And I gave her the
Finger
We pulled into Capital Foods and swaggered on in
I got a slurpee, Piña Colada, I loved the color of it
White
I went to get a six-pack, my Fake Identification Card smiling in my
bulging wallet
And I slammed the cold, glass door on my finger by accident
It pulsed with hurt and pain
Crying out to me

Make

It

All

Stop

So I slammed it again to get it to shut up

And again and again

Over and over

The police walked in

"Is that your car?" they asked me

"No."

"Come with me, Sir," one of them said, pulling out his fancy breathalyzer

"It's not my car!" I shouted as Big Otto, already at the door, smiled at me

and slipped out

Free

They handcuffed me and locked me away in a cage

In an overpopulated dungeon

Where I eventually died soon after

Lee Honors College, 2003



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY