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.
From cover to cover, this is the 2008 issue of Western Michigan University’s undergraduate literary journal, The Laureate. These pages hold a small selection of the writing WMU students have to offer. My hope is that the works these pages contain will attract your attention as they did mine. Without apology, I hope this journal changes you.

Without submitters, there would be no publication. Thank you, each one of you, for submitting. Each member of the editorial board was deliberately chosen. Working together with them, each piece was also deliberately chosen. I would like to thank each individual member of the board for all the work put in. I would also very much like to thank the Lee Honors College for its generous financial contribution making this entire product feasible. None of this would be possible were it not for the people who continually encouraged—moved me. Again, I thank you if you were along for any part of this ride.

This particular issue of The Laureate has been a long time coming. Through many series of events, we have a final product. Through this final product, my hope is that we reach a variety of readers. Please, pass this on. Share the art in this publication. These works are not meant to be kept secret.

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To-Do List

1. Fly a kite between two power lines. Tie a key to the string and wait for the clouds to open up.

2. Stand in the street and shoot a cap gun at oncoming traffic; let the smell of sulphur stain the air.

3. Pull the gray, expired parking meters from my head. Find more change in the cushion of gravity that pushes seasons forward.

4. Hide under my sheets from the sheep I need to stop counting. Should just break that damn fence, let them run free.

5. Observe the dog across the street. His bowl still empty from the week before. My sympathy is in his tail.

6. Try on my favorite suit for the ninth time this week. See the seams stretch like snails in the limelight.

7. Go shopping for a condiment I see myself inside of. The contents ready to be spread thin over burnt wheat toast.

Andrew Soliday
Consumption

I’m going to carve my name
into all of my silverware
Now everything I cut and stab and chew
will be completely mine
Anything foreign can grow acclimated
Post-utensil engagement
I like the idea of digesting things
Consuming zooming using all you need
And disposing the rest
Beneficial candle vigil stomach acid
Let the rest leave you
in a rushing stream scream whirl
Empty zip-locks and cardboard boxes
are beautiful things
Because they’re storage devices
Used-to-be-useful implements are not useless
Because air needs a resting place, too
I take pity on the air
Because it is the most rapid moving body
and goes completely unnoticed
I’m sure it’d rather be disposed just like
all the other things we consume
So it can die, be flushed, and rest
But instead it’s sucked in, tossed around, and spat out
Such a hectic life
And probably not as fulfilling as one could imagine
Do you wanna spoon?
If not, I urge you to use my fork
Everything you cut and stab and chew
Can be reminiscent of me
It could be a new way to get to know people:
Consumption
Between my silverware
and your stomach acid
and the cyclone-esque air tossing around your lungs
and the disposal of the unnecessary
Ins and Outs
Growth through sprouts
I’d say self-realization and unity
Are the complementary dinner mints

Carolyn Racine
how i’ll know if you are home

the person who really loves me
lives inside bones
(a hard hollow knock on his skull)
and this is when
those overused, romanticized
flashes of light in one’s eye, that flicker,
either as absorbing as aesthetic fire at work
or as absorbed as a dying fluorescent bulb
dull and introspective, undecided,
that iris iridescence, that flicker, those flashes
become a beacon
moonlight in a backyard
the blue dance of an operating television
the orange lightning of a summer stoop cigarette
all levels of awareness and idea
a pattern that is interweaving,
ever-changing, often stop and go
reality through an intermittent glow
how i’ll know if you are home

Rebecca Mansberger
The Things We Don’t Talk About

When I was in the fifth grade, I fell in love with Emma Larke. She had this dimple on her right cheek from being chased by her sister into the corner of a nightstand. She used that dimple as her show and tell when she forgot her t-shirt from England. Her front tooth was chipped from falling onto the cement during a game of four squares. I was there and saw the whole bloody scene. She didn’t cry.

In sixth grade, her parents divorced and she moved with her mom to Washington. I was devastated. My best friend Mark and I sat on our bikes across the street from her brick house and watched the movers carry boxes out and into a big moving van. Emma saw me and came over. She gave me a piece of paper with her new address on it and told me to write her. I did every day for the first month then continued with weekly e-mails until she moved back to Chicago five years later. Five years after she moved back, we got married and it has been for better or for worse.

*****

“What’s an onomatopoeia?” She asks over the sound of the water colliding with the plastic curtain and tub basin. “You know what an onomatopoeia is. You were the English major.” I knick my chin with the razor and watch as the blood drips into the sink. “Damnit Emma, have you been using my razor to shave your legs again? The blade is dull and I just changed it yesterday.”

“Is it when a word is spelled the same backward as forward? I don’t remember.” She hums the same song she always does in the shower, it’s by Frank Sinatra, but I always forget the name. I can see her silhouette through the fogged up curtain. She’s ignoring me again. I step over the piles of clothes and reach for the curtain. As I pull it back, she shrieks and covers her chest with her washcloth and a soapy hand. “I have soap in my eyes! Close it!”

“Why are you covering yourself?” I laugh as I open and close the curtain fast. For the past seven years I have seen every freckle and blemish on her body. I’ve watched each bruise or cut appear and disappear from one thing or another. I’ve seen each sunspot, which made itself known in October after her tan finally wore off, yet she’s still shy around me.

“Just close it, Kevin!” I laugh again and close the curtain. “Why is your chin bleeding? Don’t get it on the hand towel. There are cotton balls and alcohol in the cabinet.”
"A word spelled the same backward as forward is called a palindrome. An onomatopoeia is a formation that expresses how a word sounds, like splash or something. Stop watching those soap operas. They’ll make you stupid." I grab the cotton balls from the cabinet and press one against the cut on my chin. The alcohol stings.

"I don’t think that’s the name."

"Of course you don’t, sweetheart."

"What’s that?” she asks while poking her head out from behind the curtain, her eyes closed and scrunched up to keep the shampoo from getting in.

"I didn’t say anything. Hurry up, we have twenty minutes."

*****

While accelerating to blend into the flow of Chicago rush hour traffic, I watch as the buildings move in slow motion against the dark clouds. The smell in the air reminds me of the ferris wheel ride we took on Navy Pier when I first told Emma I loved her. She threw up over the side from too much Gin. She coughed and wiped her mouth with her sleeve. Smiling at me, she said it back, but when she tried to kiss me, I wouldn’t let her. I don’t love you that much, I had told her while holding her hair back as she threw up over the side again.

"I was reading Cosmo last night and it said the average person spends two fifths of their life thinking of sex. Do you think that’s right?” She’s playing with the heat button on her seat.

"Check for candy before you do that, the last time you turned the seat heater on, you melted three of my Junior Mints. And why do you read that shit? It’s boring women spreading boring non-sense at five dollars an issue. You’re practically paying some big-shot to chew up and spit out your college degree while simultaneously making you feel horrible about yourself."

She unbuckles her seat belt and lifts herself up, checking for the candy underneath her. "I don’t think I think about sex that much. Maybe when I have nothing better to do. Do you think about sex that much?"

"Not too much I don’t think, but right now, I’m picturing you naked, and a half hour ago, while I was pumping gas and you were walking in to pay, I was picturing you naked. That’s a spectacular thing, if you ask me.” Emma blushed. The redness started in her ears and made its way like syrup over her entire face.

"Do you really do that? You’re disgusting."

"Why is that disgusting? I think it’s perfectly normal and healthy to think about you naked.”

"No, not that, you have Junior Mints and French fries in the seat.” She lowers the window and throws them out.
"What the hell, Emma? I could have eaten those." I take out a full box from beneath my seat and pop a couple in my mouth. I tap her on the leg, she looks at me, and I stick my tongue out.

"Don’t be gross. You have to take exit seventy-nine. Eighty closed last weekend."

****

"So when are you guys going to make some grandchildren for me to spoil?" Dennis suffers from dementia, but today is a good day, so conversation is bearable. "Kevin, do you know what that flap is for in the front of your underwear?" Then again, maybe not.

"Well, it’s for easier access when you have to use the bathroom, I suppose." God. This was going to be a long meal. It must have come out sarcastic because Emma pinches my leg under the table.

"Be nice," she whispers.

"Yeah, I know it makes it easier to piss, I’m not stupid, but what is the name of it? Does it have a name?" Dennis looks at me with eyes like a child. He’s waiting for an answer.

"I don’t call it anything. I guess I’ve never thought about it."

"I saw the hockey game on the television the other day. Bondra scored a couple points. He had an excellent shot."

I know Emma got her good looks and need to redecorate every six months from her mom, but she definitely had her dad’s listening skills and attention span.

"Have you talked to your mom lately, Em?"

I lean back in my chair and admire the deep mahogany table that match the woodwork in the doors and trim around the windows. The wood floors must have been polished recently because it smells like lemon oil and my socks slide over it easily.

"I talked to her on Sunday. She’s fine; said to say hello. I think Kev and I are going out there for New Year’s. We’ll leave on the twenty-seventh after spending Christmas with you."

Emma’s mom left Dennis when he started to get sick. She couldn’t handle it. I guess she missed the “in sickness and in health” part.

Dennis’s live-in nurse/maid brings out a salad and fills our glasses with water. She has a lazy eye, and I never know which one it is, so when I talk to her, I just stare at her eyebrows. She winks at me and puts her hand on my shoulder. Emma giggles because she’s been convinced the nurse has had a crush on me for years. She’s maybe ten years older than Emma and me; in her late thirties I would guess. I sometimes see her look through Emma’s cell phone when Emma leaves it on the table by the front door.

"That will be nice for you. New Year’s on the Pacific will be an excellent thing to bring you two together, maybe even make me a grandchild." The whole making of grandchildren is brought up every Sunday when we have dinner with him. He sometimes raises his eyebrow and jabs
me in the side with his elbow. A cigar and mustache would complete his 
creepiness.

"Well dad, Kevin and I want to save up a little more money and 
get out of the apartment. There isn’t enough room there for a baby." She 
smiles at me and rubs my inner thigh, under the table. We have a spare 
bedroom. It was painted yellow the week after we found out. It has el-
ephants and balloons near the ceiling and a wooden rocker still sits in the 
corner. We use it as a storage room for things we never use and never will, 
but refuse to throw out. The nurse feeds Dennis his salad.

*****

"Let me feed my damn self!" His outburst startles us all, but the 
nurse keeps force-feeding him like he’s three. "You can only offer me a 
knife to cut my heart out!" I laugh at this and Emma grabs my inner thigh 
hard, making me stop quickly. The nurse drops the fork at the sound of 
a buzzer and goes into the kitchen. "She is going to be the death of me, 
Marie."

Emma’s smile fades a little at the sound of her mom’s name. He 
calls her Marie all the time. The first month Emma and I lived together, 
he would call and ask for Marie, and I’d tell him he had the wrong num-
ber. Just because he had dementia didn’t mean he didn’t have a sense of 
humor. We got caller ID soon after.

*****

I’m lying in bed and she’s brushing her teeth. She leaves the water 
running because she hates the sound of brushing. I told her, it doesn’t mat-
ter if the water is on or not, she’s still going to hear the brushing inside her 
head. But I gave up a long time ago. As a pre-sleep ritual, Emma checks 
every window to make sure they’re all locked. I try telling her no one can 
get to our apartment on the twenty-eighth floor of our building, but she 
never listens. It helps her sleep at night.

I hear her opening each mini-blind and then unlocking and locking 
each lock. Her feet scuff against the floorboards as I see her shadow come 
down the hall and she stands in the doorway, looking or listening. I can’t 
see her face in the dark. After a moment, she crawls into bed. Starting 
at the foot of the bed, she makes her way up to me on all fours. Her hair 
is all messy and falling around her face. I tell her this is when she looks 
the prettiest; no make-up, but she doesn’t believe me. I tell her anyway. 
She’s wearing my boxers and a tank top. "I wondered where those went,” 
and even though I whisper, it still sounds too loud compared to the quiet-
ness of the room. Her teeth catch the light coming through the blinds.

"Where what went?"

I make a quick move, and she’s on her back. She’s laughing again 
and her whole body shakes underneath me. "We need some twinkle lights 
in here." She looks around the room, straining her neck to see past my 
back. "They’re more romantic than candles, and you know I always forget 
to blow them out." I laugh, thinking about the time she left one burning 
while we were at work and it melted down the coffee table onto the
carpet, making a murder scene of candle wax. I roll onto my side, and scoop her into me. Her hair tickles my nose, and I’m consumed with the smell of lilacs.

"I can pick some up on my way home from work tomorrow. Do you want the white or colored ones?" She breathes in deep and sighs, her whole body moving against mine. She moves closer into my side, bringing my arm under her neck and intertwines her fingers in mine. She squeezes them, and I squeeze hers back.

She wants the white ones.
The Ocean is Sitting alone in a Chair in the Corner of a Nearly Empty Room

The vase, transparent blue and glowing
in the corner holding the lilies, stems
peaking out through the distorted window.
A caterpillar climbing a tree surrounded
by concrete, island paradise city just outside.
It’s the smell of gravity, when the ocean
twists longingly, achingly for the source of her
hearts bursting pressure, as though someone
chiseled off the spells that held the artery
to the bottom of the heart. She had been
on the island so long only sand drips out,
a thumping hourglass. And from the corner
of her eye she sees them. Certain unnamed
angels are smirking nearby.

Jodi Hovey
Camille

They found her mother
in the parking lot of a church,
quiet. It was six am, and by then
it had been hours, Camille told me.
I wonder if she, her mother, lived
to see the sunrise
and if she didn’t, if that might’ve stopped her.
Might have made her count her breaths
or count her children,
instead of finding death.

On a telephone she told me.
Too young to own this disorder,
but when men come back from war
they usually aren’t men, but boys.
This same diagnosis.

Post, after,
post-marked letters telling me
that she is sobbing herself to sleep,
please come soon.
And one night, alone together, I held
Camille for hours in her bed.
It was the heaviest I had ever felt,
but I still tried to support her.
As she curved into me, looking
out the black window,
I remembered the last time
we were in her room, before,
how her mother had walked in
to make sure we were okay.

Caroline Lampinen
Drink to the Moon

Give me a taste
and I’ll hand you the moon-
blood red and full- to hang on your wall.
I’ll float out your door,
as you ponder and say,
“IT will fit nicely, yes, right here by the stairs.”

and time grows us older.

I’ll linger by, one autumn day,
with the scent of knowledge still clinging to my throat.
I’ll watch the shadows, from your moon,
seep out your door and down the lane.

and time will grow us older.

We’ll drink wine to your moon,
we’ll wallow in intellect.
And when the shadows fall, we’ll make love-
to the notion of light.
Hope will simmer beneath our eyelids,
but dreams, desires, and lust -
they will dance upon our tongues,
curl between our fingers,
settle into our souls.

and we will grow older with time.

Give me a day
and I’ll show you the world.
We’ll paint it white and blue to hide the stains -
from tongues, fingers, souls.
We’ll drink to your moon,
we’ll waltz to the earth -

and time will never leave us far behind.

Shoshana McIntosh
i remember the soft glow of the clock read: 'blue'
our bodies collapsed on the tiles,
barren spread forcing us to remain out in the open as we dissolved,
dipping smoothly between ink pockets
paved lines curving through the milky purr of my hands,
black nestled into your bangs like passing cars on a bedroom wall
back porch light, a hint of the moon
turning pages to the peeling engagement of coffeed paper
taped beside spanish tin covers between the cupboard frames
down in the linoleum creases, we could feel their labyrinths in our thighs
and our arched feet
i sunk in, you joined in next to me,
binder nestled into your lap like the bible that i would never read
we welcomed our kitchen buddhas, dishes stacked like parvati and kali
but i saw no jesus in the ceiling cracks, only the flipping of the tarot cards
in our nirvana
card thirteen, queen of spades stolen and creased in the center
you touched my shoulder and i was back to todays and listening to you whisper
expecting smiles, our damp knit-blue,
tongues melting aspirin in provocative tangerine
one by one your adjectives plant rock gardens on my temples and i'm grounded
until we blink back sixteen doves, four chapped clovers
marble bleeding from our toes
the calm burned our tips, too honest to be any realer than it already was,
the simple count of the sink dripping off a used cup
cold like only summer can be in ratted jeans and twenty-five
with cats and raw winters, cheese soup as we bang aluminum
to hear the ribbing, use the wrapper to paint society on the wall
back again, and your lips are the corpse and we fossilize
our dust no more than batteries,
acid on the steps and the refrigerator door

Kathleen Tarleton
Theodore’s Pants

A one act play

CHARACTERS
THEODORE BUXLEY: A 42 year old man. He moves awkwardly and is dressed in khaki pants, a white button-down shirt, and a brown and orange sweater vest.

EDITH BUXLEY: 68, Theodore’s mother. She is overweight and eccentric looking. Crazy. Wears a brightly colored, tacky mumu or bathrobe.

EDWARD: Theodore’s goldfish and confidante. His fishbowl is kept on the kitchen table.

SETTING
The second floor of the Meadowview Apartment building in the town of Shaden, Maryland where Theodore has just moved out of his mother’s apartment for the first time, and into his own apartment (which is right next door). Theodore’s apartment is plain except for the necessary furniture (all beige) and a poster of Tom Hanks from the movie BIG. Edith’s apartment is tacky, busy, full of knicknacks (Jesus figurines, a porcelain baby doll collection, etc)

TIME
The present

(Theodore sits in his apartment on a beige kitchen chair at a beige kitchen table, empty except for a goldfish bowl with Edward swimming inside of it. There is banging on the wall from the room next door—it is Edith. BANG BANG BANG

THEODORE
(Spoken slowly to his goldfish, Edward.) YES, MOTHER! Holy cow, Ed. What could she want now?? What else could she possibly want? You’re lucky, you know. You know that, Buddy? It’s the truth. You don’t have to worry about pillows to match your couch. And ironing—holy cow. I just can’t get the creases to line up, you know? I run the iron back and forth, back and forth, back and...and I think I’m making a straight line, you know, and I put them
on, and I’ve got a line wrapping around my leg like a... I don’t know, like a candy cane stripe or something. How am I supposed to find a woman with squiggles going down my pant legs like that? Mother wants grandkids, you know. Four of them, she said. All girls. Named Dorothy, Rose, Blanche, and Sophia. You know that show, right? Golden Girls? Mom likes Blanche best. She says that a lady has to get hers, even if it’s just so she doesn’t forget she’s a lady.

(BANG BANG BANG on the wall, Edith’s voice, yelling but still faint)

EDITH
Theodore, you get down here so I can hem your pants!

(Theodore sighs, examines his sloppily ironed khakis, pauses thoughtfully)

THEODORE
I don’t see what’s so wrong with my pants as they are... I mean, just the other day, I was tying my scooter up to the bike rack at work and I was carrying all this stuff, I mean, I had my helmet and my wrist pads and (beat) oh, and a shopping list, because I told mother that I would buy the vegetables for the dinner salad that night and... a flyer in my hand from the man in the omelet suit, you know, that breakfast place that I walk by, with the red paint on the door, well he gave it to me, and so I... well, I took it and I had all this stuff and I guess I lost my grip on one of my wristpads and it fell on the ground. And I bent over to pick it up, and, Holy cow, Ed, there was a man next to me whose pants were so long, I couldn’t even see his shoes! (laughs loudly, inappropriately) Now tell me Ed, tell me why my pants can’t be long like that? (beat) I suppose that’s a good point, Ed. I might trip on them. And then I’d have a hole, probably in the knee. But you know what, Ed? Just the other day, I was in the back of the store with Archie, and he was telling me about his niece, she was sick you know? She had shingles. And this man walked by, he was pushing a dolly. With Baby wipes, big boxes of baby wipes. And his pants had holes in the knees— both knees! And nobody said anything to him, Edward. Not a word. But maybe it’s because he had a beard. I don’t think people give much trouble to men with beards. Mother says that beards are for lumberjacks and ZZ top. But I don’t know, Ed. You think I could look okay with a beard?

EDITH

(charges through the door wearing a pink and teal mumu w/ peacocks on it)

(Yelling shrilly) Theodore Graham Buxley! (under her breath) So help me, sweet Lord Jesus Christ my Savior and Father, before I sew his ankles to his
pants. (yelling again) Get your fanny in my sewing room!

(Theodore walks towards the doorway, and Mother points accusingly at his pantlegs.)

And pick those up so you’re not dragging them on the floor.

THEODORE

y-y-yes, mother.

(Edith storms out of Theodore’s apartment, Theodore waddles after her, holding his pantlegs up by the knees. He turns around and looks sheepishly at Edward.)

(We see them walk down the hallway and into another apartment, Edith’s. She points at his pants, and he slides them off to reveal white cotton briefs and argyle socks pulled halfway up to his knees. His arms hang at his sides like an apes. She begins to measure and pin.)

EDITH

You were talking to that damn fish again, weren’t you. What you need is a woman, Theodore. A real fine one, just like your mother. That will keep you busy...yes, dear. What you need is some estrogen. You know, your father always used to say that a man falls in love with a woman who reminds him of his mother. Wise man, he was. Yes, before he was killed by that bus—(stops abruptly, realizing what she has said)

THEODORE

What did you say? (Edith looks at him, and then looks away, fidgeting)

Mother, what did you say?

EDITH

Oh Theodore, your father. He was...

(Theodore’s face looks increasingly concerned, puzzled)

Your father he was...Your Father, Edward, he was killed by...
THEODORE
Oh Geeze, Mother!! Out with it!!

EDITH
(blurting)
He was killed by the number 4 bus at the corner of 12th and Weston. The bus driver, well I guess he dropped his ice ream cone, plop right in his lap, and when he bent down to get it, he...you know, well he–

THEODORE
You told me he died in the war!

EDITH
No darling, you misunderstood. I said "On the four". Like the number 4 bus.

THEODORE
Mother, you said he was a POW!

EDITH
No, darling. DOA. I said he was DOA.

THEODORE
Mother, you told me they sent him home with a flag!

EDITH
No dear. "In a bag". He was just so terribly...mushed...

THEODORE
Geeze, Mother! And all this time, you let me think he fought in Nam–

EDITH
Oh honestly, Theodore. I told you that when you were 5. I didn’t expect you to remem--Stand still, would you?

(she is holding Theodore's pants up to his legs, one hand pressed against his waist, and the other smoothing out his inseam. This is odd and inappropriate, but not done in a sexual manner. Theodore fidgets. He is quiet.)

Not that any of that matters, now. Doesn’t change anything, does it? He’s still dead, right? Here, Try these on (hands him the pinned pants)
THEODORE
Yes, mother. Still dead.

EDITH
I think I’ll take the waist in, too. Looks a little baggy.

THEODORE
You—you know mother, the other day I was in the back of the store with Archie, and he was telling me about his trip to Atlanta, you know, I told you he won that drawing they had down at the traveling agency, and he won a train ticket down to Atlanta and back? Well, he went, and he was telling me about...well, he was telling me all about it and then this man came up and Archie stopped his story about Atlanta because he had to ask this man if he would cover his shift for him on Friday, because Archie has this mole under his chin that he has to get removed in case of...cancer, I suppose. And well, this man, the one that’s going to cover for him, he was talking and he dropped his pen on the ground and he bent down to pick it up and...mother, I saw his underwear. His pants were falling down and I could see his underwear. And they were black (beat). And, well, I guess I was just thinking...well, I just thought that maybe...

EDITH
Stand still, Theodore.

THEODORE
Yeah, well I was just thinking that maybe we...don’t have to take the waist in. Maybe we could just leave...m-my pants a little bit baggy on the top. And maybe we could buy...well, maybe I was thinking that I’d pick out the black underwear—

EDITH
Theodore, quiet. Now, are you a hoodlum? Or a lumberjack? I don’t think so. Turn around so I can pin the back. And I don’t want to hear another word about these pants. Are we clear? (she begins to pin the back)

THEODORE
Yes, Mother.

EDITH
Now take those off. And try not to knock out any of the pins.

(Theodore slowly slides them down to his ankles, wincing slightly)

Give them here.
(She sits down at her sewing machine and begins working on them immediately. Theodore is standing next to her in his underwear looking lost.)

THEODORE
Mother...can we talk about...

EDITH
No, Theodore. No we cannot talk about Edward. I’m afraid I already said too much.

THEODORE
But he’s my father! And a man has a right to know how is father died.

EDITH
No, no, what’s done is done. And a boy shouldn’t cloud up his head thinking about that sort of--

THEODORE
God dammit, Mother. I’m not a boy! Not even close! And if I want my pants hemmed, I’ll hem them myself! Holy cow, Mother! Enough already. (he walks towards the door)

EDITH
Where are you going?

THEODORE
I’m going home, Mother.

(he storms out of the room in his underwear. We hear Edith’s door slam, and now Theodore is back in his apartment. He stands front and center with his arms crossed, pouting.)

Can you believe her, Edward? I mean, can you believe that? My father didn’t die fighting in Vietnam, Ed. He got hit by a bus. Smack. Mother said he was mush. I bet his bones were so broke, that his arms flopped around like they were stuffed with Jello. Can you picture that Ed? (beat) I can. (beat) I’ve got to get some sleep, buddy. You should sleep, too. Tomorrow, I’m getting up early to clean your bowl. You’re getting a little bit sloppy there. Kind of a mess. And then I’ve got to go to work. (beat) Did I tell you that Archie’s niece has shingles?...I guess I did. But I didn’t tell you about Archie, about his trip to Atlanta. You know, he won train tickets and he went down there for a whole week—can you imagine that? Holy
cow—no work, for a week...he said that there were women everywhere. With legs up to here, he said (gestures at his belly button), and sometimes when he came back at night there would be candy on his pillow...doesn’t that just sound magical, Ed? Maybe someday we can go to Atlanta. Just you and me. I could get you a carrying case with a handle. And I’d hold you right up against the window so you could look out the train and watch the trees go by. I bet you’d like that, wouldn’t you? You never got to see the world, huh. Trapped in a bowl of water your whole life. You only know what’s given to you—there’s nothing to take, nothing to decide. Sometimes, Ed, sometimes you break my heart.

(Theodore sits quietly next to Edward for a moment, and then gets up and runs through a doorway to the bathroom. He turns the bathtub faucet on and checks the temperature, and walks back out into the kitchen. He picks up Edward’s bowl and walks towards the bathroom.)

THEODORE
I think we need some breathing room, Ed. You and me.

(Theodore pours the contents of Edwards bowl (this includes Edward) into the running bathwater. He stands there looking down at the fish for a moment, and then starts taking the rest of his clothes off, saving his socks and his glasses for last. Naked, he steps carefully into the tub and leans back.)

And maybe it’s time I grew a beard.

CURTAIN

Ashley Christopher
Through the keyhole
Through the holes in my socks
We’ve landed on site now
The surface is sticky.
You cover my eyes. You
Lift my sleepy shirt to
Kiss my leaking heart
To say:

this is the only part that’s real
The pieces we can taste

Bring you ten fingers to my flesh
Your stolen hands of time.
I want the million fuzzy bumble bees
Passing through your lips in sleep.
Bring them to me on an alter of worry
Carry them here on the waves of your voice.

:to your greedy thighs
:to my guilty tongue

Amber Adams
Harvest’s Dusk

From the top of her streetlamp
The crow rebukes the trampled husk
Of corn. The law of the jaw cracks
Between rubber and road.

A rusty sun in the west cries
Low over the hoe-down fun
Where silk and straw rub clean
The compressed crew and floor.

A murder of cobwebs hide
Behind ears of disorder
In the field, as scarecrows
Bow at the unkindness.

And the salt and the sweet and the butter
Smear my mouth and snag
In my teeth while black swoops
Echo across the court.

Kimberly Knopf
Marc holds back Léa’s golden curls or he just loves the filmy, cobwebby feel of them dragging through his fingers again. His phone rings well past last call, her on the line, always; three am in Montréal, and he weeds through dirty light and overturned glasses, asks if she’s all right when he knows she’s not, and wonders every time if he should have insisted on staying, or if he never should have come back. He walks backwards through her living room because the shadows jog along the walls less that way, when he can follow the murky streetlight glow fuzz in through the windows. Leaves behind something solid.

It’s late but he rubs her shoulders through her thin, sweat-soaked shirt until she can sit up from the porcelain, and then he collects her, like a little kid, like a puppy or something you’d lost, and squeezes tighter than he realized he wanted to. He draws tally marks down her pale arms, one for each drink she had until he reaches her elbows, and then he helps her out of her shirt and leaves a kiss between her shoulder blades.

He waits until he’s sleep-dizzy and she’s calm, or at least still, and then he takes her hands and helps her up, out, into bed where he sits and tangles fingers in her loose damp ringlets, through and out and through again in little familiar patterns. When she speaks, it’s chill and clammy like her skin, barely-there French that he pretends he doesn’t know the meaning of even though it’s native; it’s drunken and honest and held suspended on a breath Léa can’t expel without a shudder, caught in her ribcage. And she says, because she always says, that parfois elle est désolé.

She disappears into the white sheets like arctic wasteland and Marc, desperate, grasps at nothing and cotton and cool skin, raises a rash of red blossom across skin like wax, like unbroken water, to make sure she’s still there at all. Léa always asks if he’ll come, needs him to, but she never says he’ll have to go. He wants to siphon color into her through his fingertips; the way he’s drawing on her back, across her shoulders, every few inches he can feel an even, sleeping heartbeat under the dusky impressions his fingers leave. Marc with his eyes closed wishes he could find answers just by touch, ask the ridges of Léa’s spine like an Ouija board. He imagines he can picture bones like the alphabet and channel something dead now that he wishes weren’t, imagines he can ask it what if they remember this tomorrow, and feel the familiar bumps and curves and contusions say letter by letter i-t m-i-g-h-t b-e a-l-l r-i-g-h-t.

She smells like liquor and lost opportunity and he leans in close anyway, to make the best of it or so he doesn’t forget, because Léa will forget, and he doesn’t ever know how many chances he has. She’s anemic, she’s spectral, and in the morning with a headache, heavy stomach and the stale taste of beer lingering on her lips she’ll dissolve in the sunlight. Marc finger paints questions across the line of her back, and the frosty
half-moons against pale pink of his nails blend in to her colorless skin, the scallop of dark fabric looping over her shoulder the only contrast.

Léa always sleeps on her right side; her long fingers are curled under a pillow and her breathing shallow, but at least now her skin is almost warmer to the touch. Marc wonders if she’d look like this every night, can’t remember if she used to.

He presses his forehead against her neck, draws close in a way he swore he wouldn’t anymore and asks the Ouija board of what should have been, of Léa’s bare skin he still has memorized, ghostly in the early morning, if she ever really meant to leave him. And nothing answers but the dim expanse of night giving way to bleak, white-washed dawn.

Everything stays alabaster still, silent and in the morning she ties her hair back and makes coffee without speaking before Marc starts his car, gasping into the chill, empty air. He picks the oldest, chipped mug in her kitchen in case he doesn’t return and watches her behind windowpanes in his rearview mirror, smaller and smaller and fading.

Stephanie Yates
A Silence in Perfect Cursive

Broken blinds let in the blueness
of morning. Summer has been and fall
takes its lap in oranges and yellows.
I sleep like it’s July again, my naked limbs
pale, contrasting the cherry headboard. Patterns
of skylines surface in the wood grain
and I trace them with one finger, thinking
of the thirty one Thursdays we’ve had,
when you drew circles across my skin
in the dark. I couldn’t see your face
but I remember how good it felt
to be healed.

If there were suggestions of hope,
they came now, in each promising November
snowflake. You can see your breath on the air,
even when you dream. Sounds of centuries passing
like loose change in the pockets of children.
Memories sleep on the hands
of a clock.

Time lends itself away and we’re stuck,
motionless in a brilliant reflection. Stars embossed
into that night, spider webs
on the edge of a dock and our breath
hot against April’s chill. The world can stop -
unless you ask it.

Sunday morning coffee like forgetfulness,
I wake from a dream of lovers. Music comes
from somewhere, perhaps tomorrow.
I think of the words you’ve left on my back,
looping across my spine. I can still feel the stain
of those breathless circumferences.

Carissa Dismuke
Crescendo

Accordion bellows press together, push out the air. Middle C stretches, moans—struck with a yarn mallet. Your teeth glow green, our eyes pinch shut.

Perched at your vibraphone, you play wah wah wah and I sweat pregnant with an accordion, folding and unfolding. Pulsing in our stomachs, a rich tone unravels, throbs in our joints. Feet tap, keep beat as notes slap themselves to walls, the room hums and we become faint with sound. Perfect pitch planted on my tongue to lick your glowing teeth.

Your rapid pedaling continues. Chords slide down metal and wrap around our skin. Notes bend, spiral down our throats, sing to twisted bones.

Jenna Cashera
Hughes used Baskin’s birds to illustrate his books, like *Crow*, as he wrote between his suicidal wives. Plath dedicated “Sculptor” to Baskin, about the bronze dead men scattered through his house, writes, “Bronze dead dominate the floor.”

*Domination.* Sounds like *damnation.* Baskin was a Jew, who maybe understood them both. While Hughes ate crow, two wives who turned on gas breathed in, lay on the floor like bronze, dead men.
A Giant Outside the Window

We were always told to be proud of our hometown name. Michigan is full of towns that sound majestic, like Wyandott and Muskegon and Pontiac, but they’re really just butchered versions of old Native American tribes. Not us, though. We, the proud elementary students of Ypsilanti, were named after no less than nobility, the fabled Demetrius Ypsilanti of Greek legend.

“And if anyone tries to tell you that Ypsilanti was named as a trading post, you can be proud to know otherwise,” pronounced Mr. Carver, our social studies teacher.

He explained the enormity of our heritage to us our fourth grade year. That was the same fall that Grandpa came to live with us, I remember because the leaves fell so thick on the front lawn that October. Mr. Carver was a cultured young man in Oxford shirts, with a smooth baritone that put his students at ease. He had high hopes for the class, and hit us up big from the start with lofty notions of heritage and pride and heroes.

“Demetrius Ypsilanti was an integral figure in the struggle of the Greek people against tyranny,” he intoned. “With three hundred men he defeated an army of thirty thousand...”

His words only partially maintained their meaning in my ears. Today my thoughts strayed outside into the drying autumn grass. I pretended to ride my bike through piles of leaves, faster and faster, passing soldiers in togas and war helmets while epic battles happened on my neighbors’ front lawns. Eventually my bike and I took flight and circled around the frayed tree tops, far above the clashes and bashes of the fighting below.

The kid who sat behind me, Paul, poked me in the back with his dirty index finger. “Did you hear that, Nathan?” he asked.

I mumbled in return as I flew ever higher. Michigan faded and I crossed states: Ohio, Illinois, the fabled Chicago.

“We’re famous!” he exclaimed.

My bike and I melded into a rocket ship and flew into space. We switched atmospheres and my bike exploded into splinters of hot metal. The bell rang. I fell back to earth.

I went straight home after school. I let myself in through the kitchen and shut the door behind me, careful not to let it slam.

“Hey, Grandpa,” I called softly from the foyer. Grandpa’s answering grunt meandered around the main cavern of the living room. Our house consisted of one large room in the middle, separated by half-walls and arches, so hardly any room had a confined space. I tiptoed around Grandpa and the sofa, softening my footsteps on the mossy carpet. The room felt like it was filled with large cotton balls that muffled any sound waves. The wrinkled old man melded right into the couch, indistinguishable from his piled afghans in the fading afternoon glow.
I ran upstairs and slammed my bedroom door. The clap it gave was a comforting jolt, like how Paul poked me whenever Mr. Carver tosses me a question. Before Grandpa came, calamity always rang through the house. My parents used to shout, waging war across the hallways. I would catch only a few of the sharp darts that punctuated the air as I tried to finish my homework.

"Money!"
"Work!"
"Nathan!"

Hearing my name was my favorite. It made me sound so strong. I was the most powerful weapon of them all. I’d play along with the noises, adding my own to the fray by throwing books and shoes at the walls. I had missed the game since Grandpa arrived.

Dinner, too, was mostly quiet except for the wet smacking noises Grandpa made as he toothlessly gummed his rigatoni. I watched him over my plate, fascinated. Afterwards, Dad returned to his office and Grandpa to the couch. I sat at the breakfast table in the kitchen, fiddling with potato skins while my mother stood at the sink.

"Mom, what’s wrong with Grandpa?" I asked.
"Hush, Nathan, he can probably hear you," she whispered with a tilt of her head. She wiped her hands on her khakis and slowly turned on the hot water. "Now, why would you ask that?"
"Because he doesn’t talk," I mumbled back.

Her loafers squeaked as she leaned over to grab a dirty pan.

"Grandpa is an old man. He’s had a long, hard life, and he’s earned the right to sit around for awhile and not be bothered. And please stop playing with the food."

I hopped off the chair and tipped the greasy skins into the waste bin. "Why was his life hard?" My mother brushed loose strands of greying hair off her face. Her voice was laced with brittle annoyance as she stared into the soap suds.

"Listen to me, Nathan," she said. "There are some things in this world that you don’t understand. You’re too young, and you don’t need to know them yet."

I nodded. Lots of things were like that for me, like times tables.
"You can’t ask Grandpa about it either," she continued.
"Why?"
"We all just have to make sure he’s as happy as he can be, while he’s here. You have to do your part," she finished, and sighed. "Now go to the living room and get the Scrabble set."

Board games had become an after-dinner fixture since Grandpa came. They were brought out in stacks from the attic, dilapidated cardboard boxes from decades past: Backgammon, Stratego, Sequence. Every night my mother and I sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the sofa. Grandpa sat like an aged king on his throne, surveying us from above.
"Isn't this fun?" Mom asked repeatedly. "The whole family, together."

I was stationed near Grandpa's right knee. From there I could study his face for glimpses of the tragedy of which Mom had whispered. I could not tell if his eyes followed her hand as she moved his pieces. They were half-closed, with heavy wrinkled lids. He seemed okay, though, comfortable amongst his blankets.

At school Mr. Carver continued to distract me with his lyrical facts. I maintained poor grades while daydreaming about the squirrels who scampered outside our window. I pictured them hibernating in their holes, buried deep underground in layers of mulch. We had formally left the subject of Demetrius behind, but the Greek ghost still hovered above us.

"Demetrius Ypsilanti is seen as a hero of your town, correct?" he asked. A thin crack in Mr. Carver's speech had started to appear. Even his simple requests were the faintest of pleas. No one answered.

"Correct!" he barked. "And since he was so important to your town, let's think of our own heros."

A sheet of paper was slapped down in front of me. I stared dumbly at the wide-rule lines. I did not, as far as I knew, look up to anyone.

"It could be someone like Demetrius," Mr. Carver continued. "Who fought bravely to bring peace and democracy to his country. Or it could be someone from your own life."

The squirrel of my daydream had turned into a caterpillar larva, tightly wrapped in strands of fine silk like an Egyptian mummy. A spider crawled ever closer towards it; I raced on my bike to save the caterpillar from disaster, but a sharp order tripped me up and yanked me back into the classroom.

"Nathan! Are you listening?"

I was held back after class.

"I'm going to call your mother today, Nathan," Mr. Carver murmured to me in the private of the deserted classroom. "You are going to get into trouble one of these days."

At dinner my mother wrung her hands over the meatloaf and decided that grades were going to take first priority in my life. Even over Scrabble. I was now supposed to march straight up to my room every evening after dinner, and attend to my school work until bed. However, my schoolmate Paul was the child of recently divorced parents. I had learned how to sneak around at night.

"It's the only way to find out anything," he had confided in me one day. "Grown-ups love to keep secrets from kids, so you can hear lots of stuff at night."

He was right. The only closed door in the house was the den, and from behind its blockade there were whispers. I crouched low in my pajamas, listening.

"The war," muttered my father.

"If he's forgotten about it yet," my mother breathed later.
“The doctors said.”
“Shell-shock.”

Fear seeped under the cracks in the door like poisonous gas. My stomach was uneasy with questions as I felt my way back to the stairs. A rattling breath like dead grass stopped me. As if ice had been poured down my back, I froze.

The archway of the living room stood trapped in a silent scream, dark and mute before me. The only light came from the window, whose shades were still partially open from the day. The moonlight streaming forth cast a translucent glow on the skin of the old man on the couch. He was wrapped tightly from feet to shoulders in covers, like something embalmed. His milky white form was inert, but I felt I could discern his eyeballs rolling around under his eyelids. My parents’ murmurs still emanated from the den, like wind among trees.

I tip-toed past, hunched low and tense. I trembled closer to the couch, not daring to breathe. As I neared his head, Grandpa’s mouth began to twitch. He began to mumble words I could not make out. His body started to quiver, like a dead thing slowly coming back to life. The fear broke, and I ran to my bedroom, the muffled thumps of my feet chasing me upwards.

That night I had nightmares about giants, the kind that ate people especially, stalking outside the house. Because we didn’t have any walls or doors there were no enclosed spaces, so every room had a window. The giants outside, hairy and monstrous, peered in and spotted me. The living room with its spacious windows was the worse place of all, and there I was trapped. Leaves flew up around the house as the giants scrabbled in the dirt to get me. The living room windows shattered in a crash. A scaly hand broke through and grabbed me. I screamed as the thick fingers closed around my body. My alarm went off.

As October ended, the blowing gales had stripped the oak trees of their proud plumage. It was time to start raking. I was eager to distract myself from Grandpa, the threat of failing school and Mr. Carver, whose eyes were beginning to burn in his face.

I was given the chore of raking by my father, who had started coming late to dinner. I wondered if he dreamt as I did, and had penned himself in his office to avoid the giants. In the evening, when the sidewalks were washed with amber light, I was ordered to clear our lawn. Quickly, too, so I would have time to finish my homework. I still needed to choose a hero.

My mother said the dinner prayer that night before Dad came down.

“Blessed 0 Lord,” she mumbled, “and these thy gifts which we are about to receive…”

My mother trailed off at the end of the prayer like always, to minimize the sound. She glanced at Grandpa, who held a blanket around his shoulders like a cape. There was a small spasm in his left eyelid that
reminded me of his chilling nights. A plate of chicken was handed to me. The meat made a wet thwack on my plate, and I shivered.

Thud.

A noise. A dull thud had come from upstairs, the direction of my father's office. With a strange noise in her throat, Mom peeked at Grandpa, and continued to rapidly spoon potatoes.

Clunk.

This one was heavier.

Thud. Louder. Thunk. Clunk. Then, a crash. He must have knocked over a lamp.

"Of course," my mother sneered. She threw down her napkin and stalked up the staircase.

More pounding came from upstairs, now mingled with the muffled shouts of my mother. The sounds bounced off the half-walls and arches. Grandpa stopped chewing, and looked at me, straight in the eyes. They were blue and flecked with clear, stormy grey. They were fully open.

My parents marched downstairs, taking careful aim and firing their missiles. They were not whispering, or taking care not to stomp their angry feet.

"He's your father!" shouted my mother. This time I caught every syllable they let loose. Their meaning was unmistakable.

"I just can't stand it anymore!" my father threw back. They ignored us as they headed towards the den.

"What's wrong with it? Everyone was in agreement! Even Nathan's been doing his part!" my mother yelled. My name. I was not excited to hear it. I felt like I had a part in something secretive and wrong, something I should have been ashamed about.

My father stopped marching, his hand gripping the handle of the den's door. Air blew out of his nostrils like a matador's bull.

"Nathan? You think he's been enjoying this? This strange, unnecessary, ridiculous quiet? This isn't a place for a kid to grow up!" Dad declared. "What kind of ideas do you think he's getting about Dad?"

I sank in my chair. Grandpa's eyes stayed trained on my face. I felt studied as under a microscope, insignificant yet so important.

Smack.

The door of the den was slammed. A metallic click locked my parents away. Grandpa began to tremble. Nervous energy poured over me, flooding my chair. I fled the table, leaving my lifeless chicken cold on the plate.

I stood on our lawn with rake in hand, staring at the deep sea of brown and orange that surrounded me. Lost in the vastness, I looked back at my house's red brick face.

The house was loud, just like it used to be.

My parents were still inside the den. I pictured them sitting in opposite armchairs like politicians, arguing big issues in booming voices. Maybe Mom was thinking of sending Grandpa to an old folks' home. Maybe
Dad just wanted to live normally around his father, whom he still wanted to think of as his father and not just another shell-shocked vet. Maybe they felt bad for themselves, or for me, or for Grandpa’s previous life. Maybe they felt bad because they didn’t.

Grandpa was probably still at the dining room table. My social studies paper was, I knew, sitting blank on my abandoned desk.

Heros, pride, heritage.
A keen wind picked up. I shivered again and began to rake.
Soldiers, battles, glory.
A few cars straggled by after work, puttering slowly down the asphalt. The evening breeze picked up and softly shuffled the bare branches. It was hushed, but life and motion prevailed. My hands moved in steady rhythm with the rake, back and forth and back again.
Fear, memory, loss.
Heros.

Two piles later, the screen door creaked open. I stuck my rake into the ground.

"Hi, Grandpa." "Hello, Nathan."
The sound of my name drew me to him. His voice was low and clear, with no trace of the storm that colored his blue eyes. It sounded something like Mr. Carver's, but without the distraction that muddled my brain.

"How’s the raking?" he asked.
"Good," I responded, "but slow. I have lots to go."
He drew the comforter tighter around his shoulders. "It’s nice out here, though. Quiet."
He achingly lowered himself in the wicker chair on the porch. I remembered my mother and her plea.

"Do you know about Demetrius Ypsilanti?" I asked.
He studied my face once more. "Why do you ask about him?"
I shrugged. "We talked about him at school. Our town’s named after him."

"Oh," he said, shaking his head. "He was a soldier, I think. I heard he retired early though, after his major battles. I don’t know much more than that."
I picked up my rake again. "He must have been special though, to have a whole town named after him."
"That makes sense," Grandpa observed.
"A real hero," I said. I smiled and found it returned.
Grandpa leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. I tried to picture him younger, without the blankets. I couldn’t make out the image well, but I supposed I was not focusing hard enough. My grandpa began to snore. As the leaves accumulated into mountainous piles, I pretended we were riding my bike, the two of us. We rode over the broken sidewalks of the neighborhood, past the park and the elementary school, faster and faster. Soon we took flight and crossed state borders to fight off hoards of soldiers in togas, to defeat them only with crashing cymbals in our hands.

Laura Citino
“It looks like the ground is on fire”

Burning trees overflow onto houses and sidewalks. Smooth pewter cement crumbles into cheese cube size blocks. Young children and their bicycles ignite, try to run, the bicycle tries to pedal, and the flames catch up with them.

From up here, it all seems normal. Screams can’t be heard at such a high altitude. The cement’s merely aging like a good red wine, and the children are having such a good time with their new Schwinns.

Is this ignorance or separation? Blindness or clear vision? People are dying by choice while some refuse to see it happen. Like me at 3500 feet, with a compass pointing North, those anonymous screams might just as well be this Southern wind I’m leaving behind.

Kimberly Schoetzow
Recalling a mood to be aghast.

Such as last winters winds, when they leapt past us, hurried to get nowhere. I'm brained senseless by such trials. Like after the petals open, all that's left is the fall. The ground betrayed with yellows and whites and oranges dripped in honey scent and bees are at a loss.

In June we tore down that barn, that barn where we would smoke cloves among the bails of hay, rotten in their stagnance, waiting to be sparked, consumed in a glory unattainable on their own. But we tore it all down instead. I even helped, using my grandpa's hammer, with joy in the pulse in the weight in my hands meeting the soft passive wood. Once it stood red, though I never saw, yet they say it was. They say.

But let me know what you think. Like when I sang that song in the revealing dark along the row of dying ash and my voice cracked and they apologetically said it was good. And they said I should talk more because it sounds as if I mean it and they enjoy to hear, such as that leaping wind with no sight and no hope for a good end, or a pillow for resting.

The barn was still there then, faded and skeletal. I longed to run and go, hiding myself in the aging ribs, the dusty cavern. And O, being the pulse and knowing at the least that I was giving life to something. Not even the mice where content, I watched them as my mind was pulled apart and down. What, I wonder, would it be like living as a mouse? I'd hate the white whiskers. To be blunt, I'd rather not sense my surroundings.

Nathan Lipps
To the Squirrel on Rose

You pull yourself
calmly, calculated,
lopsided leg
useless as my black ponytail.
Fuchsia petunias sweep your spine
twisting, an ivy vine creeping
up the rusted lamp post.
You stop, in front
of my robin’s egg toes, speckled
from flicked up mud.

A bike rides by
throwing puddles
into clammy orange lit air.
I wonder how
you came by your leg,
seemingly snapped
into two.
You don’t twitch
or scare
or smile,
a living garden statue,
tipped over, lying beside
Rose Street’s cracking cement.
You crawl,
contorting, draping
that broken limb
over your thinning tail.

The rain starts
you sit
in the park downtown.
I hope
you found a cubby hole
tree and hide
from the falling sky.
No, you must be wet,
writhing as the trees
do above you.

Jessica Rethman
Wake

Harold Brock got news of his father's death on a Wednesday afternoon. Within an hour he had told the secretary to cancel his classes for the week and told his landlord to watch his cat. These were the only two people that he told. They were both very sympathetic.

If you saw Harold on the street, you'd think that he was a broadly handsome man with piercing eyes and close cropped hair above the brow, chin and cheeks set into a dark granite complexion. If you looked real close you'd see that he had a scar above his left eye from the time his older brother Walter had shot him with a pellet gun. If you looked even closer you'd see that Harold was a divorced insomniac with a mild addiction to Nyquil and a strong, unshakeable belief in Bigfoot.

His lab was located in a forgotten wing in the decrepit education building. He was sandwiched between the advisors office and closets of buckets of stagnant mop water. In the summer, the sickly sweet smell would swell and creep into the office and the whole room would smell like sour milk. His office had been switched from the sleek science building because he had lost his research funding due to a disagreement with a Dr. Morale, the head of the anthropology department. His new office was large but decrepit, about thirty feet by twenty, and in it he had a videotape collection that covered the west wall, an impressive collection of plaster footprints, and a forest of microscopes, tweezers, beakers, and chemicals. Against the east wall a small cot was folded up like an ironing board.

The office doubled as a dark room; he had chemical baths that sat on the back tables. Here, amongst beakers and chemicals, his students could find him, often late into the night, sifting through the photographs and plaster casts. More often than not, though, the students left Harold to his work.

That Friday evening his ex-wife called. The first thing she said to him was, "When were you planning on telling me about your father?"
"How long have you known?" he said.
"Your mother called me last night."
"She called you?" he said.
"Yeah. I wanted to give you a chance to tell me yourself. You've always been a coward, Harold."
"Look, Sharon, I appreciate the sympathy, but this is something I'd rather do alone."
"Bullshit. Harold, this has nothing to do with you. I'm booking a flight to Minneapolis."

Harold protested, and Sharon offered to pay for the flight. She found a sitter for her dog, cancelled her business meetings, and by Friday night Harold was crammed onto Flight 716 Seattle to Minneapolis next to a woman that he didn't love anymore. He sat with his face to the window, the huge emptiness outside his window rolling past. He felt
claustrophobic. He went into the bathroom and took the last few swigs from a bottle of Nyquil, hoping maybe he’d be able to fall asleep on the flight. The cabin lights were out, the west coast curled up under the plane like a dog, and the plane cruised through the sky with Zen-like patience somewhere between time zones.

Sharon dozed lightly and left a puddle of drool on Harold’s arm.

An hour later she woke, stretched, and said, “So. Harold. How’s the Bigfoot business these days?” She balanced each word on the end of her tongue.

“Sharon, this is a five hour flight.”

“I asked a simple question.”

“The Bigfoot business is fine. How’s the real estate business?” Harold said.

Sharon snorted. She was a failed real estate agent with jet-black hair and bad luck. She was a darkly beautiful woman, exotic, even, but between her money troubles over the last year she had forgotten this at some point. Harold forgot, too. He would have been surprised now to hear that once, when he was much younger, he floated on air for three days because he’d gotten her phone number.

Sharon still dressed as a real estate agent, everywhere she went. She wore nice black suits, always, no matter the occasion, and she was always business-casual, always, especially when she talked, walked, ate, drank, cried, fell, fucked.

“The real-estate business is fine,” she said. “Have you landed the big tenure position?” A broad, cruel smile spread across her face. “Oh, don’t worry, Harold. I’m sure this year is the year.”

“Nice, Sharon, real nice. My father is in his final resting place and you’re kicking me in the balls,” he said.

This was somewhere over Boise.

***

Harold’s insomnia that night was worse than most. Sharon had taken Harold’s room, at his mother’s insistence. Harold’s dead father occupied the guest bedroom, which left Harold on the fold-out bed in the living room. The fold-out bed was a range of uneven springs and jutting bars, and he’d finished off the bottle of Nyquil on the flight.

He was surprised to see that his mother had kept his room the same, with baseball trim around the ceiling, blue wallpaper and trophies on the dresser. Harold remembered staring at the trophies in the dark at the tender age of fourteen, wondering what it meant to have them. He wondered if Sharon was staring at them right now. The house was heavy with the sort of silence that only death can bring.

Around three he gave up on sleep and began working on his statement for the funeral under the dim light of a desk lamp. When his father had died, he couldn’t think of anything to say. By the time kids were up
progress. He hadn't slept in two days.

"How'd you sleep on the couch?" his mother asked him.

"Just fine."

"You don't look fine. Maybe you should see the doctor."

"Ma, I don't need to see the doctor. I'm just under a little stress right now."

"We all are, honey."

His mother cracked several eggs into a pan and by then the sun was up and most of his relatives were coming into the kitchen. His brother Walter and his wife were in the pantry now with their kids. Uncle Jim and Aunt Edna were still in their matching flannel pajamas. There were several other people in the living room that Harold recognized, though he didn't remember their names, and their children dashed recklessly from room to room. Two children plowed into Sharon, fell down, laughed, and sprung around her as she walked into the kitchen.

"Oh, I'm glad you're awake," Mrs. Brock said. "Did you sleep okay?"

"Yes, thank you for the hospitality, Mrs. Brock," Sharon said.

"Oh, it's my pleasure. I'm just glad to see you and Harold back in the same room again."

"If Dad were alive, she wouldn't be here," Harold said.

"If I weren't here, you wouldn't have come at all," Sharon said.

"Sharon, don't start," Harold said.

"You tell your mother about the conference yet?" she said.

"Sharon--"

"Conference?" Mrs. Brock asked.

"Don't worry about it," Harold said.

"Harold, are you going to a conference?" she asked again.

"Ma, I said don't worry about it. I'm here."

"You're not going to a conference," his mother said. "You can pretend like you give a damn about your family for one weekend."

Harold shrank back. His mother never swore. "Mom, we can talk about this later--"

"--You're just as stubborn as your father. Sharon, you know that's where he gets it from. The Brock men are a stubborn lot. You should thank the Lord you were never around to see a fight. Harold never did get along with his father. They would push and shove and cuss at one another and there was nothing I could do about it."

His mother rapidly cut potato slices the size of silver dollars.

"What are you studying out West?" Uncle Jim said.

"Evolutionary biology, with an emphasis on primatology."

"Say what now?"

"I study the process of evolution. I've finished my PhD and I've been trying to convince the board to accept my degree in Cryptozoology."

"Cryptozo-whatsit?" Jim said.

"Cryptozoology. The scientific search for mythological animals."
"You mean, Loch Ness, Bigfoot, the boogie man?"
"Yeah, something like that," Harold said.
"So what does a Cryptozo-whatsit do?" Jim said.
"It depends. I spend the school year in my lab looking at videos and casts when I'm not teaching. Then I spend summers camping in the Cascade mountains, looking for Bigfoot."
"Find him yet?" Jim said.
"We're looking."
"What does the university think of all this?"
"They're not entirely pleased. The director has been trying to fire me now for six years."
"Yeah?"
"Yep. He almost got me, until I sold my book to a publisher. Then the university started to put pressure on him to keep me around."
"No kidding? You didn't tell me that you had a book in the works. What's it called?"
"'The Science of Sasquatch,'" Harry said.
"Well, I'll be," Uncle Jim said. "My nephew, the writer. Huh."
Jim chewed at his sausage with admiration. "I'd bet your father is beaming down right now."
Walter stepped into the kitchen and opened the fridge. "Yeah, he's real proud," his brother said, peering between jars of mayonnaise and green olives.
"Hi Walter," Harold said.
"You remember the time Dad saw Harold on channel forty-two?" he said. "Harold was up there on the screen, talking about Bigfoot. You should've seen it, Uncle Jim. One of the guys at the shop gets wind of it and suddenly they're all calling Dad 'Sasquatch Sammy.'"
"Fuck off, Walter," Harold said.
"Whoa, slow down," Walter said. "I don't understand professor speak."
"Harold Stanwood Brock, you watch your language," his mother said. "There are children around. And Walter, knock it off. Now sit down and eat your breakfast, both of you. I made some venison to go with your eggs and toast."
"Ma, I don't like venison," Harold said.
"Sit down and eat. I know this vegan thing is big on the west coast, but you're back in Minnesota now. Just look at you. You're falling apart."
"I was never a vegan, Ma."
"Well when your father died he left me with about two hundred pounds of deer meat from the hunting season and I'll be darned if it goes to waste. Gosh, that's about all I eat. Venison stew, venison cutlets, venison roast, venison burgers." While she talked she ran from one end of the kitchen to the other, setting down forks and plates. She had set an extra spot at the table.
Sharon was still silent. She excused herself and stepped out behind the garage for a smoke.

"Harold, go talk to her," his mother said.

"Ma, stop it."

"Go talk to her. She loved your father."

Harold sighed but realized that fighting with his mother was useless. He stepped lightly out into the September night. He could see Sharon at the end of the garage, silhouetted against a street lamp and wreathed in a pale cloud of smoke. Her silhouette was beautiful and mysterious, like a stranger in the night. He slowly walked up to her and said,

"Mind if I join you?"

She carelessly cast a cigarette in his direction.

"You doing okay?" he said.

"Yeah."

They stood side by side in the solemn night, both searching for the words that hung somewhere in the vast, uncrossable, empty space between them. The silence hung heavy like the full moon in the sky. Harold thought about when he and Sharon were young things, when they used to get drunk off of one another's company and talk all night. What happened, he wondered.

"Do you miss him?" Harold said.

"Who?"

"My father."

"Sure," she said. "Don't you?"

"I don't know," he said, carefully. "I feel like I should."

"Your father was a good man."

"And I was a good son."

"Harold, the man in there is dead. If you were a good son, then you'd say goodbye to your father."

"Sharon, can I tell you something I've never told you before?"

Harold could see the lines around her eyes soften a little.

"Do you remember how I went camping out west with my father when I was younger?" he said.

She nodded.

"I woke up early one morning before my father got up. I got out of the tent and grabbed a fishing pole and a hunter's knife. In my head, I thought that if I caught and cooked a fish before he woke up, maybe he wouldn't feel so bad about taking me with him instead of Walter. Problem is I've never caught a fish in my life. So I've got my line in the water and Mt. Adam is off in the distance when I feel this cold prickling sensation on the back of my neck. The birds are all quiet, and I feel like something is watching me, but I can't hear anything. I start to call out for my dad, thinking maybe he'd snuck up behind me, but I get no response. Then I catch scent of this smell—I can't even tell you what, maybe something like
rotting meat, but worse. That’s when I see this... thing. I can’t explain
it. All my years as a scientist and I still can’t explain it. Whatever it was,
it was huge, and tall, and walked on two feet. I could feel its footsteps.
I wanted to run but my feet were rooted to the spot. It turns its massive
head and looks me in the eye, and I look it in the eye, and for a second
we stand there, looking across this huge uncrossable gulf, across a million
years of evolution. We are both terrified, I can see it in its eyes, and it can
see it in mine. And then it bolts. Before I can even move, it bolts and is
over the next hill and out of sight. ’God,’ I thought, ’it’s so fast.’

’And then I bolt. I wanted to follow it into the woods but I was
too scared. I’ve spent the last twenty years wishing I’d gone back into the
woods.

’So I get back to camp and my father had built a small fire.
’Where were you?’ he says to me.

’I was out of breath, but I tried to tell him what I saw, and he says,
’Where’s the fishing pole?’

’I’d dropped the fishing pole. I didn’t even know. But that’s all he
could ask. Where’s the fishing pole...’

’Harold, it’s time to forget about all that,” she said.
Harold nodded, stamped out the cigarette, and went inside. Blaine
was telling Mrs. Brock a story, more so with his hands than with his words,
about the time Sam had told a foreman to go to hell. Harold could see
grateful tears in his mother’s eyes.

The others listened to Blaine tell his stories for another hour.
Blaine’s voice grew hoarse and the whiskey clouded his memory, and soon
he sat hunched at the table in fitful, taciturn drunkenness. The others
grew silent, too, and Walter was the first to leave the table. Aunt Edna
and Uncle Jim were next. Blaine followed fifteen minutes later, crashing
his enormous bulk into the pinstriped sofa, and finally Sharon shuffled off
without saying a word. By five in the morning Harold and his mother sat
silently across from one another. They had run out of things to say. The
sun swelled under the horizon and the birds were awake and telling stories
in their secret language.

’Ma, go to bed. You’re killing yourself,” he said.
’It’s not much longer till sunrise,” she said.
’Seriously. I’ll stand guard. I need a moment alone with the old
man anyway.”
Mrs. Brock was too tired to object. She flashed a weary half-smile
and stood up.

“When are you leaving town?” she said.
“The convention is tomorrow.”
“You’re going?” she said.
“I have to.”
She nodded. “You sure do take after your father.” She kissed his
forehead and slipped off into the night.
Now that the others had gone to sleep Harold could feel the
emptiness of death enter into the room again. He watched the candles burn themselves down to insignificant stubs. The silence was awkward, even more awkward than the drive to Washington. Death, Harold thought, the most awkward of all silences. He sat only three feet from the corpse, but the distance between Harold and his father was even more uncrossable now than when the man was alive.

"You know," he said, "Mom's right. You really were a stubborn bastard."

Harold uncovered Blaine's whiskey from under the table. He took a few swigs.

"I'm going to a convention tomorrow," he said. He laughed at himself. He'd never talked to a corpse before. "You can't make fun of me for my conventions anymore."

In the silence of the early dawn Harold's thoughts went back to the eulogy. He still hadn't found anything to say. Harold pulled out his notepad to try again and pushed a silent pen to silent paper. He sifted through memories of his father.

"What do you want me to say at your funeral tonight?" he said.

The corpse didn't answer. A slight breeze picked up and swung the window shut with a forceful bang. He thought about his mother's superstition, about leaving a window open to let the soul out, and he went to open the window. He stopped himself. "What am I doing?" he said aloud. "I'm a scientist."

He threw the pad of paper onto the workbench and resigned himself to watching the sun come up. As it rose over the trees, the sunlight crept up along the concrete floor and touched Sam's corpse. One candle still held its vigil from the night, though it seemed pitiful in the slanting sunlight. Outside, the air shook off its cold autumn chill.

"Superstition be damned," Harold said. He stepped over to the window and propped it open with a two-by-four. The gentle September wind flowed through his hair and snuffed out the candle. The birds sang and insects buzzed in lazy circles and Harold watched this street from a scene in his childhood come back to life. Adults clutched coffee to their chests in their harried shuffles to their cars, children played and tumbled as they waited for the bus, and now and then an early morning jogger trotted past. Harold felt the room lighten and his body relax. For the first time in years, Harold felt tired.

When the coroner came an hour later, the family said their goodbyes to Sammy Brock. Edna, Jim, Walter and Blaine each took their turn kissing the dead man's clean shaved cheeks. Sharon still couldn't bring herself to look in the man's face but had grown less afraid of the body and now ventured a timid 'seeya'. The two pallbearers had come back and carried a coffin into the garage and placed Harold into the box, then shut the lid and loaded it into the back of the Hurst. Harold watched the vehicle pull away, standing in the street and watching until the car reached the end of the street and rounded the corner.
He watched for some time more. He watched other cars go down the street and round the corner, and wondered where they were heading. Standing there in the September sun, amongst the trees and the cars and the houses, his father’s life was a fond, distant memory. Harold could feel the words buzzing in his head, and he crept off quickly into the guest bedroom, away from the galloping children and his crying mother, and he began to write.

He started this way:

"The world seems small next to your father. No matter how old I get, this doesn't change. The world still seems small next to a giant like Sam Brock.

"Death doesn't change this feeling. It only transforms it, into something else."

Jacob Frye
Grandpa’s Collections

He keeps things like soldiers must -
Prexies and Liberty issues, his beard hair trimmings
like pacifists in black bags.

He keeps his eyes on
the Wheel of Fortune, a silver coin Judas held
resting in his shoe.

He keeps his life in a locked room upstairs.
The only complete collection of Corn Palace postcards -
Absurdities in Kodachrome. Antique

telephone pole insulators -
set them by the window light, they kaleidoscope.
He shows me his retirement watch, it’s still.

He keeps paperweights with flowers,
family histories, a spineless first edition Mein Kemph. Blow
the dust off, it’s gunsmoke. He showed me

a skull ring with "West Wall" engraved
on it, a thin silver with all the nicks of a wedding band.
He did not buy it. It was not a gift.

Grandpa shows guns best.
He had drawers full of them smuggled into his room
right under grandma’s nose.

When I was a boy,
he let me hold all of them,
all his heavy words creaking the hardwood floors.

He passed down to me a gift
more valuable than coins or a ring - that feeling of cold weight
and purpose accumulating in my small, scared hands.

Keith Carver
The landscape was gold
along the Californian coast

of apartment complex backyards—
mostly driveways and parking spots,

no yards to speak of, just
puffs of incandescent

youth-gone-mad, latch-key
kids with sunned-black feet,

that’s who these shores belonged to,
not those affluent pixies who float

between dandelions and dollars, painting
playschool graffiti squares that used to be so
dull compared to the gritty chalkings that
used to span the walls of underground caves,

ritual art from before the birth of Christ, from
before any of these kids were even told of guilt.

These kids were never told of bliss, not in
these vacant lots left barren from nine to five.

There was never bliss for a child of seven who was
mugged for the very first time of just fifty cents

because some other kid, barely twice his age,
could not afford the gift of summer solstice
given by the traveling ice cream man who
used to span the golden coast of California.
Mowing the weeds around an apple tree,
I step on a nest of naked mice— small, shivering
in mid-April’s breeze, crowded together

like all young when facing the blueness
of sight. Fresh grass, slick— pillows of dew
& crumpled Honey Crisps, still rotting, still juicing

in soil even after this blustery season.
Fermentation releasing & rising.
Past the split-rail fence, the neighbors’ dog
digs for a leftover ham bone, just behind the brown twigs
of a rose bush. The ground has softened & leaks its waters
to the underground currents, the river of our well.

Soon a haze will blanket the air, dust that cannot settle
with speeding trucks & pot holes. Blossoms already
pod at this tree’s tips— it will burst into whiteness

before the month’s end. But now, the crunch of mice
under my boot, the gray I did not see beneath the crowding green—.

Jennifer Dempsey
SUPERFAN

A play in one act

CHARACTERS:

BITTY, mid- to late-teens.

MOM, BITTY’s mom.

AUNT JONIE, MOM’s sister.

WOMAN, middle-aged tourist, can be played by same actress as MOM.

JUST SOME DUDE, vaguely resembles Al Roker.

NBC MAILBOY, an intern.

(Split stage. Lights off SL. Lights on SR.)

BITTY

I love weathermen. I mean, love, love them. Many scoff, but I just can’t help it! To me, the ability to read climate-related charts and graphs and then take that information, interpret it in a professional, scientific setting and reveal the results to an anxious and awaiting public via national television is a gift. A sexy gift.

I also have a thing for chubby, jolly, bald bespectacled men. The way their bare skulls glisten with sweat in the hot July sun after inhaling half a dozen hot dogs at the neighborhood block party, the manner in which their second, and sometimes third, chin jiggles ever so joyfully with each guffaw as they enjoy their favorite joke, the way their oversized eye glasses emboss crimson circles on the tops of their pudgy little cheeks: pure heaven.

Knowing what pushes my fat-friendly buttons, it is easy to see why I would be especially infatuated with the ebullient Al Roker. This passion brings me much joy and peace, which is why I become particularly frustrated when a certain few poke fun at my fascination or “diagnose” it as an obsession. If the foxy face featured on the bountiful posters covering the walls of my bedroom and the chests of my homemade t-shirts were of Brad Pitt, notice would not be taken. If the legally-changed surname on my birth certificate read “Ledger” or “Timberlake,” such odd stares would not be thrown. It
may be perfectly acceptable for young girls to fantasize about hobbits and elves with absurd names like Elijah and Orlando, but not for them to dream of smart, successful small-screen stars? Society may sneer at a girl like me, but to it I raise my third finger in anger and contempt.

(Lights dim SR. BITTY runs SL. Lights on SL.)

MOM

Why Al Roker? I don’t get it.

BITTY

Mom, do you ever get anything? You are an ignorant woman.

MOM

I was okay with the whole Al Gore obsession. I mean, he does lead a zealous crusade against environmental destruction. But Al Roker? I didn’t know you were into those kinds of guys.

BITTY

Well you obviously don’t know me or understand my ways. You are so retarded. Ugh, I hate you!

(Lights dim SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SR.)

I must admit my disgust with society fades when I gaze lovingly at the glossy headshots of Mr. Roker, intentionally ignoring the unsightly glare of his large glasses and pretending that I have a clear view of those soulful brown eyes.

My admiration has recently led to the writing of a simple yet poignant letter to Al himself, subtly outlining the ways in which he has inspired my life and influenced the decisions I have made along the way. I also requested a five-night travel package to New York City to view a taping of “The Today Show” and perhaps a few moments of airtime to profess my love.

(Light dim SR. BITTY runs SL. Lights on SL.)

BITTY

(Composing letter at a desk.)

Mr. Al Roker: my name is Bitty. I am your biggest fan. My dream in life is to one day visit New York City to see “The Today Show” live and give you a big hug! Lovingly, Bitty. P.S., would you autograph a photo of yourself for me? My address is...

(Lights dim SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SL.)
BITTY
After re-reading the first draft, however, my requests came off as greedy and demanding.

(Lights dim SR. BITTY runs SL. Lights on SL.)

MOM
(Reading draft of letter.)
You are so greedy and demanding! Why would you bother this poor man? Can you leave him alone? Please?

(Lights dim SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SR.)

BITTY
So, in an effort to transform myself into a heartwarming human interest segment, I edited in an extended lie detailing my history with pacemakers, how the kids at school tauntingly referred to me as Heather Mills-McCartney due to my recent amputation below the knee, and my tragic and incurable premature female baldness. I signed it as my dying grandmother whose last wish was to see her granddaughter overcome pancreatic cancer.

(Lights dim SR. Lights on SL.)

NBC MAILBOY
(Reading letter.)
Mr. Al Roker: my name is Bitty. I am your biggest fan. My dream in life is to one day visit New York City to see “The Today Show” live and give you a big hug! Lovingly, Bitty. P.S., would you autograph a photo of yourself for me? My address is...

(Lights dim SL. Lights on SR.)

BITTY
Sealed with a kiss, the outgoing envelope was stuffed in my mailbox and I was left with nothing to do but wait. Seventeen days later I received a response.

(Lights dim SR. BITTY runs SL. Lights on SL.)

BITTY
(Reading letter.)
Dear Ms. Bitty, thank you for your interest in “The Today Show.” We gladly invite you to visit www.nbcstore.com to browse official NBC merchandise. New features include “The Biggest Loser” cookbook with favorite low-cal recipes from last season’s winner... (Pause.)
A personal invitation to New York from Al Roker himself?! I could only say yes! He only sent one plane ticket due to NBC’s budget cuts, so I figured why not keep the invite to myself and not tell anyone? What a shock it would be to have Mom see me on television, right there in the middle of Rockefeller Plaza waving a homemade sign and accepting long-awaited affection from the man I love. Tugging around my official NBC luggage, (Lights on SL to reveal a suitcase covered in promotional stickers of “Deal or No Deal” and “Will & Grace.” Lights off SL.)

I rushed through Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and arrived at the terminal with minutes to spare. Boarding the plane, I found myself surprised with a most glamorous treat as I was immediately upgraded to first class. I couldn’t wait to thank the producers of the show and, of course, Al Roker, for this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

(Lights dim SR. Lights on SL.)

Honey, have you seen my AmEx card? I swear it was right here in my purse. Bitty do you know where it is? Bitty? Bitty? (Picks up ransom-style note made from magazine clippings.)

Off to visit Al? This again? Christ.

(Lights dim SL. Lights on SR.)

I had never seen post-9/11 New York, and was grateful that few effects of it were lingering on NBC’s breath (Beat. BITTY crosses herself) bless the victims and their families. The studio was in full tact, but tours hadn’t started for the day so I chose to instead browse the world famous NBC store. Disappointed by the selection—no I do not want a pair of official “Scrubs” scrubs, thank you—I made my way down 49th street looking for a bite to eat.

After grabbing a pie, as they say, I was utterly exhausted by the hoopla and zoomed over to Sheraton Times Square where “The Today Show” had reserved a cozy little suite: room 36, which just so happens to be Al Roker’s number from high school football. What a peculiar coincidence for an impromptu pilgrimage!
AUNT JONIE
Sure, you can stay here, but if your mom finds out I’m a part of this, you can say good-bye to Christmas presents for the rest of your life. Not like you’re gettin’ shit this year anyway, you little brat.

BITTY
Thanks, Aunt Jonie. Don’t worry, she won’t have to know.

AUNT JONIE
Yeah, whatever. Bathroom’s up the hall to the left. Don’t touch my shampoo. It’s Pantene. Money don’t grow on trees, you know.

(Lights dim SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SR.)

BITTY
After a restful night’s napping, the bright Manhattan sun shook me awake to greet Monday morning. After sampling a number of sandwiches from New York’s abundant stretch of world-famous delicatessens,

(Lights on SL.)

JONIE
Yeah, we’re out of milk. Tough shit, kid. You never had water with Honey-O’s?

(Lights dim SL.)

BITTY
I skated over to The Rock like a true Manhattanite where I was greeted with incredible pandemonium. Hundreds of fans bounced hand-crafted signs, shouting to the camera, “Happy Birthday, Nana!”, or “25 years! We made it, honey!” The buzz of the crowd, the unity wired secure by a common love and excitement, the waves, the shrieks, the smiles; I was at home! I had been seduced by the crowd and was seeing fireworks. I was no longer a lonely girl making out with my mirror; this was my first real kiss with superfandom.

(Lights dim SR. Lights on SL.)

MOM
(Dials a phone. Beat.) Jonie? (Beat.) Have you talked to Bitty? (Beat.) Did she— (Beat.) Okay, that’s what I thought. (Beat.) Yeah, it’s just hilarious. I can’t belie—what is she doing anyway? (Beat. Beat.) By herself? You can’t let her go. Keep her in the house until I can get out there. (Beat.) What do you mean what’s it to you? (Beat.) You’re kidding me. (Beat.) Fine. Whatever. Just don’t let her go. (Beat.) Yeah, I’ll check the flight schedule and call you back. (Hangs up phone.) God dammit!
(Lights dim SL. Exit MOM. Enter AUNT JONIE and BITTY. Lights on SL.)

AUNT JONIE
Get back here, you little shit.

BITTY
What?

AUNT JONIE
I’m not supposed to let you leave.

BITTY
What.

AUNT JONIE
Your mom called. Blah, blah, blah. Something about you and a fat guy. I dunno.

BITTY
What. What? (Pause.) How did she know?!

AUNT JONIE
Couldn’t say. Move over, wouldja? You’re blocking the T.V. I like this commercial.

BITTY
Whatever. You can’t stop me. I’m still going. I’m going!

AUNT JONIE
Look, I could give two shits if you go or not. You could be on your way to the gallows and I’d still have my mani-pedi at quarter-to-two. But what the hell do you think you’re gonna accomplish?

BITTY
It’s a profession of desire. Haven’t you ever loved somebody?

JONIE
I never get the chance with you taking all the good ones! (Chortles.) Who was your last lover? Ted Bundy?

BITTY
You’re thinking of Al Bundy and his name is Ed O’—whatever! I’m over him. I’m over them all, and I’m late for the taping! I will leave you to your Maury.
JONIE
Suit yourself. Wait, you gotta see this! This guy's seven feet tall and he’s married to a midget. It’s like, what the hell? He’s real tall, she’s real short. She’s a midget. Hah! Hey, pick me up some milk, would ya?

(Lights dim SL. Exit JONIE, enter WOMAN. Lights on SL.)

WOMAN
I can’t wait for Emeril to come out! A man after my own heart. My daughter and I went to his restaurant down in New Orleans last spring. Dee-lish! I have never in my life had crabcakes so good. Do you watch Emeril?

BITTY
He’s okay.

WOMAN
Who are you here to see then?

BITTY
I have made an incredible journey to see my one love, Al Roker.

WOMAN
Al Roker? The weatherman? Ha! Different strokes for different folks, I guess. You’re not gonna be a happy camper today. Al’s on leave to recover from surgery.

BITTY
Surgery?

WOMAN
Yeah, didn’t you hear? He gained all the weight back and he’s having his stomach stapled again. It is a drastic measure if you ask me. I got Emeril’s new “Lite-Eating” cookbook. Lost three pounds already. And I tell you, I have never had pruschetto so good...

(Lights dim SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SR.)

BITTY
I must have fainted. Or punched someone, because the next thing I know, the fuzz are dragging me out of Rockefeller Plaza. I couldn’t believe it! Gastric bypass? How could I not have known? My comfort soon became a dish from Ben and Jerry’s, and I wept liberally into a half-eaten scoop of something pink and chocolaty. Cursing myself and the ever-silent media for keeping Al’s operation under wraps, I noticed a man in the booth across
the restaurant poking eagerly at a melting cone with his tongue. I instantly recognized that luscious, gourmet chocolate brown skin; that big, round head, smooth and polished as the belly of a seal; that fine, wool suit, its storm cloud color screaming class and understated glamour... I knew this man because I love him.

(Lights dim SR. BITTY runs SL. Lights on SL.)

BITTY

Mr. Roker!

JUST SOME DUDE

You talking to me?

BITTY

Mr. Roker!

JUST SOME DUDE

I ain’t no Mr. Roker.

BITTY

No, I understand, Al. I know you need to lay low because of your “stomach stapling” or whatever, but really, I’m your biggest fan. I’ve come so far—

JUST SOME DUDE

Al Roker?! (Sarcastically,) Ha, ha. Haven’t heard that one before.

BITTY

Oh, I’m sure you have, I mean, you have fans all across the nation, but I am your biggest! I just adore you! Ohmygod I can’t believe this is actually happening.

JUST SOME DUDE

No, you don’t understand. I’m not—

BITTY

Oh god, how rude of me! I’m terribly sorry to interrupt you while you’re out dining. I feel so bad, but do you think you could just autograph something for me?

JUST SOME DUDE

I am not Al Roker. I don’t know if you’re trying to be funny or what. If you are, it’s not. It’s not funny. Now please just leave me alone.

BITTY

Mr. Roker. You’ve got to be kidding me. I came all the way from Ohio to see you!
JUST SOME DUDE
I don’t care where you came from. Get the hell away from me!

BITTY
I have been through hell to see you. I stole my mother’s credit card to fly to New York. I escaped the tight reigns of an evil aunt and fled to Rockefeller Plaza, where I was manhandled by a small gang of cops and thrown out into the cold streets of the big city. I put up a fight. I fought for you, Mr. Roker, and the one chance I get to ask for a measly autograph from my life’s greatest hero, you treat me like an idiot and deny your own identity? When I am clearly on to your little scheme? I cannot believe this!

JUST SOME DUDE
You are insane! (Pause.) You know what? Here. I’ll sign this napkin for you. Okay? You gotta pen? Look. Al... Ro... ker... Here. Here you go. Now please go away!

(Lights out SL. BITTY runs SR. Lights on SR.)

BITTY
I mean, of course I felt bad disturbing him playing hooky, but I couldn’t resist! It was Al Roker! In the flesh! In the flesh and blood! Al Roker! Mom was more than a bit upset that I left without informing her of my expedition and objective, but she calmed down and realized she had been overreacting when she saw this.

(Waves napkin in air like a golden ticket.)
It might be just a Ben and Jerry’s napkin, but it was Al Roker’s Ben and Jerry’s napkin. Al Roker’s napkin signed by Al Roker. The real thing! I’ll have to write him a thank-you letter...

(Lights fade.)

END

Erin Beal
In spring at last all the windows rise open
and with them all sound of spring creeps in, gently,
like roots pushing their fingers through black earth.
The whine of the whippoorwill and the titmouse’s
pecks of pitch. The clash of the neighbor’s door as it opens:
the hinges’ expectancy. Into the brilliant streets,
now crowded with sound. A long-legged man
walks his white sheep dog. Its tongue
hangs from its mouth like finely pounded leather.
At the grocery store the man strokes petal-soft mangos,
the thin, dry leaves of corn. He buys cucumbers and avocados
for the first time this year, carries them home
in a ripe paper sack, bulging forward like a pregnant belly.
At home he peels a cucumber slowly.
It clings to its skin and weeps captive-cries—
the dry knife noise, the shy shudders as the skin falls
into sink water, glowing like green glass bottles.
The man’s mustache curdles with prickles of salt,
and his shoulders heave forward with the giant weight of cutting.
On the porch the dog hears the smeared sound of many radios
from many speeding cars. The wind is rich with new scents:
young rabbits and budding oak leaves. Sweat. The dog watches
the glittering birds as attentively as a lover.
It dreams that each ragged scratch of their boney claws
reveals new birds hidden in the dirt, and that these birds too
are scratching. It dreams that it is sleeping on the porch.
Inside the house, the man does not think of his wife, whose footsteps
are as dull as an orphan’s. He does not think
of the silences between them, the quiet hum of her snores
so early that his thoughts are still fanged and wild,
still clinging to the wisps of moonlight
that trace the bathroom rug. He does not think
of her oval lips, like pears, like seeds of pomegranates.
Her soft stomach, the tender lines curving near her eyes
like garter snakes. The man
touches the moisture on his forehead, its dim coolness,
and leans against the counter. Outside he hears
a car coughing and starting. Sharp shrieks of children
racing all the way to the end of the road.
Ice becoming drips of water. Curls of leaves
left from last fall, licking new-bare legs
and periscopic maple stems. He listens
and hears Styrofoam cups scudder
across the street like legless mice.
He is not thinking of loneliness.
How he is connected
and not, drifting
through a sea of sound. The echoes.
As graceful as a hand reaching up to touch a face
and then falling.

Rebecah Pulsifer
In My Bedroom/Winter Has Been Far Too Long

even in the limelight, through shades, all white collared, in rows of school children, I seek winter’s late light, trapped in the gray ceiling, dormant like my premonitions of salvation, turning desperation into lateness. I think of intimacy: wearing another’s skin for thrill of ambiguity; a nose, a breast, the glisten of a big toe’s knuckle hair - still there was nothing I could do with my iced over bones, cracking like denial. You were what I needed when the walls of my room were lined with the flesh of my second life.

Andrew Soliday
The Pains in My Stomach

Part I

It begins as innocent
as anything might.
Drop $1309 plus one hundred
for the deposit.
And we’re on our way
There’s no stopping now
No foreseeable escape.

Boarded and strapped in
$1409 does not buy comfort.
Beer flavoured with orange
Pre-packaged meals
And Camembert delay what will
be consistently inconsistent.
And from there we go.
Never comfortable again.

Always surprising
that first warble.
And it hits, of course
inconveniently, of course
And it hurts, of course
And you look around,
on a hunt which will never end
Because, though hunt successful,
you must search your pockets
for your dignity
or a pound to hand over
to receive something less rough
yet still not soft.
I thought I heard someone say,
"There must be something in the water."
"Come on in, the water is great"
Great, describing a body of water named after a living person.
Unsettled, heaving all that might've wanted to remain at the bottom anywhere else.
No option, everyone is watching.
But you can wash off in the pool.
No one is watching you when, as you scamper off nine times, sigh.
Origin of the title, withstanding.
There must have been something in the water.

What are you to do
when you realize you've been left high and dry
or in low spirits and wet because you forgot
nothing is convenient?
Make do and pretend it is.
I sense there is a lot of pretending that there is nothing in the water.

And everything looks perfect.
Magazine cutout and everything.
Blues only made on accident or computer-aided, created.
Blues that lift the spirit.
But it could have been the salt--cliché in hand, rubbed deep into the wounds which must eventually heal.
The blues and salts that make us float are all about the water.
Things begin to settle for no reason at all.
You can smell it in the air.
It's coming, chasing the cats—
tails between their legs.
But it is enjoyable because, momentarily
things are comfortable. Easy, even.
And you could be loved but
why? Things are perfect now.
The delusion must have set in early
because I would've sworn
the water tasted sweet.
And the cats are gone.
They knew ahead of time what was to happen.
There is nothing beautiful
without pain in this place.
It was to be expected.

It was the only thing to be expected.
Waking up and feeling paralyzed
but movement was extraordinarily
evident and necessary.
Crouched and getting there
made no sense at all
but was the only option available.
We make do and move on.
We have the knowledge that even the sweetness
was enough to embitter the water.

And I strap back in
to what I hope is sanity, consistency.
What I pray will be comfortable.
But I forget that time does not stop
because I have neglected it.
My feet have made room for
the other organs which have
taken up residence in my shoes.
We are not to consume the ice.
It is the water's final disguise
as refreshing.
For every discomfort, one should hope for an intermission. Unfortunately, unstrapped and back to reality brought no comfort at all. And the truth comes out in bits and pieces but always all at once. There’s nothing in this water. It’s all you. No deception possible. Drink up while you can. Swallow whole and prepare for the next portion. There’s no water to conceal a thing.

Part II

Upon return, the pain returns—a different sort of discomfort. One that rings of permanence. Delayed again but some things never fail. Your patience does not imply you are being waited for. More uncomfortable than could ever have been imaginable. The line between a resident and visitor has become a necessary accommodation. But I must remember to contain, deep within me, anything and everything which might want to work its way out. I will surround it with the pit in my stomach that says I should be happy. It knows it will not be nurtured.
A treat at any other time has become the only means of sustenance. A pleasantry in any other place begins a sort of tragedy. Residentvisitor is uncomfortable in someone else's bed with her words in her own skin. With everything never being enough, there is some baggage that needs packing and replacing. And that needs to be enough. With plenty of time to waste and the lost effort to do so, one begins to wonder where the water has gone to.

Picking up and moving out, residentvisitor becomes renter. The change in location leaves everything to be desired because resident organs must go everywhere with renter. Now, when the pain hits there is only one place to run but not enough to run to when it's over. But it's never over. Thus continues the never-ending cycle. Some things are eternal--Like the fear in your eyes when you are asked to drink the water.

This unexpected inconvenience forces your temperature over today's weather forecast. Hot and blue. Though different, still uncomfortable, finally alone but unfortunately, in need of another. And it is, perhaps, this dependence which makes renter realize she wanted to be an owner all along. That, or the phone call. Whichever it may be, she began to debate her opinion of the necessity of the water.
This one came on with a shove.
And a ball of emotion held
in the tears left unshed
and the words left unspoken.
But you begin to wonder why
because here nothing can be held
onto or in. Not one thing.
Adamantly trying to hold onto
the thoughts that will only snowball
in a place that will ultimately melt
everything that means anything.
The water holds any tears that may have escaped
and the dreams that were shed
long before memory was ever acquired.

You begin to learn to coexist with
a nuisance that will never disappear
and allow a comfortable cohabitation.
As if playing hide and seek with an
insolent child who may or may not be
aware of what he’s doing, its presence, following
the nervous countdown, brings you to
your knees where you stay until you are told
you’ve become accustomed to a fallacy
and must let go. The water will accept anything
you can release for the time being.

Giving in, getting up, falling
down the stairs into a car
rushing to beat the clock which
sounds a meal you will not be eating
you prepare to let down the only
guard you have left.
You watch carefully, fearfully
as they try to plunge the water into you
through your wrist but
can’t because your body
knows better.
Pack it up and pack it in. 
The good and the bad and the useless are stored within the memory and recollection of what it feels like. Strapped in again you're on your way to the first world you've ever known to the people who won't understand your new found adoration of water from the tap.

Theresa Thomas
In Sight of the White Cathedral.

There's this church I saw that had a gap where a brick left its square hole for ideas to trickle through. But there were other bricks behind it. In this city tall monks in masonry bibs buy muffins, rolling the paper off in rapturous swifts. The Priest of down town, of sullied corners, of alleyway salvations, hugs the children in pursuit of pursuit and at night clips the hairs off the tops of his toes. My hands take me there, over "Heaven's this way" Blvd, gripping the railing of a one way bus. Beside me two fathers discourse what's to be known as worse: being the sword that slays, or the sad scabbard which holds the bloody blade. Soon they will turn and notice my stare.

Nathan Lipps
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