

THE BREAD LOAF JOURNAL

VOLUME IV | SUMMER 2017



WRITINGS FROM THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

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Introduction

Welcome to the 2017 Bread Loaf Journal: Writings from the School of English. Stacia Bowley and I had the great pleasure of reading all of the excellent and unconventional work that you submitted, and the challenge of narrowing down that field. The works in this journal vary widely across genre, style, and topic, although they fall roughly into three categories: nature, love, and society. They ask us to look again, and look differently, at ourselves and the world that surrounds us. I hope they make you think, wonder, and eventually, write back.

—Lauren Frantz, *co-editor*

The Roger Tory Peterson Field Guide to Trees that Rhyme

NICHOLAS SIRIANNO

Carolina buckthorn
Labrador tea
Sweetleaf
Sweetbell
Bog rosemary

Gumbo-limbo
Bitterbush
Inkwood
Pepper tree
Terebinthifolius

Big flower paw paw
Coco plum
Buttonwood
Princewood
Possomhaw viburnum

Sparkleberry Smoketree
Corkwood
Gum
Chokecherry Hornbeam
Rhododendron

Prince tree
Princes tree
Loblolly pine
Nannyberry Red bud
Wooly pipe vine

White ash
Black ash
Green ash and Blue
Pumpkin Carolina
And Ashleaf too

Hobblebush
Arrowwood
Squashberry black
Maple, Willow, Sycamore
Poison sumac

Hawthorn
Margret
Washington moss
Tree-of-Heaven Devilwood
St. Andrews Cross

Honeysuckle
Woodbine
Pale yellow rock
Swamp Bella Northern
Common lilac

Sand cherry
Black cherry
Greenberry Bristle
Supplyjack Jack pine
Moonseed Thistle

Pussywillow
Catgrape
Wolfberry Dogwood
Troutlilly Toadflax
Goatsbeard and Foxglove

My Father Splitting Wood

BY FORREST BROWN

There is a pause as he brings the ax-head
up and holds it there—
His t-shirt sticking
to his sides and upper chest
small droplets of sweat
hanging from his chin
his arms shaking slightly
the veins in his muscles
like exposed roots bursting
through a layer of packed dirt—

Then a swing,
the ax-head in the stump,
and a block of birch-wood tumbles to each side.

White Bird, Golden Cage

D.T. BURTCH

My nose is always the first to recognize the cold. It rushes through like a chimney sweep knocking any sediment loose. Greg always says he hates the winter, but there is no other time of year that you can feel this clean. He came on a few walks with me after our son Henry was born, but he would always make me sack Henry along in the Tough Traveler. Greg’s back is always preventing him from doing something he’d “love to do, but just can’t.” I enjoyed taking them down to Marble Beach after night snow and hike through the forest to the shore. The lake brings a slight tinge of humidity to the pure winter air. If it is windy enough, the breakers float mist in to the shore and it feels like inhaling tiny little ice crystals. Henry and I still walk here.

Walks have, for a long while, been a time of reflection and mindfulness necessary to take my mind garbage out to the curb. When I need to get out of the house, Henry and I hop in the van and head to Marble Beach. This is where I watched him learn what squirrels were, how the tide worked, what oak trees were as he traced the veins of the leaves, put them up to his scrunched nose, and sniff. Today was perfect. The tangle of branches above us acquiesced to the white sunlight, a framework for a beautiful canopy without the canopy. Except there was a canopy as we approached the end of the forest. We stepped onto the sand and turned around to see the Lake Erie tree icicles. This happened on occasion if there was strong wind off the lake during the night and carried large amounts of mist from the waves inland. It also had to be well below freezing for the initial crystallization to happen, but once it did the morning sun unveiled something like Superman’s Fortress of Solitude.

“Holy cow, Mom. This is something special.” He was always saying things like this. He definitely did not get his dad’s mindfulness. His hand reached up for mine. The dancing light was mesmerizing, and the closer I looked, glints of red jumped from the bright whites. I squinted and could see patches of the ice covered in shiny crimson blotches. Henry saw it too.

“What’s that?” he pointed to a lower branch on a frozen old oak. Henry had long ago left his cute point when he never really intensely pointed at anything. There used to be slack in his wrist. Today his arm looked like a hunting dog.

“What’s what, honey?” I prompted.

“That orange and red thing on this branch,” he shuffled closer to give more exact coordinates. I could now see the orange trapped in the red. My father had told me a story about this once. The birds trapped in the ice.

My father was the most pleasant man I ever encountered. I think that is where Henry gets his tender little heart. He was a repairman for Bay Village Windows and always came home with stories about his day at work. All three of us greeted him at the door waiting to be regaled about the day’s interactions and characters. The day he told me the story of the birds, all three of us (my brother, my sister, and myself) greeted him at the door per usual, and he didn’t tell us anything. He simply took off his hat and gloves, put his hand on the back of my head, and kissed the top of it. He did it to Danielle and Nathan as well. Something in the kiss made me afraid to ask about his day, but he was breaking a time-honored ritual. What was dad doing all day? We deserved to know!

That night when he came to read and tuck me in, I asked about the anomaly. Why hadn’t he mused to us about the happenings of a window repairman?

“It was just a tough day, honey. I didn’t want to talk about it when I came home.” He leaned back against my pillows with me and cracked open *Look Out For Pirates*.

“Can you tell me the stories now? We don’t have to read.”

I could sense the hesitation in my father. It wasn’t in his voice. His eyes wandered off in the distance when he was thinking. The same way my eyes wandered into the distance, focusing on frozen bird feet. Then he extended his arm above my head and I leaned into his chest.

“Called on a lake house today,” he started. Then he took a deep breath, “and, a very nice lady named Sandy showed me around where she needed to repair some windows with a little moisture rot. Y’know how I’ve told you about lake houses and moisture rot?” He was always making sure I remembered the tricks of the window repair trade.

“Yeah, it usually happens on the lake side.”

“Bingo. So she takes me back to her kitchen, where the window I’m supposed to look at is, and this window is enormous. It is a beautiful window. One single pane, four by eight feet, and you can see the tree, the lake, everything. Sandy pointed out to me that the Lake Erie icicles showed up last night” Usually during these stories his free hand gestured at the wide landscape he was describing and his fingers trickled to make the icicles. Tonight it just wrapped and around and hugged me. “I started to look around the trim when I noticed

the strangest thing. I pointed out to the icicles and asked Sandy what the spots of red were all over the trees.” My father squeezed my arm and paused. “She told me that when the Lake Erie icicles come in from the lake, sometimes birds perched there overnight don’t realize what’s happening to the trees, and when day comes, they are frozen to the branches. You sure you wanna hear this?” I wasn’t, but I was.

“Yes, Dad. You can tell me.”

“She said that when they try to fly away, they struggle and struggle until, eventually they just separate themselves from their legs.” He gave me another comforting squeeze.

“So they just have to fly for the rest of their life?”

“That’s right, Squirt. It was just sad, that’s why I didn’t want to talk about it earlier. Plus I didn’t think your brother or sister would have wanted to hear that story.”

“Probably not.”

I thought of the futility in my father’s eyes when he decided to tell me. I felt his squeeze and looked at Henry jumping and pointing at the bloodstained icicle.

I started singing, “*White bird in a golden cage, on a winter’s day...*”

“Mom, quit playing around! I think this is blood!”

“*White bird in a golden cage, alone. White bird in a golden cage, on a winter’s day, alone...*”

Eventually I sang it enough that he couldn’t do anything but join me. We skipped and sang our way back to the van.

As May

NICHOLAS SIRIANNO

Green the field and ferry wind
the Ferris ripple that round and dimmed
by dandy thicket and cricket grove
of berry, thorn, and woven clove
a field kiss of meadowlarks
that flit beside the woody dark
and dampened hill of spiders webs
that fall apart as morning ebbs.

When the cloak and lark of gummy clouds
over shadow laden hills of cows
and field mice that crawl and bound
through the vetch and flowers of the ground
see the wind of morning grey
and the heaving in the brake and hay
the smolder in the corner skys
that sulk and metamorphosize
to shape and shifting blues of grey
a wounded sky that’s bruised and frayed
bring the night to mornings day
and close the Virgin eyes of May.

The Stone Iris

KATHARINE NORTON

There was a birdbath in the backyard that the birds never used.
Its basin, a concave stone iris, was technically severed from its stand,
but the thick undergrowth held it loftily and Grecianly
in place.

We—
the one who could see into the basin,
the one who could almost see into the basin,
and the ones who could not see into the basin—
inhabited the undergrowth
on Saturdays and Sundays.

Believing below the bushes and inventing in the ivy,
we built our premises with an eye on story and sanctuary,
erecting a palace to match our pillar.

It is impossible to know how much time could have passed this way,
how long the basin could have held on.
But what we do know is that, on a Monday when we were not there,
Daddy axed down the bushes and ripped up the ivy,
because he could not see what we had built.

And after he finished raking, piling, and bagging the undergrowth—
and since the birds never used it—
he lifted the teetering basin off its stand
and placed it

on the newly cleared ground.

Rift Asteroid Eros

HIMALI SINGH SOIN



3D print of asteroid Eros, provided by NASA.gov in two halves, cast in terra-cotta; 1 mi = 1 cm; may have led to the extinction of the dinosaurs”

Keep [the] Bees

H. E. BALLARD

The modern-day Top Bar is a trapezoidal box. Unlike traditional Langstroth hives, Top Bars compel bees to build their own honeycomb down from the top. Some say this makes the honeybee a more hardy species. Chas Mraz, a 3rd-generation beekeeper in Vermont, uses traditional Langstroths. “Bees don’t like to build down,” he says.

∞

Dr. George Makol, Immunologist:
“Don’t leave your Epi-Pen in the car.”

A lot of bees died recently. If they had been human the headline would read “global pandemic” and the World Health Organization would be coordinating the response. Pests, pesticides, or pathogens might be the cause, but no one really knows, and no one’s putting real money behind investigative research. Chas Mraz owns hives in Vermont from the town of Middlebury up to the Canadian border and used to consider a ten-percent over-winter loss unlucky, but now the loss is up to 30%. He likens it to the soldiers at Fort Ticonderoga who died of dysentery inside the camp instead of succumbing to battle wounds out on the job.

Chas Mraz’s grandfather was Charles. Charles began keeping bees in 1919 in New York City at age 14, but lived most of his life in Middlebury, Vermont. His barn-like workshop is on the east side of Washington Street Extension. Middlebury memorialized Charles with a marble monument in the center of town. It would be gratifying to think bees use the honeycomb-shaped marble slab as a way-stop during their daily work, for Charles was the “Bee Man” and an apitherapist. He saw the potential of bee venom as an antidote for arthritic pain. In his 1995 book *Health and the Honeybee*, he chronicled acquaintances he’d treated with direct-stinging. To his disappointment, patients got amnesia when it came to crediting bees for their cures. No matter, Charles invented a process for extracting venom from live bees and his family business, Champlain Valley Apiaries, continues to sell freeze-dried *Apis mellifera* venom to people, pretty much everywhere but an awful lot goes to Asia where they have greater respect for traditional medicine.

#

Bees have been around forever. The fossilized bee found in Burma got stuck in resin, now amber, 100 million years ago. Egyptians domesticated bees in 1st century B.C. but no one knows how. In 62 A.D., Seneca wrote in one of his *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, “Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari” (Bees, as they say, we ought to learn from). In medieval times, farmers kept bees in pottery vessels or hollowed logs. When beekeeping came to the Virginia Colony from England in 1622, keepers used skeps. Skeps are conical baskets woven from straw, the image you see on honey pots. In the wild, bees take up residence in tree holes or earthen burrows and anyone foraging to harvest honey wrecks the honeycomb and risks being stung.

In 1852, a Philadelphia man named L.L. Langstroth designed a system of stackable boxes that allows access to bees and honey without causing damage to the honeycomb. The Langstroth is probably what you think of when you envision a bee hive. The base, a 10-inch tall wooden box with hand-holds, is the brood chamber; inside are ten slide-out frames on which bees construct honeycomb, lay eggs, and deposit honey. On top goes a 5-inch tall expansion box called a “super”; the beekeeper adds supers as the bees make honey; in good years, he stacks them higher than his head.

Analogies between people and bees date back to Ancient Greece and Rome. Mostly it is admiration for bees’ diligence. Virgil in his 29 B.C. *Georgics* made a practical case for admiring “the natural endowments Jupiter himself has given bees.” Aristotle commended their work-ethic as a model for men, not realizing that the king is actually a queen and the workers are female.

Bernard Mandeville in his 1714 *Fable of the Bees* cited bees as justification for a sort of Adam-Smith-style capitalism founded on self-interest. Modern-day animal behaviorist Thomas Seeley, in *Honeybee Democracy*, likened bee swarms to the human brain and suggested decision-making could improve if we were to emulate bee behavior.

∞

“Bees are not like people,” says Chas Mraz, grandson of a world-famous beekeeper.

If humans see bees as a model for what can be achieved through cooperation it is because honeybees are single-minded creatures, who, in a manner, adhere to Malcom Gladwell’s 10,000-hours-of-practice principle.

“Bees are genetically designed for one purpose. They are complete socialists and totally work for the colony. There’s no council headed by a queen.”

Make a beeline.

Be a busy bee.

Buzz off!

“Maybe we could design a robot to be like bees—to work with no complaint?”

One day, because it’s summer vacation, Chas-Paul, who is 11, comes out to help his father at the “Hemingway” yard, one of 32 apiary locations operated by his family’s company. Chas-Paul carries stacks of beeswax-laden supers—the dresser-drawer-looking honey-storage components—from a truck, through a tall unmown field, over a fallen tree, to a cracked concrete slab that is the abandoned foundation of a milking barn and home to some hives. Chas-Paul wears khaki pants and a white long-sleeved shirt plus a bee-veil, a safari style hardhat draped with netting and threaded with a long string tied around his torso. Chas-Paul’s father keeps a supply of full-body coveralls but Chas-Paul, like his father, isn’t wearing one.

To disarm the bees’ pheromone intruder signal, beekeepers rely on smokers, medieval contraptions consisting of a stovepipe mini-furnace and bellow. At the back of the pickup truck, Mraz crams mounds of sisal twine salvaged from hay-baling friends into his smoker and lights it with a kitchen match until it smolders. He pumps the bellow like an accordion and a heavy white smoke swirls from the spout and drifts through the air. He shoves a crow-bar hive tool into the back pocket of his tan trousers which are tucked into gray socks. His plain short-sleeved white t-shirt leaves his arms bare. His bald head is bare too. He tromps through the waist-high grass and prods Chas-Paul to keep coming with the supers.

∞

R.E. Snodgrass, in his 1925 text *Anatomy and Physiology of the Honeybee*, wrote that the instinct of the bee mimics “a lowly developed power of reasoning.” *The Mayflower Descendant: A Quarterly Magazine of Pilgrim Geneology and History* claims early settlers considered bees to be part of the family, not property like livestock. On the occasion of a birth or marriage, they made sure to tell the bees the news. This man-bee reciprocity is universal. Fruitful honeycomb is the intersection of strong-willed keepers, who are mostly male, and strong-willed bees, who are decidedly female. But, the keeper is chaperone, not jailer, for no farm fence keeps honeybees in.

“I’m not even sure ‘owning’ is the right word: if I do my job, they stay put.”

∞

Dense rows of blueberry shrubs loaded with summer fruit border the “Winery” bee yard. In the midst of twenty or so hive stacks, each painted in a faded shade of sage, brick-red, sienna, cream, or sky-blue, single bees dart in the air and piles of bees cluster on the ground; a carpet of bees vibrates on an exposed hive, its roof removed. Darting bees overhead make the blue sky into a polka-dot canopy. The buzz is a low, persistent drone. Bee yards have borders but no barriers; bees can go where they like. It feels like chaos barely reined in.

Mraz opens a hive and pulls out a frame of honeycomb. The edge wood is dark-varnished with a shiny coat of propolis but the comb is unexpectedly barren. He sticks a twig into a cell and wipes the snot-like larva on the hive roof: fatal foul brood. Impossible to anticipate. He’ll burn the contaminated hive.

Those who are called to keep bees are resourceful. Money is not the goal. Honey or pollen or venom might not even be the goal. Beekeeping is a calling. Mraz contends beekeepers are a curious and intellectual bunch. Calm too, I would guess. The bees are free to go; the keeper is free to follow. If it is a thinking person’s endeavor—anticipating, sensing, knowing, responding—what does the bee think?

The bees likely recognize Mraz with their keen sense of smell. He’s their friend, yet he gets stung.

“I get beat up by the little girls all the time.”

Does he mind?

He doesn’t mind.

There is risk; there is reward. To an outsider, there is danger: apiphobia. Mostly, the fear is of being stung. For some a warranted fear, albeit in the midst of contradiction. What other wild creature evokes panic yet produces domesticated agricultural bounty of Elysian distinction? The yellowjacket, which is a wasp, is often misidentified as a bee. They are not the same.

Yellowjackets are skinny and shiny; bees are fat and hairy. Yellowjackets eat insects; bees eat nectar. Yellowjackets wield a smooth, multi-use stinger; bees use a barbed, single-use stinger.

Only bees make honey. Yet, wasps and bees have a similar impact on people: the sting hurts and the venom can trigger anaphylaxis. Notwithstanding, like me, you can be allergic to wasps but not bees.

Those who are allergic can be injected with venom to become less allergic, a process called immunotherapy. The mechanism by which the hyposensitization occurs is not understood. Beekeepers acquire immunity to bee venom naturally, in the line of duty. Cause and effect: the layman tends to fear stinging insects rather than risk the sting’s repercussion. The beekeeper with a strong determination to engage, a conviction for what must be done, has an innate understanding of how a closed ecosystem operates: no gain without pain.

∞

If I could be a bee, it would not be for the philosopher’s praise of my organizational skills, but so I could fly free.

If I could be a bee, I’d fly from the hive straight away to the field, to the forage, to as far away as I could skidoodle.

Not the queen, not the drone, just an every-day worker bee, is what I’d be.

Crowded in,

making honey for a boy to eat on his toast.

If I were a bee, I don’t think the wasp would be so interested in me.

∞

It seems to be the case for the Mraz men to venture into the world only to yield to the call of the bees when the head beekeeper job opens. Charles senior ran the apiary business for 60 years; Charles turned it over to his son William who, up to that point, had been a weapon systems engineer; William turned it over to his son Chas, an NYU grad working construction management in NYC. It was a way-of-life change for Chas, not only because he moved from a city of 8 million to a town of 8 thousand, but because it’s agriculture.

“The work is completely unpredictable. I can’t order another hundred thousand from Shanghai,” said Chas, head beekeeper of Champlain Valley Apiaries.

For generations, gentleman apiarists augmented their hobby gardens with bees. According to a 1915 issue of *Country Gentleman*, women beekeepers did it, too. Farmers and beekeepers exist in a symbiotic relationship. They sustain their connection by agreement to an ancient social contract. Mraz pays no rent. He delivers annual honey to the farmers on whose land his hives reside. And yet, he and the landowner rely on the other in a way that transcends a barter transaction. Farmers plant seeds; bees pollinate crops; fields grow flowers; bees collect nectar; honey fills hives; Mraz extracts honey; a queen lays eggs; repeat.

During the summer months, 50,000 bees inhabit a hive. Twenty or so hives make up one of Mraz’s bee-yards, which constitutes an apiary. Together, the yards are the Champlain Valley Apiaries. There are sunny days and rainy days. When the barometer falls, the bees fly home.

∞

Mraz walks into a meadow, thick with grass and blazoned with purple and white clover and leggy alfalfa, dotted with tiny violet blooms; he stares at the ground and points to the bounty that predicts the honey’s ebb and flow. He’s quiet. Despite the abundance of bees nearby, the air is still.

“I’m looking to see what’s coming next.”

He looks up. He compliments the old-time farmer of these particular fields. The longer the pasture is left un-mown the better for bees. In his grandfather’s day, the Mraz family had a thousand hives; today it’s down to about 600. By starting nucleus colonies—“nucs”—Mraz helps the bees strengthen their ranks.

He opens his metal contractor clipboard and checks the penciled notes of data for this hive visit. He runs his finger down the list of 32 yards, some established 60 years ago. Most are long-time farms in the Champlain Valley of New England for which there exists no modern-day record.

“You’d have to be an old Vermonter to know,” says Mraz.

He refers to the yards by location:

Whiting,	Town Line,	Nordic,
Defao,	Panton,	Whaley,
Buttolph,	Slang,	Bostwick,
Kent Wright,	Vergennes,	Dr. Collins,
Hemingway,	Redd,	Lindburgh,
Store,	Waltham,	Lynn Lang,
Nate Smith,	Gov’t Farm,	Sheldon,
N. Bridport,	Wales,	Morses Line,
Old Lady’s,	James,	Chipman Hill, and Bill.
Fish & Game,	Winery,	
New N. Bridport,	Berry Farm,	

Mraz explains the names.

“Bostwick. Our grandfathers were great friends.”

Lynn Lang is an old local beekeeper whose hives Mraz took over recently. Chipman Hill is Mraz’s house, the one his grandfather built. Nate Smith is another old beekeeper, dead now.

∞

In the warehouse on Washington Street, the aroma of beeswax greets visitors at the door; it’s pure and cheerful like fresh fruit and, at the same time, deep and timeless, like the cool cellars of a French winery. Standing with Chas, I hear his venerated history; it is the story of honeybee humanity. In the next room, Cee (pronounced “sea”) operates a 1970s-era bottling apparatus, designed in-house and kept around because it works. Cee works for Chas and with practiced finesse fills plastic bear squeeze bottles with liquid honey: position, foot pedal, squelp, release, yellow screwcap. One by one.

Chas talks about why the bee yards were sited where they remain today. A good site has nearby forage, access to water, and a tree line on the northwest edge to shield from the elements. The bees don’t ask for much. The cure for the bees is the cure for the land; caring for the land is caring for the bees. The venom is its own antidote.

He continues, about the bee-yard names. “Government Farm hasn’t been a government farm for years. Winery is a winery and the old lady is long dead.” says Chas Mraz, a Vermont guardian of bees, who soon will turn fifty.

“Old lady is my favorite.”

a seedling now sprouting where the tongue
should be

SAMANTHA BRIGGS

Only and always this time of year
a golden pink wetness fills the AM air and me
with the familiar and impossible combination of heaviness and hope.

I cough a cloud of dirt to greet the day
and choke on the p o t e n t i a l o f m o r n i n g
listen to the silence and notice:

hiding between the walls of my ribcage buried beneath the soil in my lungs lives
the t r e m b l i n g d e s i r e
of something forgotten planted long ago
(some thing lost, longing to grow).

I stumble around mouth gaping
 open and gasping
(for air, for water, for sunlight, for you).

The bitter sweet grassy goodness surrounds my senses with summer
still weeds must be pulled at the root.

Eyes water at the effort
of chomping on leaves tugging the stem two fingers fondle
the back of my throat
 Gaggling I choke on green saliva

spitting tiny grass shards from my mouth with every attempt to talk
atyou
 while little green morsels speckle your face
and I can’t help but laugh
 you were always so g r e e n w i t h e n v y.

Laughing and laughing for days and days
Vines growing now
 the laughter i t f a d e s.

Taxidermy

CLAIRE BRISLIN

if you had felt the tightening finery
of these tanned hand stitches

the precision of the drill securing
antlers that branch into rivers of alabaster

you would know the gentle tactility of love

black marble sockets still
reflect your image
without letting in the light

and you search for answers
in the wrinkled dark leather of my mouth

not knowing that the cavity of me
drowns in polyurethane

so you run

from my phantom limbs
from the tufted shock of white throat

Wolfsnare Creek

HUGH KOEZE



The Lover’s Discourse:¹ Fragments on Liminality

BETH ROBBINS

Death unites as well as separates; it silences all paltry feeling. (Honore de Balzac)

[liminality]

On September 9, 2015, Steve was killed in a car crash.

Steve was my husband. Steve was the father of our three children.

I live in the liminal.

I am neither fully present in the now, lost in the past, or looking ahead. But moving between. Perpetually moving.

And yet I sense this time as a threshold.

And also a hot mess.

It’s a space that I’ve never consciously been in before. A space without boundaries. The liminal. There’s no heaven above and hell below. At least not as far as I can discern. As far as I can tease out, it’s really all on the same plane and is, rather, a matter of perception. It’s an ability to move between, to listen intuitively with the right brain. To feel the warmth and joy that is Steve.

And to feel the despair. The panic. The inability to breathe.

To feel the crashing of the prison door. Shutting me out. To say, he is no longer here physically.

¹ Thanks to Roland Barthes for the title idea.

I depart as air . . . I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you²

Derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold, liminal is a transitional or initial stage of a process. It means a position in more than one realm. Or, in a sense, in no realm. Pure potential. Limitless energy. It recognizes boundaries and yet exists in the boundless. It is sometimes concluded to be the realm of the imagination. I experience it as a reality, almost tangible.

On the night of Steve’s death I was thrust into a realm I had previously intellectualized but was now forced to live in.

The logic of Steve’s accident was nonexistent. Impossible.

The details: Steve was heading home from a business meeting. Driving his bright yellow VW Beetle. He left a message for me, saying he’d be home in an hour. When that hour passed and then another and then another, and my attempts to reach him failed, I began to experience a fear, a panic that I had never known.

Thirty plus years of life with Steve. I was 21 when we met. I grew up with him. I would frequently say that Steve saved me. And I meant it. I still do.

² Whitman, “Song of Myself.”

When the police officers arrived at my house the air was thick. I felt I could not breathe. When they knocked at the door I thought I would not answer. I knew what they were going to say.

“Your husband, Steve Meyerowitz, was killed in a head-on collision.”

(My husband was killed? In a car accident?)

NO.

This is not my story.

This cannot be my story.

Time for a pause. An intermission, of sorts.

[this is not my story]

This is not my story.

It was a dark and stormy night. Sometimes a thing happens on a dark and stormy night. Sometimes it is only possible to destroy a life on a night that is dark and so very very stormy.

It was a humid night. A storm most definitely approaching. September. I was sitting on the couch, waiting for him to get back home. I was restless. Couldn’t settle with a book. So I started streaming an old television show, but I couldn’t focus.

This is not my story. This cannot be my story.

Begin here. This is my story:

Steve ran out happily to wish our son and me well as we drove off to school. I waved. Impatient. I was running late. No time to stop for a hug and another wave.

“I’ll see you tonight after my meeting,” he called out.

This is my story:

September 9 was the first day of school. It was a good beginning. I spoke to the students in the words I wanted. I spoke about attentiveness, and I quoted Dante and Annie Dillard. I spoke about the world sparking and flaming. I spoke about being lost but with attention finding a way out. Of the truth that we live in a created world.

This was my story.

But then it wasn’t my story.

Steve didn’t arrive home.

A little late was something I was used to, but hours passed and I couldn’t reach him. And then there was a feeling of unreality. I felt a haunting. The atmosphere shifted. I felt I had stepped outside of life and was entering another realm.

And then the knock on the door.

And a police car in the driveway.

If I didn’t open the door this would not be my story.

My story would pick up as it had been.

Like this.

He would come home. We would sit and talk.

But, they knocked again. I went to the door.

Two policemen.

They asked if I knew him.

This is not my story.

No, this would not be my story. This is not.

This is.

This.

He was dead.

This story that was not my story involved my husband dying in a car crash.

This is not my story.

My story is this:

Steve comes home. He’s smiling. Calls out with his usual good cheer, “Hi, Buddy!”

That is my story. Laughter.

Piano playing and singing. Irving Berlin. Cheek to Cheek. Dancing in the living room. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers sitting in a car on a ferry. Thick dense (impenetrable) fog. Singing. They Can’t Take That Away from Me.

My story?

Good food cooking. Chaos in the kitchen. Magic emerging. Fighting. Making up. Making plans and promises. Apologizing.

Reaching out for his hand. And holding it.

Seeing him walking ahead and then reaching back to me. Reaching back. Always reaching back.

My story is this:
Loving and taking the moments for granted.

And then the plot changes. There is shock and fragmentation.

No, this story is not mine.

The story that places my vibrant husband tenderly lovingly in a shroud and then down into his grave.

Trying desperately to live the unacceptable. Experiencing the reality of something unreal, essentially impossible.

And my story is not my story as I had been consciously crafting it, but the story that I am given and that becomes my story.

[chaos]

I was thrust into chaos. Nothing made sense. I was utterly unmoored. Lost. This could not be. I understood chaos as the realm of the unformed, but with creative potential. I understood that it is from chaos that creation can occur.

Logic cuts. It dissects. It analyzes. It distances the subject (me) from the (desired) object (Steve). But by quieting the brain, a way out or a way through is possible. The binary is a trap. Polarities exist, but either extreme results in a disconnect of some sort. Life requires movement and change. Stasis is death.

I found myself through Keats. Or, perhaps more accurately, I began to find myself.
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

[paradox]

I live in a liminal space. Simultaneously existing in the past and in the (paradoxical shocking undigestible joyful magical inconceivable) present.

I look to be in the now, to open to what is rather than long for what is not and what cannot be.

It is not possible through logic. nor, in truth, through feeling. It is possible, though.

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:/Already with thee!³

Is Keats the thread? Does Keats allow me a path out of this labyrinth? Silence the self to allow the other to sing in full-throated ease.

But there is a limitation for me. Silence the self? The poet is named as the most unpoetical of all creation.

The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all god’s Creatures . . . When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me [so] that I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children.

This is your way, dear John. Was some of your suffering caused by the annihilation of yourself, or was that the precise path out of the suffering for you? Be as the flower receiving the bee.

But this is not my way. Not exactly. Not entirely.

My way is related to the hieroglyph. The secret hidden and yet in full view, and potentially decipherable. Foucault speaks to this, referring to Paracelsus.

It is not God’s will that what he creates for man’s benefit and what he has given us should remain hidden . . . And even though he has hidden certain things, he has allowed nothing to

³ Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale.”

remain without exterior and visible signs in the form of special marks—just as a man who has buried a hoard of treasure marks the spot that may find it again.⁴

It is reaching outside the self for something that exists within the self. When I yearn for Steve, look for signs, lose myself in the immensity of what is not, I drown. But when I allow—without grasping—the images or feelings or music to fill me, then I am with Steve. I am already with Steve. But something more seems needed for me.

[the first (liminal) encounter: whitman]

He was old when he visited me. Unkempt. Untidy. I could smell him. His hands were gnarled, stained with ink.

He gazed at me. He saw me. He reached out his arms. And I was held. And comforted.

They are alive and well somewhere;

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,

And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,

And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward . . . and nothing collapses,

And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.⁵

[paradox, continued]

⁴ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and other Writings*, p. 866.

⁵ Whitman, “Song of Myself.”

Be in the world but not of the world. At least not only. Living something beyond words. How do I explain the bliss that comes? How do I speak to the joy in this apparent horror? In the days after Steve’s unexpected shocking death I felt cocooned. Shock, I suppose. But more than shock, too. I felt a hum, I felt a tingling, and a sense of immense bliss. How curious to find myself smiling through my despair. How beyond logic to feel Steve present and loving and listening. Listening.

Everything is in flux. Anything fixed is dead. Like his corpse. Unmoving. Heavy. But transformation, metamorphosis exists.

Logic and sermons never convince,

The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.⁶

The trap of the dualistic approach freezes me. The either/or. The yes/no. The black/ white. The living/the dead.

What is the answer? Both, and more.

But I always return to Keats.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and lethe-wards had sunk:

Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

⁶ Whitman, “Song of Myself.”

But being too happy in thine happiness,—⁷

The immediacy of the first experience reading these words is what I recall. With the first words something happened to me.

(Why even then? Before all this happened.)

The words penetrated, transported. They (for whatever reason) moved into me and took me outside of myself and into the realm of the other.

And I felt happy.

[keats in the liminal]

I had passed a restless night. Unable to sleep. Uncomfortable. Yearning for what is not, but holding on to what is and what might be . . .

I suppose I must have slept. Even briefly.

Because when I opened my eyes, he was there, sitting on the window seat. Slight of build. John Keats. Yes, I knew he was short—only five feet—but he was more fairy-like than I had expected.

My excitement overwhelmed. My awe stopped speech.

He was sad. Tender. Seemed to be longing.

No words. From either of us.

I looked away for a moment. Dear young poet, I thought.

Then, he was gone.

⁷ Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale.”

Nuclear Family

SCOTT S. CLAUSEN

We share with the mouse
I heard dying in the kitchen
this morning a common
relative who survived
a mass extinction so
we shouldn’t be surprised
to wake up and find
the hungry traps licked clean.

Sure we could get a cat
but how will you feel when
it leaves a severed head
in your shoe or a corpse
in the bed. The idea
there’s a single solution
is the kind of thinking
that leads to atomic

warfare, which I’m convinced
wouldn’t solve our mouse
problem and good thing too
because then from what would
placental life bounce back
if the bomb were to drop.
But I’ll concede it’s hard
to sleep with the scratching

in the walls, a reminder
we’re surrounded by heaps
of beating hearts that’ll find
a way into our warmth
whether I spend my whole
weekend sealing up cracks
with toxic foam or not.

In a Matter of Time

TARYN HEON

I will tell my daughter she isn’t mine (once she can understand, of course); I will tell her that she is an overture, hand-offering, from a humble universe, and whenever she feels small, I will tell her that she *is* small;

I will show her things to scale so that she never feels too great, but tiny and insulated, by galaxies, Earth, animals and flora; she will be warm. Her hands will be cold and nervous. She will ask me if she’s special, if she’s unique, and I will tell her “Yes, here is proof of it. The probability of you is precious. It isn’t made of matter. But, put it in your pocket, hold it like a chick, and show it to no one. And she will ask “why not?” and I will say, “Good, keep questioning.”

When she trips, I will pick her up—the fall is painful enough, never mind the getting-back-up: scuffs on her pants; rickety legs; a wet face, blotchy and red. She is just beginning to learn of shame, and I am just beginning to try, unsuccessfully, to resolve it for her.

She will be grounded, but, predisposed to cynicism. First, she will be exuberant and glad. I will watch her and clear my throat like my mom always did when nervous; my eyes will travel around her body drawing a clear shield. At some point, she will question that body. “Stop questioning,” I will say then, much later—not quite yet.

At a certain point, she will come home from school and ask me, “What’s matter?” and I will say, “nothing and everything,” while wiping dust from my eye, drawing a circle in the air with the palm of my hand. Her eyes will attach to the motion.

I will blink a very long blink before changing out of my nightgown. She will have gone to high school and learned subtleties like half-smiles. She will have developed self-doubt. Her thighs and breasts will have honeycomb tissue. She will test out nodding her head and saying “mmhmm” while on the telephone, and eventually it will sink in. I will say something is important, crucial even, in an erudite way while she’s in a sour mood—a mistake on my part—and she will say, “what does it matter?”

She will put honey in her tea and ask me if I would like another cup when I visit her apartment. I will feel like a guest in her home, and I will ask her where her spoons are. “We must go over these important matters,” she will say in a British accent, with a wry smile. Sarcasm will suit her. She’ll start teaching me things. She will be sure of everything but herself. Her sarcasm will have soft-

ened into a knowing carelessness, and I will admire her. At this point in time she will have been questioning her body, also asking too many questions about existential matters.

One day, I will find her in bed with the curtains drawn. In her eyes, I will see that the Earth had taken a considerable toll. The life insulating her will have thinned. People and things will have hung on by a velvet petal and she will find it romantic but devastating. There will be no such color or word as “black;” there will be space and no language and no fossils. She will tell me, “everything is the matter” with her palms wiping the air, her eyes rolling backwards to dam up the waterway. In her eyes, she will see not even an echo or a specter of matter. My arms squeezed tight, and my voice, with all softness and concern, will never resolve that emptiness for her.

Someone or something will hold her upright. There will be more scuffs on her pants; rickety legs; a wet face, blotchy and red. They will gaze into her eyes and, they will add to the proof of her probability that rests in her pocket:

“What’s matter?” they will say, and she will say, “nothing and everything,” while wiping particles from her eye, drawing a circle in the air with the palm of her hand.

They will tug on her pant pocket and ask to be held. “I can’t right now, honey,” she will say, and their bottomless pit of need will consume them. They will sob. “But here, hold this,” my daughter will say, and she will pull a stone out of her pocket and place it in their curious hand. “This is a very important job. This rock, flown from the universe, told me to tell you: ‘you matter.’”

Insulated by galaxies, Earth, animals and flora, they will dutifully carry a collection with considerable weight, wedded to all that is real.

Counting Clouds

ELISSA RODMAN

I grew up hating the telephone.

That noisy thief hungered for your love, pulled you backwards before arrival, stole dinners, broke promises, took our years.

I was ashamed that I missed you. Mom told us good reasons, swirling misery and duty.

Summer would come. You would wake me to watch the Perseids, cover me in blankets, let me sleep on the porch. On sometimes days off, you taught me how to unlace a fish, showed me the humble way

of counting clouds, educated me in thunderstorms.

Wake

JOEL IWASKIEWICZ

Craning my neck
Stretching my gaze
Beyond the foot of the bed
To find his bassinet

I watch my son wake.

Squeaks precede swaddled squirming
Eyes closed, mouth in motion
The lower jaw divorced from the top
Reaching toward opposite poles
A precious snarl
Lips bob like a message in a bottle
And then the eyes are alive.

Without squinting, he looks
To the right, and what
Is on the other side?
He finds all of it.
Miles smiles
As I climb down to greet him.
Because I have called in sick on
Wednesday
November 9th
Today I get to be his full-time father
While his mother casts a coffee smell
At the bottom of the stairs.

He glows at me
Knowingly
Honing in so precisely
As if to say, “I have you now.”
Carefully

I scrape away the moss-colored crust
From a sealed tear duct
My thumbnail tracing his eye lashes.

His eyes are deep stones
Grey in a warm way
Like his mother’s
They could change any day
But I hope they don’t.

I see my son and like him
They say he sees everything
Colors and shapes
At a distance, too
It’s his brain that isn’t fully developed yet
The rods and cones operate expertly
Just
Independent from the command center
Making the most of a three-month trial
Of not having to know.

Staring at the morning Twitter drip
Like a neglected faucet
Getting worse by the minute

I see
Too much
I do not understand
I see red that I wish were blue
But I am not color blind
Though I can’t remember if I ever
Told white friends I was.

My rods and my cones rile and cower
I study two-hued maps
That tell me over and over and over
What my brain refuses to register.

I stare at my son
Who sees me
But is drawn to the light of the television
And the computer screen
And the betraying map
That will not be purple
For him.

He grins and gazes
Waiting for me to raise him
As my tear ducts unblock
Over him

Over and
Over and
Over.

A Barefoot Education

JACKI WEAVER

Around the year 1934, a schoolteacher walked to the home of John and Anne Pribish, two illiterate immigrants from Poland living in Avella, Pennsylvania; he knocked on the front door and was invited inside where he asked the Pribishes why they hadn’t been sending their children to school. Avella might be just a place of farmers and coal miners, single-room schoolhouses, red-dog roads, and the solidarity of hunger from the Depression, but even the children of farmers and miners should learn to read and write.

John Pribish told him, “They don’t have no shoes.”
“They can come in their bare feet,” the teacher replied.

My grandmother shows me her second grade school picture. She is sitting at a wooden desk with open book, her hands folded as if in prayer. Her eyes, a yellow hazel that can’t be captured in black and white, look gently but solemnly into the camera lens. “I didn’t have any shoes on in this picture,” my grandmother says, as she gazes through a stack of photos kept in the end-table in her living room.

She hands me her class picture from eighth grade and challenges me to find her youthful face among the crowd. I’ve never imagined my grandmother with agile limbs or girlish features. Who might she be without orthopedic shoes and a perm? She points to a girl on the top row of risers, and I recognize the look of worried skepticism on Mary Pribish’s face, one constant that has outlived her youth. Her face is round, and her form is sturdy. A poor girl, but not thin due to a steady diet of lard slathered on bread. She has a womanly bosom, maternal even. She isn’t looking at the camera, and she isn’t smiling. Something off to the side has caught Mary’s attention, her disapproval, or maybe her doubt.

My grandmother tells me again how she sewed the jumper by herself. She wanted a jumper like the dresses other girls were wearing, but if a family of ten needs a dollar for food, a daughter can’t have a dollar for a new jumper. So Mary fashioned one herself, cutting an old dress into wide straps and sewing the fabric in place. She had one white blouse which she washed and starched and ironed for herself every day after school. When her shoes wore down, her father added cardboard to the soles. Once summer arrived, she went barefoot.

“I didn’t have any shoes so the teacher said, ‘send them in their bare feet.’ And then there was a problem because the other kids didn’t want to wear

shoes either once they saw that we didn't have to." My grandmother turns away from the photographs back to the Pirates game on TV. She has the volume at level 68 so that I barely can hear her when she asks me to read her the score and the inning.

My own schooling cost my parents quite a bit more than the barefoot, one-room education my grandmother received. There was the cost of tuition for Catholic grade school and high school. The cost of multiple uniform blouses, polos, embroidered sweaters, pants, and pleated skirts. About thirty pairs of knee socks, and a new pair of shoes if I didn't approve of the hand-me-down pair from my sister. Add in activity and field trip fees. An annual start-of-year shopping trip for pencils, pens, notebooks, erasers, folders, binders, highlighters, a daily planner, a lime green mini stapler, poster board, Crayola markers, and perhaps a new book-bag. And that's not to mention the family computer and printer, dial-up Internet, the cost of acting, voice, and dance lessons, or the dollars of gasoline used to transport me to school or rehearsals or a friend's house or the movie theater.

And despite the privilege and products supplied so readily, I remember at times feeling self-conscious of my second-hand clothes, and I was aware that my classmates' parents weren't a mechanic and a stay-at-home mom so their clothes were more fashionable, electronics more elaborate, collars less blue.

I'm ashamed of myself when I remember the day I sat in my mother's room and cried onto the bedspread after she tried to convince me to commute to a university closer to our home, which I told her was "like, one step up from community college." I didn't care that they had offered me more scholarship money because my mother had worked there part-time for many years. I had perfect attendance, I was salutatorian, I was better. Why did I take AP classes or bring home every book in my locker every weekend if attending a "good" college had been out of my reach all along? I made the choice to take out more loans and attend the university I thought I deserved.

Even though I do not regret my choice of college and even though I've paid off the loans, I'm ashamed to think of my arrogance that day. I insulted my mother's work, and the hard-fought Associate's degree she earned there, taking night classes while I was in diapers.

As time passed though, I dropped many of my resentments, and I have gotten to be on nodding terms with my upbringing. I still shop at Goodwill from time to time, and I think about blue collar and domestic work as both labor and intellect.

Free will is kind of deceptive, I think. A person may have the agency to think freely and act decisively, but in spite of all our choices and efforts, there are some lives we are not able to live. My grandmother received a checkered education up to the eighth grade. She learned how to write and how to tell time though neither of her parents ever could. She missed days of school to care for her siblings, then left altogether to go to work. It was the Depression. Some hungers came before others.

Entitled though I may be, I am living the dream of a future that my grandmother could never choose to live. I am living a future my grandmother never knew to dream of other than to say that she loved her teachers and she sewed her own jumper.

After dropping out of school at age 15, Mary left home to work as a live-in maid for a family in Mt. Lebanon, PA. Goodbye to mother and father, brothers and sisters, she spent the weekdays cleaning the house of rich people who would tell her years later that her husband needed to knock on the back door when he came to pick her up from work. The front door was for company.

Obeys she did, until one afternoon when the whole family was out, and she spied Edward's 57 Chevy in the driveway. She leaned out of the window and told him to stay there, as she rushed to unlock the front door and greet her company.

She scrubbed laundry on a washboard and stripped bedding and ironed pillowcases, sweating under the arms and sore on her feet. "Keeping house," she called it, as if a house could slip out of your hands if you didn't dust the mantle and scrub the floors. She collected seven dollars at the end of the week. One dollar a day.

For holiday meals, the family gave her the Parson's Nose to eat in the kitchen.

"You know what the Parson's Nose is, don't you?" A glint in my grandmother's eye tells me that she wants to say it, even though she's told me many times before so I shake my head, no.

"It's the last part of the bird to go over the fence." Fat and skin, just the posterior. Her Christmas treat.

"It's an insult," my mother says, cutting off the Parson's Nose and placing it in a plastic container for my grandmother. "They couldn't have given her a slice of meat?"

Their insult became her delight. Whoever prepares the turkey knows to save the Parson’s Nose for grandma. Maybe it’s nostalgia, maybe stubbornness. *Yes, Lord, but even the dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall from their master’s table.*

The thought of me working as a teacher meets her approval (which few things do). Even at 91 years old, my grandmother remembers the names of her teachers and how the boys always managed to distract the history lesson and how one teacher was teased because she knew how to drive a car by reading it in a manual but had never been behind the wheel. I tell her about my students and about their parents, and I apologize for not visiting or calling more often. I blame it on their writing. It takes a long time to grade their writing, I tell her.

My grandmother comments that “Aunt Chris and your mother have such beautiful handwriting,” and I know that once again she has forgotten and misunderstood what I mean when I say that I teach writing.

“Yes,” I say. “They have beautiful handwriting.” And she turns her attention back toward the television.

I scrubbed my first toilet at age 20 in Brottier apartment 808, grimacing and washing my hands repeatedly after it was finished, reminding myself that I come from a line of women who scrub toilets. It’s not elegant, but it’s in my genes. I am the descendant of a maid and I get to be a college student now because of the toilets she scrubbed and the windows she washed, and I didn’t gag the next time I scrubbed it.

She talks about my grandfather often, but never happily. She hadn’t known Ed Yakima for long before he proposed:

“I don’t know if I love you,” Mary said.

“I’ve got love enough for the both of us” was his reply.

I’ve heard my grandmother recount this story many times, how she was only 16, how Ed had wanted to get married quickly in order to have a double wedding with his brother, how she didn’t accept him then but did eventually marry him by age 18. All of this has become our family lore. But there’s something about this love-enough-for-the-both-of-us line that seems unreal to me. Perhaps it’s the cinematic phrasing or the suspicious tone my grandmother uses when quoting him. Ed Yakima passed away many years before I was born, so I’ll never know if it was the sort of thing he would have said.

My grandfather can’t defend himself when my grandmother now claims to never have loved him and conjures jealous imaginings of the affairs she’s

convinced he had when fighting overseas in the Third Armored Division during World War II.

She stares at the muted television, an anger from the past building in her chest as she tells me again how he never bonded with my Uncle Augie, his first-born son. My grandfather might have been in the trenches or at the Battle of the Bulge on the day Augie was born, and the little boy was nearly three, still sleeping in his mother’s bed, when the young soldier returned home and insisted that the child sleep in its own room now.

“I heard him crying in the middle of the night,” my grandmother says. “But he put his arm across my chest and wouldn’t let me go to him.”

She thinks about this moment and blames him more every time Augie makes his annual visit to rehash grievances against the father whose approval he never found. My grandmother blames him for proposing to her before they were in love, and she blames him for dying before her, leaving her to live alone and battle cancer after watching him succumb to it.

“She doesn’t appreciate all he did for her,” my mother says, standing over the kitchen sink, elbow-deep in dish soap. “She came from nothing. He took her out of Avella. He built her not one but two houses with his own hands.”

In a photograph from their courtship, Mary Pribish sits on top of a stone wall while Ed Yakima stands next to her leaning his elbow against the wall. His smile is that of certainty and ease, hers is of eagerness and mirth. Who can say which story is true or when the meaning of the story changed?

Despite her monologue of complaints against her own marriage, my grandmother can’t understand why I haven’t gotten married yet. At my age, she had a husband and four children, while I didn’t even have my first kiss until age 25.

I’ve been in love though. I remember meeting Andy and believing with equal parts excitement and terror that my destiny was enfolding. I felt as though he had always been a part of my soul.

I remember holding his hand while ice skating, both of us too nervous to speak much except to apologize for my unsteady feet. But words seemed unnecessary, maybe even profane as we moved hand-in-hand past the mass of strangers lining the rink.

Andy and I will never get married; in fact, when I learned that he was engaged to someone else, I was most surprised at the lack of pain that accompanied this knowledge. I made the choice to give him time and distance, and I no longer question making that choice, though I don’t have an answer when my

grandmother asks how much longer I think it will take before I find a husband.

I’m sitting at the table with my grandmother; I’m 5 years old, so she’s seventy-one. She’s performing my favorite magic trick. She tears off two small pieces of a paper towel and uses a drop of water from the spigot to affix them to the nails of her index fingers. She sits across from me, grinning with the delight of an entertainer. She points her index fingers toward the table and tells me the story of two little birdies sitting on the line. But the cold winter comes and the birdies fly away. Here, she lifts her hands, palms upward for a moment, saying “fly away.” She points to the table again. The pieces of paper towel have vanished.

She lift her hands once more. She says “come back,” and pointing to the table again, the paper towels have reappeared. Fly away, come back. Fly away, come back. A lovely singsong proverb. She is enthralled by her own trick, and a trick it is, but one I don’t figure out until later. In that second when she raises her hands, she switches and points her middle finger down instead, so the paper has only seemed to fly away. In my childhood wonder, I believe the bird to have flown away on its own, but here it is, attached to her finger the whole time.

Sweetgum Ball

HUGH KOEZE



Horse in Central Park

DEIRDRE A. KOENEN

Fairy dust snow fills the Central Park air,
soaking into our mittens and skin,
much as it did when we were younger,
and visited our aunt in the city.

I’m the visitor now, my sister lives here,
and she doesn’t want to stop
to pet the horses lined up on 85th Street, waiting in the cold
for someone to notice, someone to need them.

One is a petite pinto, deep brown and white,
quivering beneath the gaudy, purple garment
draped sadly over her withers, mocking the elegance
of her breed, perhaps an Arabian or a Morgan –

I recognize her features from the books I pored over,
in the library, where I’d make myself at home
with *The Encyclopedia of Horses* and *The Soul of a Horse*,
entranced with the range of breeds, the beauty of their bodies.

These were the creatures that filled my school book margins
galloping and trotting about the science lessons I never liked.
I lovingly named each sketch; each plastic toy in my box
had a story, a mate, a portion of my day.

But this Central Park pinto has no name, no one
to brush her flanks and offer her apples, though I’d like to,
for she’s much like my imaginary friend, who had a mane
and whinnied, and didn’t respond in human ways

when I spoke, but in day dreams met my outstretched hand
with her velvety nose, and let me run alongside her
when I fell behind the paces of my sister.

Holding Hands

STEPHEN COATES

my finger inches across the couch,

timid and tentative
like a wild horse
extending its long, arching neck
toward the hand of an innocent child
then drawing back sharply
afraid of the touch of the unfamiliar

the drum inside my chest

hammers harder and faster and louder

as our hands brush
I decide to

take

the

plunge

and my pinky curls around yours

gently, yet firmly
like the hand of an infant
curling around the finger of its feeder
in trust and faith
unwilling to release

you recognize my attempt
and join me in the water
as all our fingers intertwine

To Each His Own Exodus

MIKE DEBOWSKI

Our family was isolated, just the four of us, all the time when we were together. I don’t even have a single memory of seeing any grandparents or aunts and uncles, and a quick search through any of our family photo albums would seem to suggest they were all either dead or left behind in Missouri, where both my parents came from. There was no bitterness when I asked them about any of this, just a sort of shrugging askance of why in the world I’d want to see them anyway.

My brother Royce confided in me a little more about this, or at least as much as he could from what he remembered. Apparently, the last time we had been out to see them, Grandpa Ramsey (my mom’s dad) had woken Royce and me up right at dawn one Sunday and stole us away to an early church service. Royce looked at me very significantly when he said this, as though I should suddenly be up in arms with him about our kidnapping and indoctrination. I looked back blankly.

Royce reached up and smacked me over the back of the head, more as an admonishing than an act intended to actually deliver pain.

“Dumbass, that was the only time we’ve ever been to church, in any way, shape, or form.

Mom and Dad had specifically told them they planned on never bringing us.”

“It was just one service. . . .”

“They might as well have kidnapped us and signed us up for school in Missouri. Don’t you get it? They made it us against them.”

I still didn’t fully understand the significance, but I moved on anyways.

“What about Dad’s side of the family?”

“We were supposed to visit them on the second leg of that trip, but Dad just drove us straight on out of Missouri and back home. He was pissed. I don’t think he specifically said we’d never be going back there, but you certainly got that sense.”

“Didn’t they call, or write, or anything?”

“You bet. Dad’s parents even showed up at our doorstep in Pennsylvania a couple months later. But Dad just kept the door locked and closed the blinds, and they eventually went away.”

“And Mom was okay with this?”

“She wasn’t as upset as he was, but I never got the sense she missed seeing any of the family. I just remember her smiling the whole long drive when we came home early that last time from Missouri. Dad was up there, fuming to himself as he drove, and Mom had the window down and her hand in the air, smiling at the sky, smiling back at us.” Royce paused and looked up as if picturing this. “Closing her eyes and just smiling. I had never seen her so happy.”

I paused and digested this for a moment, imagining my mother with her hand out the window as we sped down the freeway. She had moments like this every so often, just pure jubilation, moments where I felt like I just wanted to sit next to her and watch her.

Then I looked back at Royce kind of quizzically. “Why in the world does she go to St. Paul’s practically every Sunday then?”

“Man, I don’t know, I guess she likes it.”

“But you just said they hated church.”

“I didn’t say they hated it, I just said they would never bring us.”

“Don’t you think that’s weird? Why wouldn’t Mom bring us sometime? Is Dad stopping her?”

“Hell no, Dad wouldn’t care. That whole family thing wasn’t really about the church.”

“Then what is it?”

“Hell if I know, why don’t you ask her if you want to go so bad.”

I did ask her, in the kitchen the next day, and to my dumbfounded surprise she gave me a flat “no.”

“Why not?”

“Church isn’t for kids, Neil.”

I scrunched my eyebrows. “First of all, I’m 14. Second of all, what in the world are you talking about? Church is like the most family-friendly thing in the world. Half my friends’ parents *make* them go every Sunday. I mean, for crap’s sake, what is Sunday School all about?”

Mom looked at me, a little frustrated, then turned back to the open refrigerator to continue cleaning. “I’m not bringing you to church.”

Our family wasn’t entirely an island, though, as much as they probably wished they were.

More like a peninsula with a tiny isthmus connecting us to the rest of the world. That isthmus was my dad’s fault—specifically, an illegitimate son named Isaac that my father had 14 years before Royce, with his high school girlfriend when they were both 16.

This was exactly as hairy an issue as it sounds like it would be for Mom and Dad, despite their relative calm about most things that seemed problematic to normal people. Dad was good to him, but it was a cool, dutiful kind of charity. Whenever Isaac would show up, my father would shake his hand without looking at him (his eyes going over Isaac’s shoulder to something behind him), no smiling or joking. Every time I saw them interact, it was like a negotiation, communicating only as much as they needed to. Isaac never stayed overnight—in fact, never even more than a few hours—and my father always guided him through the house and out onto the deck in back, where they would drink coffee and talk their business. Royce said it was money they would discuss, but Isaac seemed to be doing alright for himself. He would sometimes show up in new cars, and he dressed like a man who belonged in a city during rush hour. Dad didn’t seem terribly ashamed of Isaac; he would even call Royce and me down if we were home to say hello before he left. Isaac would smile familiarly at us and either pat us on the back or ruffle our hair (especially when I was younger) and ask us general questions like how was school, how’s baseball going, any big plans for the summer.

Mom, on the other hand, shunned Isaac. While Royce and I would sometimes spy on my father’s meetings with him through our windows, Mom would bring a book into the bathroom and stay in there until he left. One time, during Isaac’s longest visit, she even poked her head out of the door and asked Royce to bring her some pretzels and soda. She didn’t seem angry when he was there, just intent on avoiding him. The mystifying thing about this, though, was that she had lived with Isaac in the house for almost five years, a period of time she referenced casually in conversation.

“Penny [our old dog] used to love Isaac, but she wouldn’t go near little baby Royce.”

Or, “We moved to this house once Royce was born, since Isaac was already in the only other bedroom of our apartment.”

No malice in her voice, just fact and observation. I never caught wind of any falling out between them, not even related to his moving out of the house at 16. Once he was gone, though, she just wanted to keep it that way.

I was born a year after Isaac left, and I was in his old room for those 17 years of my life that we lived in our first house on Sinai. I would even occasionally find things of his in the recesses of my closet and the space under my bed. Usually clothes or baseball cards, which I would sort of look at for a while and imagine him living with us. Once, though, as we were moving out, I found a little box in the back corner of the closet, buried under a pile of loose sleeping bags. Inside was a taxidermied raven, on its side atop some tissue paper.

I took it downstairs and handed the box to my father over one of his nightly glasses of bourbon.

“Well god damn,” he said as he opened the box. “It’s Charlie.”

“Charlie?”

“Isaac’s pet raven. I thought we buried him out back,” he said, smirking and then throwing back some more whiskey.

I looked disgustedly at the bird. “He had his pet taxidermied? That’s fucking weird.”

“Hey, watch your language,” Dad said, waving a finger at me. Then he poured himself another glass. “But yeah, that’s fucking weird.”

I took the box with Charlie back upstairs and threw it into a larger box I had been packing with all of Isaac’s other things. I planned on giving it back to him next time I saw him, but he never came to visit after we moved down the street.

Type B

KRISTIN SHIPP

The morning calm
is what they call the land:

of the braids and my mother
of the trenchcoat and the man
his face framed with dark glasses
and the same three furrowed lines
on both of our pale, bent foreheads.

We bow to each other across continents—
Him in the house with the stone wall
that I am not sure even exists
and me with light eyes
hemmed in by choice.

In that land of my grandfather
blood is personality
allegiance to a culture of secrets
actions predicted by plasma.

He is the beginning of our line
from which my mother has meandered
into the territory of my blue-eyed father
Such digression means
I am never asked for my blood type

To them I am predictable:
the daughter of no one
the stray of nothing
whose tongue is too clumsy
to understand—blood?

They don’t see the distances within me—
The lines already drawn.

Quicksand

MARIELLA SAAVEDRA CARQUIN-HAMICHAND

There are purple skies,
You told me we would fly once.
Sprint upwards,
Gallop or trollop
Like horses ready for battle
Or headed for an Olympic race.

You told me to wind our legs.
Like Christmas toys,
Eager to be turned on.

You helped me fix my legs
When on one occasion they wouldn’t start.
Stubborn tree trunks rooted too deeply in the earth.
Like quicksand,
They had been swallowed up and the earth had kept on
Chewing.
Hungry for woman thighs
To later spit out as wooden toothpicks,
Stripping the fat and soft delicate sensuality
Out from under me.

You saw me under attack and stretched out your hands, slippery
From sweat produced by the New Mexico desert.
I reached out for them,
And with my teeth gnawed at your fingers,
Scared I might bite you. Hard.
But you kept pulling me up in one swift motion,
Ripping my arm out of its socket.
You didn’t mean it though.

You stretched my dry skin,
Burnt from the clay sun.
I could feel the skin crackle and
Pop!
There is a searing burn and sharp pain in my shoulder.
But the earth is loosening its grip,
It is giving.
My hips begin to wiggle slightly free.

My chest is exposed now.
Breath is coming easier.
Breathe, I tell myself.
Slowly gaining freedom
My legs are lifted upwards,
Up I go,
Like a tree shooting straight up into the earth.

But instead of landing on dirt,
I head in the direction of the sky.
The maroon sky,
Stained with streaks of blood lines,
Separates the screams heard in the quicksand
From the lightness of dance steps
That ripple in expansive clouds.

Elizabeth

MATTHEW KIMBALL



For Sam or George

KATELYNN BELL

072216. For Sam or George

“They pant for an opportunity of revenging that humiliation; and if a contest, ending in a victory on their part, should ensue, elating them in their turn, and leaving its cursed legacy of hatred and rage behind to us, there is no end to the so-called glory and shame, and to the alternations of successful and unsuccessful murder, in which two high-spirited nations might engage.” (William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, p. 374)

He is a narcissist, a bully, entitled, and he is a man who came from privilege and wealth, and he has never been held accountable for his despicable behavior. Occasionally, he is strong and honest. He is conservative, hardheaded, traumatized, and is too unaware of the tricky ways he evades his personal responsibilities to ever be compatible with anybody, truthfully. He sent me flowers early on, and could sometimes sense with a subtle sweetness when I didn’t feel good about whatever and would inquire why. He couldn’t care past the “why” and I often felt lonely and isolated, ashamed for answering. I don’t know why I got involved with him—maybe because the company was good when he helped me move and his house caught on fire and we spent several nights camped on my floor eating pizza on tables made out of boxes he brought me from work that I needed to fill with more items from my kitchen. He put his arm around me and introduced me as his girlfriend with a bright toothy smile, emboldened from the self-conscious smile he wore when I approached him to spend a night out with him, late nights at concerts and shows I wouldn’t have wanted to go to a few weeks earlier.

Suddenly I wanted to go, and I was involved with a man who didn’t share my values, who would interrupt, or tell me that teachers didn’t live in reality because they didn’t actually build real things like he did—he built *a deck* earlier. I would tell him to drive me home in his 1960 Indigo Metallic Cadillac and he would look at me solemnly in the driveway, and apologize, but concede it was nothing personal; maybe I just took things too personally, all liberals do.

I don’t know why I told him I loved him after the worst of it—when he told me to get the fuck out of his house because he had gas-lighted me the night before, accused me of being crazy, gave me the silent treatment, and I came

over because I wanted to talk and listen and understand why he was doing this to me. “Why are you doing this to me?” I gathered my things and cried as he staunchly sat behind his guitar like a man who did what he had to do. “I bought you this,” I said. I threw him the magazine I had bought to take my mind off of the pain of him ignoring my texts and phone calls, a glossy magazine on America’s National Parks, one of his favorite things. “I don’t know why,” he said, and I took a breath and shook my head. “Because I love you,” I said, almost like a question. And he was hit, and he paused for a second as to reconsider, but pushed through it, and continued with his rant, that I am an emotional powder keg and he did nothing wrong and has never done anything wrong and is not going to apologize. I noticed that he looked crazy when he said this—he looked homeless; he was homeless.

I wish that was the end of our contest, but it wasn’t—more iterations of the same attempt to make things work, each one more uncomfortable and painful than the last, each battle more terrible than the one before it until that very scary one at night when, roused from bed, I left (“get out or I’ll throw you out”) feeling like robot, and knew I had to not go back; I had to leave the war. But a few days later, “not sure if you want me contacting you but if ur around this weekend could you feed kitty?” and “I could get john to do it but trust you more.” And, Reader, of course I fed his cat, not once, twice, but three times, and I watered the vegetable garden I had planted for him, and picked the Japanese eggplant that was ripe and drove it all the way out to Santa Fe and cooked it for lunch. A few weeks later, he brought tomatoes to my mom.

Note 1: *“you would not know/ that the worst of anyone / can be, finally, / an accident of hope.*

Note 2: *“There ought to be something special / for someone / in this kind of hope.* (both from Anne Sexton, “For John, Who Asks Me Not to Enquire Further”)



07182016. The Sense of an Ending
“Some days since: nay, I can number them—four; it was last Monday night, a singular mood came over me: one in which grief replaced frenzy—sorrow, sullenness. I had long had the impression that since I could nowhere find you, you must be dead.”

“Where are you?” seemed spoken amongst mountains; for I heard a hill-sent echo repeat the words” (Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, p. 515-516).

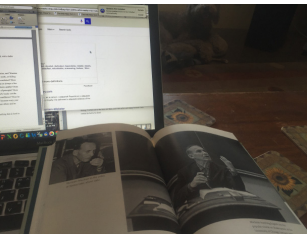
I know what Rochester is saying to Jane, having experienced it just once—the way that a bad feeling can feel like a self-indulgent performance next to the painfully felt conviction that a loved one has died. Next to grief, the frenzy of a bad argument doesn’t feel so bad. The mood changes from something that can be repaired to something that cannot. It was a Saturday and Sunday for me. I called across the Santa Fe mountains and could see and feel farther than I ever had before. I could see all the way home to Fruita, Colorado, even farther if I tried. I wanted his presence; would walk the whole way to find him. He might have gone to scout Blue Mesa Reservoir where he wanted to take me fishing and camping in just two weeks, where he might have gone to “pout,” as Elliot suggested. I looked there from where I stood and called his name. I knew he was in the mountains, in the air, in the land, somewhere. If I could believe it was true, he was there, but I felt that echo.

Note: “and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart” (Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, p. 375)



072316. Our Mutual Friend
“I suppose you,” said Eugene, “judging from what I see as I look at you, to be rather too passionate for a good schoolmaster.” As he spoke, he tossed away the edge of his cigar. (Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 289)

Does a good teacher repress himself daily to discharge his duties well? Should he dismiss man’s nature? Is she highly qualified? Is she ever too passionate? Should he wear a different suit every day of the week, or failing that, a different necktie? Does he forget to match his belt to his shoes? Does he teach like a prizefighter or an architect? Does she sit behind her desk or stand on it? Does he show up on time or always a few minutes late? Is he sad about life? Does she let the students know she is sad, and why? Does he teach with white-hot passion or cool solemn apathy? Does she make good lesson plans? Does she care about MLA citations or not? Does she disappoint her administrators? Does she do so as a matter of principle? Does he shine his shoes when nobody looks? Does he leave the room out of frustration sometimes? Throw the kid’s books out the window? Should she make the obnoxious kid cry or give him confidence? Should she do both? Does he move through the ranks and succeed his master? Does he flip a coin to decide whether or not he will attend graduation because every year some of his graduates will think they have mattered to him more than others and he wants them to believe that? Does he believe that?



Note 1: “I’ll start by saying a great teacher is a tough guy who cares deeply about something that is hard to understand.” (Norman Maclean, “This Quarter I Am Taking McKeon”)

Note 2: “Is he? Competence is hard to define. He stays in the room with them, which is the most important thing. Furthermore, he’s faithful to me. He’s faithful.” (John Updike, *The Centaur*)

First Ramadan, July

LINDA FLYNN

From Fez I remember only the women
in the crowded medina
pecking and hawing like angry hens
at the boy who had stolen a pomegranate,
you leading me away by my wrist.

In Marrakech, I watched you pray and pray and
then we made love, me
thinking of you kneeling and bowing
and sweeping your palms over your face
each time you rose, stubble tickling
the inside of my thigh.

I loved myself best in Casablanca,
dirty, chaotic, beautiful
house of white and grime, heavy
with the nameless arousal
of riding in a red taxi
from the train station
to your front door.

Cinder and Book

MAC STEPHENS

Here glowing marigold greens
Unnecessary, she says, to unpack this yellow wood
Deep emerald shutters, pristine
And the sporadic adirondack thrones still where they stood

Here trees block dip creek amen
That’s the window, I tell her, where overgrown boys shout songs
Oiled splinter wood wraps Bridgman
Vivid, good memories push out seldom considered wrongs.

Here I have taken lovers
I tell her, tires taking gravel now; three Larch faces
Grassy Tamarack hovers,
I inhale the empty cigarette pail; I can place this

doused peace, now, rekindled
You have lost here too, she questions, while I shoulder duffels
Foreshadowed didactic beer breath slathers coats of brindle
over the mood, muffled

Here we’re down to promises
Bread Loaf is for writing it out, I tell her, coming back
Apologies for what is
This place is literature sex and literal slap sack

Here Black Flies swim into ears.
I tell her about overwet towels and morning remorse,
drenched acceptance, timid fears,
the fifth weak phone call, losing dialogue at its source

Here a few smiles pass by us
Well, she says, then pauses: oil over rust screen shrouds
theatrical emptiness,
And the orange sunlight and the thunderclouds.

Train

SEAN CLEARY



We were just north of Didcot Parkway when the train horn began to malfunction. At first it seemed like the engineer must have been frantically blowing the horn at someone on the tracks. Sam and I were in those inward facing seats with the nice little table, a real blessing to find on those crowded summer trains, and her feet were stretched out across and under the table and were resting in my lap. It was a warm day and the little vent windows were all open in our car. It made the frantic scream of the horn even more visceral. We could feel it. The first thing that happened was Sam took her feet from my lap, and, ears perked up to hear through the now sputtering and bleating and screaming horn, strained her neck to look down the carriage toward the front of the train where the driver's door began to grow, it seemed, like a bulkhead that may lead to the light of summer, or the bottom of a lake—we couldn't tell if it held us in, or held something out. It was silly, of course, to look down there at the driver's door. It wasn't going to open. We couldn't see through it, but we could,

flinching at every arch and tremelo of the train's frantic wailing, imagine what stood out there on the track ahead of us.

It'd been three deaths that year already. Deaths on the tracks. The first had been the original. An older man drunk out of his mind attracted almost preternaturally to the oncoming light from the 2042 Great Western Service to Evesham. He'd been walking toward the train, we were told the next day by a morbid old man in a pub. The night before our train had stopped outside of Slough on our way back from a day in London. Our feet were tired as we waited impatiently I took off my socks to the disgust of Sam. Someone groaned about the wait. A farmhouse glowed off across a wide field. The train idled and then went silent. There was an obstruction, we were told, two trains ahead on the line, and they were working to clear the obstruction in the quickest way possible. I asked Sam if she wanted water, or to have some mixed nuts. We weren't quite drunk, but we'd brought a few lagers on the train with us and it was at this moment that we popped open the last two cans of them. The sounds of the popping fizz of the cans was accusatory in the quiet of the night, and we felt it, then, I think, even without knowing what the obstruction was out there ahead of us. Sam took a swig of the lager and I tried to catch her eyes. It'd been a good day, I thought, and even this bit of a detour—our train stopped in this field, us conserving the last entertaining bit of lager, the people carriage growing loud against the quiet of the night—seemed to only brighten the glow of the day. But that first obstruction was a man, we found out. And when the morbid old fuck told us in the pub the next day, Sam looked down at her beer in front of her there on the bartop with a sickening sort of scowl, like the staleness of it had just occurred to her. Ask me, I thought. Ask me, ask me, ask me how I feel. That's what I'd wanted, I think. Though I didn't have an answer. Poorman, Sam said, poor, poor, poor man. Our minds' eyes all turn to the man, I thought. We all think of him wandering down the tracks from the pub to home. We all try to see the light of the train glinting off the rails. The pinging tension as they bend in anticipation of the weight. The growing intensity of the light that sinks the night into a flood of black.

Must've had some poor life, said the morbid fuck at the pub. Some alcoholic, he said, lifting his pint and obscuring his red little face.

Right, I said, and tried, unsuccessfully, to take Sam's hand in mine below the bar-top. I moved my hand slowly under the bar to grant a comforting sort of touch. She abruptly grabbed her pint, looked down into its milky brown

depths, and took a two handed swig as if she were imitating a Priest holding the chalice up grandly to the Christ.

The second and third were copycats, we were told. Teenagers both. The assertion of unoriginality seemed to strip those two girls of their lives just as much as the 1832 Great Western, and the 2010 Cross Country Services did, respectively. This time it was the paper. The two in quick succession after the first had caused quite a stir. National papers. What's wrong with the youth? went the questions. There was an interview with an engineer too—the drivers essentially had to quit after that, he said. Some in the past would try to return, but now the policy was early retirement. They'd found that it just wasn't possible to keep on driving after the trauma of that event, of seeing a person slip under the smooth yellow hood of the engine.

The thud never seemed loud enough to be the taking of a human life.

The horn would not stop. It only became more frantic, like the engineer was jamming his thumb into the button, and then pounding it with his fist. He came over the intercom. It was a horn malfunction, he said. And the air in the carriage seemed to ease. We all tried to let it slip from our focus. Ten more minutes and we'd be in Oxford, and the train would be taken out of service, and a man with a set of clippers would come down and he'd disconnect the horn with a satisfying little neat snip, I thought, trying to extrapolate out this problem. And so we, Sam and I and all the rest of the passengers tried to let the blaring horn recede into normalcy, to collectively sigh it out of existence. Sam tucked her feet back under her. She sat with a lovely balance out there beyond my reach. She saw me staring over there and smiled. Smiled to diffuse the tension, maybe, but also because she knew that I like those little things like holding her feet in my lap—that though I was married, and she engaged, we could go to London every weekend together to the museums and walk the distance between Paddington and the National Gallery with an orbiting kind of humor. Her Scottish man, my English woman, were always there with us, even if they were really on business or at a conference, leaving us two Americans behind to do American things in the capital, or in Oxford. She held her hands behind her back as we walked as if she were a German philosopher in deep contemplation, or a person trying not instinctively reach out to another. But we couldn't escape it. The horn only seemed to grow louder, more frantic as we approached the station. It elbowed its way back into the train car through the open windows. What now? I thought. What if there was a person on the

tracks up ahead. What if it just so happened. We'd never know, there'd be no warning, really. They wouldn't tell us, would they? There'd be a screeching of brakes, maybe a slight click as the person's body was pinched against the shining steel of the rail. Sam caught the worry in my eyes. It's a bit creepy, isn't it? she said. I nodded, and she unfurled her long legs, tired from the day of walking, and stretched them back out toward me.

October Wedding

PAIGE BONCHER

Two weeks after the miscarriage they married, the wedding a train that couldn't be stopped. That's when I began to distrust weddings, the way they threaten to obscure the genuine, white lace shrouding the five-month old fetus, stiff ceremony overtaking the close final game of the World Series. "I bet he's a Cubs' fan," Chris says, referring to the minister now running through the script like the curtains just caught on fire. Later, I devour sauteed scallops as if my own father were paying. But will their love live up to these mollusks' pillowy perfection? Standing outside the elevators, we wait for the newlyweds to emerge for the staged candid, overhear the strangers sidle up to the photographers, ask, "Anyone we would know?" Hard to blame them since JFK got down on one knee for Jackie in the bar to their left. We all want what they had, no matter that he wasn't faithful. During the first dance, I fear the absence of Chris' hand on my knee—Aren't we supposed to be touching? It is the break from ritual that calms me, when the father-of-the bride calls his daughter by his wife's name by mistake, the gluten-free red velvet cake, the way the four-year-old ring bearer holds a wineglass over his head like a rattle during the best man's speech, delighting in his parents' dread. And when it's time to go, I pluck the roses from the hydrangeas even as Chris asks how we will keep them alive, and the waiter in a starched white uniform skulks impatiently in the corner, waiting to fold up the tables.

New Jersey Migration

PAIGE BONCHER

They sit across us on the stopped subway, two teenagers, she splayed across his lap, he leaning against her upper body, like two baby geese with their necks intertwined, heads resting in the other's downy coat. Despite their closed eyes, it's obvious that they're not actually sleeping; their talk has slowed since Christopher St. but they are too full of desire to only take the other by the hand. I stare until the girl's eye, thick with liner, opens and stares back. Meanwhile you and I argue about how the peanuts you stopped for at the 7-11 in the West Village are going to make us miss the train. "We could still make it," you insist, to which I reply, "You are too optimistic about time." You hiss loud enough for everyone to hear, "How do you know we'll miss it?" and I am as pleased as embarrassed by your tone, this new edge I've never heard. I can already sense an apology when we finally lurch towards Penn Station. We race through the corridor, dodging strangers and filthy puddles, confirming the other's information before taking the escalator down two steps at a time. We leap onto the train with twenty seconds to spare, and there's even an entire seat free for the two of us, but no eager display of affection across the arm rest, only a togetherness that will lift and carry us home.

A Requiem for “Jenny Penny” and DJ Dilated

or

What we write about when we write about love.

KATHERINE CROTTY

When I was a little girl, I wrote a lot. Stories came easier then. My most critical work was a series of short stories featuring a young girl named Jenny Penny. Jenny was the size of a penny and lived in a mouse hole in a large mansion. Given her size, she never saw the faces of the humans who inhabited the house; she only saw their feet. Thus, Jenny was obsessed with shoes, and in one of her most epic sagas, she struggled to pull a tap shoe through the mouse hole. Jenny wanted to use the shiny soles as mirrors.

In each story, be it about shoes or spindles of thread that they used for tables, Jenny’s family was extraordinarily affectionate. You could tell they loved each other because I wrote things like this:

“I love you, Mom,” said Jenny.

“I love you, too, Jenny,” said Jenny’s mom.

I was confident in the armor of grammatically correct quotation marks and tag lines that I had assimilated from The Boxcar Children. And because they all loved each other so much, most of the stories ended with illustrations of strange, small stick figures hugging one another, living happily ever after under a cloud of quickly scribbled hearts.

I wrote and illustrated “Jenny Penny” on Saturday mornings in our den. My older brother’s friend often slept in our den—he lived in New Jersey and would stay at our apartment after their baseball games or late night trips to Phil Hughes. Phil Hughes was a bar on the Upper East Side, but my brother convinced my mom that it was actually the name of one of his classmates.

“Hey, Mom, we’re going to Phil’s tonight.”

“So nice of him to have you over all the time! I hope his mother doesn’t mind.”

I would often wake up early on Saturday mornings, and, with tousled hair and a wrinkled pink nightgown, would drag into the den an art set—you know the ones, ridges for 72 different colored crayons, watercolors in white plastic dimples, all perfectly enveloped in that heavy plastic that suctioned together

like boxes for VHS tapes. I’d perch on the edge of the pull out couch, resting the art set on my lightly bruised, hairy and helplessly knobby knees. Glenn shifted with my weight on the corner of the bed and the sound of the 36” RCA television coming to life with cartoons. Glenn smelled like beer sometimes, but I didn’t know that yet.

As I finished each chapter, I’d staple the pages together, making that unmistakable crease down the left side of a page that delineates a child’s handiwork, the same creases that were often employed in the making of paper fans for my mother. As the volumes got longer, someone—a brother? My mother?—suggested collecting them in a green three-ring binder. So the staples were overpowered by a three-hole punch that somehow seemed modern and novel, and the green binder was toted around from room to room to each of my siblings so I could show it off. I have no idea where it is now.

My early attempts in writing were manifestations of my young, self-indulgent determination to be important. I imagined the looks on my future children’s faces when they found their mother’s opus, accompanied by championing reviews [to be read in the voice of Robin Leach]:

“Jenny Penny” was a stunning opening volley from the young novelist. The seminal classic, “The Boy Who Loved Hockey,” is, perhaps, an even better sophomore effort. Ms. Crotty continues to floor her burgeoning fan base in the adjacent and often shared bedrooms of her Lower East Side insurance project apartment with her wit and insightfulness into characters she only tangentially knows from a trundle bed and a shared bathroom.

But, after a few more failed attempts at the great American novel—one in which I lifted the plot of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*; another, “Paternity Ward” about a man who became pregnant—I relegated my binder and art set to the back of some cupboard to collect dust with undeveloped rolls of film and barely wrote again until college.

A few years ago, my friend asked me to articulate my feelings on love. “HAY,” my phone lit up. “Would you be interested in helping with a project I’m working on? It involves a little writing and existential searching,” she wrote via Facebook Messenger, quickly adding a vulgar and entirely too large thumbs-up icon. The prompt: “What is love? Why do we need it? Write any-

thing you want, basically, as long as you enjoy doing it.” She was asking a small group of friends to do so in honor of her third anniversary with her boyfriend. I was put off by the task. It seemed presumptuous to ask me to do this for a somewhat measly anniversary. In truth, I was intimidated because the couple I was supposed to honor is wonderful—brave, smart, inordinately talented—and I was already a year out of a breakup that I was only just beginning to get over. [“I don’t want to get married,” he whisper-yelled in bed on the morning of his sister’s bridal shower. I still went to the shower, puffy eyed, and played all of the stupid games.]

Despite my reservations, I slogged through my friend’s assignment. I quoted Hemingway and Neruda, talked about how being in love is really about being alone with a more complete version of yourself that can only be created by the person whom you love and, in that way, you are never actually alone. It was pretty crappy. In the class period before lunch, I sent it off into the ethos of the interweb, accompanied by a summary safety blanket of an email to my friend explaining how I “just casually threw this together while my kids were watching *Of Mice and Men*,” and “here’s a picture of the backs of their heads” so you know I am not lying. [I was lying.]

In these moments, writing for a couple on their third anniversary, a part of me just wanted to fucking doodle a string of hearts puffing out of their googly eyes like smoke from a chimney, like I had in “Jenny Penny.” Sometimes, I wish we could carry them around with us in our real lives, a bunch of hearts on leashes suspended over our heads like umbrellas ready to open when we need to be vulnerable.

In college, I took a writing workshop with a guy named Louis. He told me I was vain and idealistic because I always wrote about love. I probably was vain and idealistic, and maybe I still am, and I certainly *thought* I was writing the truth about love. I was dating a blonde haired, blue eyed Californian and I was in love. We graduated, got jobs in the city, and continued being in L-O-V-E for another year or so. Eventually, our priorities shifted. He quit his job. I told him he was irresponsible. We broke up. I got involved with a co-worker.

That Californian moved back home and reinvented himself as an electronic DJ named DJ Dilated. [He did not get the memo on his 25th birthday about child-bearing hips and doesn’t immediately think of cervixes when he hears the word “dilated.”] During the day, he wears a suit to an office in San Francisco, but on the weekends, he wears furry vests and bracelets that glow in the dark and travels to deserts to mash together a bunch of songs that he didn’t write.

But, I should admit that after that break-up with the man who didn’t want to get married, DJ Dilated happened to visit New York “for a gig,” and he happened to wake up in my bed. We fell into old habits, like muscle memory. It was nice, but I told all of my friends that I had been sick in bed with bronchitis that weekend, embarrassed that I had slept with the artist formerly known as Kevin, the DJ with a dumb name who used to make me feel safe and small. I furiously scribbled a bunch of hearts over our heads, then tore the paper from the binder, crumpled it, and threw it away.

Freedom to Crush

ANNIE Q. SYED

I was barely eleven and I knew smoking was “bad” for you but I didn’t care that Shane smoked. Maybe he didn’t smoke and that is what I remember now. Memory reinvents itself with each year on earth. He had a black cowboy hat that covered his dark eyes and tanned skin. He was tall like the shadow of a mountain, or so I thought probably because I was so small. I could feel the strength in his forearms the way his large hands gripped the reins when he was on his horse. Looking back on it, I don’t know if I was taken by him or my perceived strength of him and the freedom to come and go as he pleased. I liked that he said so little but when he spoke, the few times he did, everything became certain in my very uncertain world. Before going to sleep I thought about how moonlight created shadows lighter than the few scars on his face. I was in love.

My world ended when I finished reading *Shane* by Jack Schaefer. I cried. I cried for days in fact.

Please dear god take me back to the beginning of the book when I knew nothing of these feelings.

You can’t discover a book twice even though you may discover yourself anew upon many re-readings.

I was convinced it would never happen again.

Then I fell for Mr. Darcy; I wrote an ode to him. I had never written a poem before let alone used a thesaurus but I felt my seventh grade words would be too childish for him.

There was also the time I scared my parents because I cried so much after finishing *The Great Gatsby*. “Nobody understood him! Do you guys not get that? No one!” I still remember my father trying not to laugh *at* me, the way he bites his lower lip but his eyes stretch with his dimples and give away his amusement, at a very sentimental 8th grader, and it made me even more angry: not only did my very own parents not understand how I felt about Jay Gatsby’s fate, they definitely didn’t understand me. The delights of putting up with a teenager who is convinced no one understands.

I come from a culture where parents bury their first born alive if the baby happens to be a daughter. I come from a father, a political asylee, who couldn’t stop celebrating that his first born was a daughter. I have grown up in parts of

the world where the only way I could play outside was if I looked like a boy. I was the eldest and always had to look after my younger two brothers who often did “gross boy-things” that the male characters in my books never would!

My crushes were always cartoon characters—not Mickey Mouse but Japanese anime dubbed in another language depending on where we were—and made of words. I suppose that’s one of the reasons why I fell in love with words.

For a young girl to have a crush, be it on Spiderman or a character in a book or a real boy, in other parts of the world is still considered blasphemy. I don’t ever take for granted the privilege of having as many crushes as I wanted had I not been raised in the United States. The freedom to have your heart broken when a book ends or a relationship finishes is not granted to women everywhere in the world.

It is no surprise that I feel so at home at Bread Loaf. At Bread Loaf, I am not a mere hyphenated American, carrying my ancestors like an appendage, or the color of my skin but an educator first. It is one of the very few institutions where I have felt seen and heard by the staff and faculty and where I don’t have to subdue my mania for literature. If who we are is indeed more than our skin color and where we were born, as all the ancient scriptures and astrophysicists claim, I know of no other place where I can just *be*. What a privilege to be whoever and however you want to be, even if for just six weeks.

My America

JOHN D. KEITH

for homeroom 10B

oh say can you see!
the brown boys on the front lines
while the white boys snort white lines
by the dawn’s early light?
this is not
my america.

oh say can you see
bombs bursting in air
sounding the same in Kurdish
or Mesopotamian spoken Arabic
as they do in English?
this is not my america.

my america numbers 27
and it is a place to which I travel
every morning, a place that gets me
out of bed no matter how inviting
the warm covers feel.

my america wears spikes in his hair
red, sometimes, or green, spikes that say
“look at me! but don’t
look
at me”
with bangs that sometimes hide the longing.

my america has a father in prison and
a mother always at work so she does
the cooking
the cleaning

the washing
and she tries to be a child and a parent and a sister all at once
and some mornings you can see the weight of her life
pressing down on her hand
as she struggles to write herself around a poem
and she does not give up.

my america cuts herself
on her arms or the inside of her thighs because there are
days
there are days when the blood is screaming to come out and sometimes she
needs scars
on the outside to match the bruises inside.
and sometimes the razor skating across her skin,
spreading it like the boundaries between two countries, seeing the blood rise up
like ice and water off a skater’s blades and pirouetting across her lightly freck-
led skin is
the only thing
that helps.
she thinks.

my america is called fat by her mother who doesn’t realize that food has taken
the place of the praises she used to sing for her pretty girl, so she eats to fill her
heart, not her stomach.
and then she tries to erase the guilt by throwing up between classes.
a detention for chewing gum is a small price to pay
for calming her mother’s voice saying, “look at you—
you used to be so...”

my america has given up on himself. he feels
moments of strength, or faith, or call it hope, and then
the fear of failing
paralyzes him again. so,
he decides to embrace the role of the student who does no work, the intelligent
boy
who hides his fear and his intelligence in the same old coffee can on the shelf

and settles for the laughter of his peers.

oh say, can you see my america?

my america is fast becoming an escape artist. she thinks she is in love with one of her English teachers, but deep down she knows that he simply represents escape and that is what she cradles like a baby, escape from a past that haunts her, a present that frustrates her, a future that scares her—escaping into caffeine, nicotine, pills, sex, poetry—whatever will swallow her up for a moment, just a moment, one more moment. and then she looks around and sees all those moments lying dead or wounded and feels that the punch came before she was ready, she doubles over in pain and tries to escape.

my america cried at her quince because she could—finally!—see herself in her father’s eyes and she was beautiful.

my america wants to keep her boyfriend so badly that she is on the edge of a cliff you can’t climb back up.

my america is in love with a girl from a cartoon because they don’t hurt like real people.

my america has more thoughts in his head than he knows what to do with, more joy in his heart than he can explain. this scares him.

my america finally told her family that she is gay my america hates her father for what he did that night my america comes to life on the soccer field, running

with the strength of those who love her my america doesn’t see the opportunities he has to spread love my america feels like quitting but never will. my america is brave even if they aren’t yet free.

oh say, can you see them? they are my america, and i have finally found a country worth fighting for.

Como Sancocho, Como Magia; Lawrence

DARIANA D. GUERRERO

I remember the sticky days of summer,
when *la playa* was an open fire hydrant
in the middle of the projects & ice cream
came in a ¢25 cup, bought from the doorstep
of a *limbe* lady looking to make some \$.

You never knew a city like mine,
where the foundation was built
from mixed complexions
& there is plenty of *sancocho*
to fill the bellies of all who come
to the Immigrant City.

I remember the smell of *tostones*
weaving itself into the air, reminding
my nostrils of *El Cibao* or *Puerto Plata*
healing skin with the salt. The breath
of the Caribbean, *Morir soñando*
peaceful, *tranquilo*.

You never knew a city like mine,
un lugar lleno de soñadores de la ciudad.
We chant fuck Trump,
until the veins in our throats burst.
We have known what it's like
to be demonized by white men
aiming to take everything,
but our labor.

I remember the gatherings
of leaders, cloaked
in the protection of tradition
& community, magic so close

to the island you could taste it,
sancocho bubbling, stewing
chicken feet & the assortment
of animals we will not waste.

You never knew a city like mine,
where we will stomp out the scorch
of the sun to save our own; even
if it means we are charred—
if our own light is extinguished.

I am waiting

JULIA ARCE

I am waiting (After Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “I am Waiting”)

I am waiting for my results to come in
and I am waiting
for a rebirth of wonder
and I am waiting for someone
to really God-bless America
and weep
and I am waiting
for the midwifery
of a new set of twins,
You and I

and I am waiting
for the American Constitution
to really form a more perfect union
and swaddle in her arms, Tranquility
and I am waiting
for the still-born statue of Liberty
to melt and resolve herself into a mourning dew
and I am waiting
for the wall to be built
which will reef the
world with oceanic keys
and I am waiting
for the final withering away
of all miscarriages of justice
and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the Second Coming
and I am waiting
for a religious revolution

To sweep thru the religious right and evangelize with evolution
and I am waiting

for the Invisible Man to light the way
and I am waiting
for them to prove that God’s Kingdom is
really Righteous Among the Nations
and I am waiting
for the Last Supper to be served again
a la non-violent sommeliers
and I am perpetually awaiting
a rebirth of resurrection

I am waiting for the curtain of night
and I am waiting
for the National Parks Service to assume the reign
and I am waiting
for the First Peoples to return
to their Mother
and I am waiting
for rivers and creatures
to abound in her bosom
and I am waiting
for a way to be devised
to destroy all fundamentalisms
without destroying what’s fundamental
and I am waiting
for galaxies and goldfinches
to replenish like grass
and I am waiting for lovers and weepers
to lie down together again
in a new rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the Borderlands to be
unbordered
and I am anxiously waiting

for the pearl of a great price to be
purchased
by a non-fictional character
and I am waiting
for the vaccines against Love
to be destroyed

and I am waiting
to discover a cure for sickness
and I am waiting
for a post-mortem Middle Passage
to rebuild America
with its glistening miscegenation
in mutual collaboration
and I am waiting
for the lost generation to be found again
in the Lonely Planet's guide
to the rebirth of wonder

I am waiting for the dawn
that eraseth all despair
and I am awaiting restitution
for what America did
to Edna Pontellier
and I am waiting
for Isabel Allende
to re-illuminate the moon
in the House of the Spirits
and I am waiting
for Mary Oliver, bride of amazement,
to end her chaplaincy
and I am waiting
for Our Lady of Guadalupe
to appear on Wall Street
trading roses for reparations
in a new rebirth of wonder

I am waiting
to experience some evidence
of eternity
by remembering my early sincerity
and I am waiting
for the mountain mornings to come again
youth's Machu Picchu hopes come back
again

for the rhythm of waves against this clay
to shake my stupefied pen
and I am waiting to write
the great unceasing poem
and I am waiting
for the soul-perching thing with feathers
and I am perpetually waiting
for the stairway-to-heaven stair-masters
and the highway-to-hell hell-raisers
to ponder the perfect recklessness
of lupine
and I am awaiting
perpetually and forever
a renaissance of wonder

The Minority Report

STACEY “MITCH” MITCHELL KING

Agent 5 reporting on experiences on the campus in question.
Report Begins...

I went to class on the first day and found a seat where I was comfortable. The next time we had class this person casually walked in front of me and sat in the seat where I had been previously. It was like I didn’t even exist. When I acerbically asked where was I supposed to sit, she was dumbfounded. To make her feel less threatened and like I was joking, I found another seat. We are great friends now.

This guy asked me why minorities needed a separate space. I said, “That you are asking that question is why we need our own space. The look we get from you is real, one that measures and discounts us before you know us. You don’t always recognize that you are doing it” He and I shared a few laughs that summer.

Transmission to daughter/Prospective BL Agent
Grizzly Adams comes to Bread Loaf to give
humanity another chance. Details to follow...

Now, I’ve been thrown out of classes in the past. I’ve skipped classes from a hangover or just adventuring. The first class I ever walked out of one was at *Wonderbread University*. To this day, I still don’t know how I feel about walking out. Turns out, my professor did not think I was *Wonderbread* material because I could not vocalize something other than ‘I hate or I love” and my writing was subpar. I had to look up a word this smart guy used. Later, when I argued against a point the teacher is making, she gives me the cut-direct. I saw people flinch at the cut, but no one stood up for me. I left a note for her and walked out. We both wrote to each other and she saw ME—not a subpar *Wonderbread* Student—ME. And by that, see all other people. It was truly a transcendent moment feeling seen as an individual. I love her. And that Smart Guy—is freakin’ amazing!

A blanket email went out about an Indian headdress. I thought, “The People of Color missed a perfect opportunity for authentic conversation.” We alienate people with blanket statements. She left Bread Loaf early. Three years later... I still miss her.

Transmission from daughter/Prospective BL Agent:
Michael Armstrong is so cute and cuddly.
I am now going to call him Nikel.

Went to see a presentation. This one actor keeps saying, “Hide it under a rock. The hands, the hands...” The speaker asked if everyone understood what the scene meant, and all these enlightened people nod like they understood. I’m the only one with shrugged shoulders and wide eyes. NO! I did not understand anything at all! What was the point? The speaker says, “The man was dead.” Everyone except me congratulates themselves.

During a conversation outside the Barn, this girl walks over to me and my friend. She starts talking to my friend. She never made eye contact with me. It was a strange invisibility. I thought, “Was my daddy truly a glass maker? Is it too dark for her to see me?” When I started to leave she introduced herself, but it was **too late**. There was only the feeling of aloneness. Later, my friend admonishes me for being rude. When I explained what went through my head, she said, “Wow, there are so many layers to you. I wish I could see them all.” I cried...I never cry.

He actually inspired me to read 18th century British Literature for fun. Shhh! We also read Fanny Hill!...And it was good!

This kid, the only way to describe him, was as a kid—sat at the dinner table and ignored me. While reciting my play lines to a recording, he said, “She’s weird.” I looked through him, then dismissed him. He’s hideous to look at—so now I don’t see him.

Transmission to daughter/Prospective BL Agent:
Biker Gang Infiltrates Bread Loaf Picnic. Reports
that lunch was good!

She came into class with a concerned look on her face. She was a minority, but she wasn’t Black. She somehow thought that the Straight Outta Bread Loaf Shirt was infringing on the Black Culture. My first thought was, “There are so many conversations of note you could have asked me about, but you chose this? I’m Black and grew up on welfare in a housing project—I would know better than you about the Black Community. This is not license of the Black Community.” Outside I said, “I’m glad you felt comfortable enough to approach me on this. Let’s talk about it”. Turns out she was upset because people thought the shirts were ‘cool’ and since the people here at Bread Loaf are mostly privileged, people in the world would be offended. Never mind that Dr. Dre promoted this to all people using his website so they could represent places they are proud of. I said, “I am saddened that this is the first and only conversation you have ever had with me about something of note. I am charging you with having one more conversation with me about something important.” She has never had a second conversation with me.

Transmission from daughter/Prospective BL Agent:
Did you really take a case of beer from Tamarak
because they made fun of Troilus & Cressida?

I was tired, worn out, but energized by the lessons in her class. One day was so hard, we drank afterward. I feel grateful to bring in theatre into my non-English classroom. It’s not every day you get a 6’5, 250-pound boy give another boy a hand massage and look him in the eye without guile. I look at her and her husband with their children and I marvel at their patience and love.

Then, I got to act in a play with her. Talk about the Real Deal!

He said, you treat the Whites around here better than you treat the Blacks. He was calling me an Uncle Tom. I treat the other minorities as if they are my brothers and sisters until they prove differently. I treat my white counterparts with consideration and respect until they prove differently. I am not sure he ever read, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, because Tom heroically tries to save other lives from harm in the Black Community. He would do fine to ape quality traits from this modest fictional character who was willing to sacrifice his own life to protect others. I told him to grow up.

Transmission to daughter/Prospective BL Agent:
Peter Parker Comes to Bread Loaf.
Takes job as server to root out his arch enemy.
Follow this developing story!

I walked into the office to talk to him about a concern I had. He asked if I had an appointment. Later, he asks me to come into his office. When I sat down, he began to berate me for talking about him and spreading gossip that could ruin his reputation. I stood up and began the walk out. He said, “You’re not dismissed.” I said, “I’m dismissing myself. Talking about what happened to me is NOT gossip.” We did not agree on anything that day, but later, when another student complained about him to me, I said, “If you are unhappy, talk to him. He will listen.” Despite my experience, I believed this to be true. He is, under all the bluster and rules, a kind and authentic person.

The beer? Yes.

Has it all been worth it?

I only ask that we be aware, be mindful, and be open.

Give it two years and Be Present.

Know there will be a kick-ass reading list.

I was supposed to be here.

I am supposed to be here.

I learned.

I laughed so much more!

And it was worth it.

Interaction with AUTHENTIC engagement leads to humanization.

Mission successful: Recommend full infiltration

Agent 5

Report ends...

Mermaid in Repose

JOAN WEBER



as i hear the chanting arise

HANNAH LIPMAN

as i hear the chanting arise,
i step forth on the path
to the Summit.

i climb with an Intensity,
an Urgency,
a Passion
that drives me higher and higher
to Lake Waiau.

Pele’s voice rises
along with the Kanaka.
together they chant
in Solidarity.

They shout from the Piko—

ku kia’i mauna

i feel my footsteps become
Soft.
i am suddenly aware of my presence
on the Mountain.

the protectors of Mauna a Wakea
continue to chant as i
stride closer to them.

then i Stop.
i realize this Mauna
is Sacred,
and my Colonizing ancestors
Desecrated this holy land.

i kneel before
Mauna a Wakea—
before its Protectors
and Weep.

Afterwards,
i realize my tears
will not change the Past,
will not remove the trash left by Tourists,
will not break down the Telescopes.
i must use my voice,
to Speak *Of*
what i bore witness to.

i must never Speak *For*
my Hawaiian comrades.
for Their voices chant louder than mine,
and i want to find
Sisterhood with them.

—inspired by conversations with the women protectors of Mauna a Wakea

The Hartness Turret Lathe

IAN WILKINS

“Since the machine is only an implement, it cannot be
considered a thing entirely apart from the man.
In fact, the man is the greater part.”
—*Hartness Turret Lathe Manual*

I’m walking down a street I recognize
From memory. Or perhaps I’m sensing now
Some echo of a past that isn’t mine,
Yet comes to me whenever I allow
These chipped facades of brick to frame my view.
My father—all my fathers before him—
They built this place with no real end in sight.
With calloused hands and hearts they left it to
Their son. I feel the fading of the light.
I squint my eyes. I move deeper within.

So brick leads on to brick, yet broken here
By panes of glass, installed to let the sun
Inside, through leaded ripples. It appears
Abandoned long ago, except for one
Machine—A rusty Hartness Turret Lathe.
It stands there on the empty factory floor.
Too heavy? Maybe too outdated to
Have moved when all the rest were sold away,
The tools still set, the bar secure and true—
A monument, the day they locked the door.

This turret lathe allowed a man to set
His work up once—the raw material,
In perfect balance, spinning, as it met
Its fate, each carefully selected tool
Revealing facets of the shape to come.
And, without stopping to set up anew,

The turret, pulled away, rotates, returns—
The structure set, the work’s continued hum.
From this advance, what lessons can be learned?
What progress has been made? What mad pursuit?

My great grandfather’s slide rule was a gift
My father gave me when I turned a man.
As I held it in my hand, transfixed,
He said, “This world was made by men with hands,
And so your two should put you in good stead.”
I contemplate that slide rule in my mind,
The measurements precise, the quality—
And now a question lingers in my head,
Unanswered, as I look on this machine,
Unaltered, yet forgotten so by time.

That Hartness realized, when he spoke of men,
That calibrations only go so far.
To nothing less or more can they pretend:
The means of manufacture that they are.
The hearts of those few men who dare to ask
To what end all these calibrations go
Will find no solace deep in the machine.
The legacy of innovation past
May show and measure some of what we’ve seen
But gives no sense of what we need to know.

And so I pull my hands back from my eyes
And leave the lathe there standing in the dust,
The rippled glass, the bricks, the narrow sky.
I turn to walk the road I know I must.
For only one presents itself to me,
The same one that my father walked before.
Yet, where he stopped I cannot think that I
Will be content to stop and let it be.
The question stands, and it will be my guide:
A turret lathe, an empty factory floor.

China Flag

BRENDAN BENSON

Brushed invisible between
Stairways, one road
After another night after
Night. South China emerges
From broadcasts of
Bolted bloom.
They have drained
The air, the rice water;
Brought gold as new as old
Tunes that stick to the pot
Sugared and perfumed.
They amplify
Radial statements
In taxis,
Barbershops, on
FM receivers atop the pushcarts of street sweepers;
On and on about the perfection
Of an enormous red star
Tending a pygmy flower.

Visions before *Om*

SUNGBAE PARK

Legs and mind bent
Inward, inside the rusty cage
He fasted in a square
Forty days and forty nights
Moving and breathing as
Little
As possible, but
His heart, wandered past the pastures through
Throngs of people watching with delight the two
Wee goats playing in the dirt

One night he saw the men butchering
A bull, the rusty cleavers splitting flesh leaving
Negative space like a
Cake minus slices taken
Mindlessly, endlessly
—so little blood for such a beast—
Its eyes, cold fire, devours

The river flows before
His eyes now
Constant in its fickleness, never
Still, always leaving, ever there, stopping
Not, for him, for none, for no
Thing can see its end, beyond
Reach, beneath the rippled mirror, yet
Siddhartha sees
The face of his father, lonely, mourning, searching, sees
The face of his own, searching, lonely, mourning, sees
The face of his son, mourning, searching, lonely, melts
Into one, faces all and
None and one in the eternal
Now

The river undulates like Kamala’s breasts, the well-
Travelled contours of her hips swaying, how
He loved to play melodies on Kamala, she
Who taught him to love and unlove, she who
Dissolves into foam now, leaving
Him to stare, into the blank stirring
Of the water, like gazing
Into the nothingness of
The last square on the chessboard:
Has the *artha* always been so empty, now

He sees
The river as it sees
Him:
Streams—lakes—waterfalls—springs—rapids—oceans—the faces
In the water into vapor into rain into
Mouths, leaving behind the moans of joy and
Suffering, laughter and tears, indistinguishable, inseparable, into

One
Little brown boy, beady-eyed, bare as
The stolen mango that he
Bites—
Juice trickling down

A puddle seeps slowly outward

What Is, What Was, and What We See: An Essay on Memories

TARYN HEON

Moments that are small and simple stick with me first and foremost - like the way a hand feels upon a back during a goodbye or welcome hug from a person with sincerity. I find myself forgetting platitudes. I forget them intentionally. The words do, probably, have some wisdom or good intention to them. I don't forget what they are, in terms of word arrangement, as much as I forget that those who say them have a reason for saying them.

“It is what it is” is one of my favorite examples of my least favorite sayings. It is an instant irritant. My dad says it to me all the time. My mom has a repurposed-wood, rustic-looking placard with the phrase painted on it—it hangs over the doorway, above an end table with Susan Lord hugging figurines. But the phrase has been said so many times that it no longer is what it was in the beginning. It starts to lack substance. The phrase has an etymology, springing out of some emotional well. All sayings do. It's what we do as we all know—translate experience into words, however best we can. In my mom's mind, the origin of “it is what it is,” might be the first time that she acknowledged some energy of hopelessness and helplessness. I forget that the phrase had utility at some point in time for her. I guess I wish I remembered that beneath her offering to me of “it is what it is,” are her most painful memories, but she's never shared them with me. I guess that, on principle, I would like the origin of things to be considered; I don't want myself or others to forget that everything is some derivative of suffering. But, I'll admit, sometimes I wish I had the buoyancy to remember platitudes in place of negative emotion. Negative emotion had been my residence for a while. There was a period (years) when all I could recall were scenes saturated with dread, hopelessness, apathy, terror, helplessness, desperation, and the feeling of red-eyed coffee-and-nicotine mornings that dripped with anxiety and regret about things I'd said or done, or mostly said, how I'd said it, with what intonation, with or without lisp, with or without ulterior motives, and other neurotic but somehow important preoccupations. Those were distractions from the real problems, the unmentionables, and untouchables and off-the-tables, like body invasion and the fact that I couldn't make eye contact, and the fact that shame nearly replaced the marrow in my

bones. The underlying problem was a specter of a memory – a different kind of platitude, one with hazardous intentions that went, **“just relax.”** He whispered it into my ear in the same way that the priest did to him.

I chose to remember, instead, facts and theories at the end of college. One English professor taught me to think about the concept of memories. She had an unmistakable sound to her stride, a high and soft voice that was often nurturing and wry at the same time. She occasionally referenced her interactions with her therapist, who explained to her that depression is associated with the past and anxiety is associated with the future. She didn't seem too preoccupied with the past unless for narrative purposes. Otherwise, I imagined she was more situated in happenings of the future, plausible and maybe not-so-plausible happenings, like me. She maintained a breeziness throughout her nerves, and I looked up to her because of it.

Then I graduated. I had less structure. I sat on my porch every morning for my red-eyed coffee-and-nicotine ritual. I was still fluctuating between crisis, depression, and stability. I wasn't thinking about the concept of memory, but the frustratingly abstract model of the future that I needed to figure out on my own.

But something happened in the middle of that stretch of shitty years, throughout those miserable, red-eyed coffee-and-nicotine mornings, that I continue to remember: A girl, about twelve years old, who passed by me every morning on her way to the charter school (backpack stuffed, but making her strong) without making eye contact — except for one day, the last day that I saw her. It reminded me of another time, as memories go, when someone offered to me the cliché that what we see, when we view another's gaze, is the universe. I wouldn't say they were wrong.

Three Rembrandt Paintings in Mauritshuis, The Hague

LINDA FLYNN

Somewhere between the still-lifes and the Virgin Marys
three guys hang on the walls.

The Elderly Man looks like he’s finally grappling
with mortality, eyes cast downward
focused just below
the frame of his portrait,

hands grip the arms of his chair,
the skin on his face red and scabby,
like my cats when they come home
after a brawl.

To the right is the Master himself,
forehead wrinkled in concern or disdain,
I can’t tell which—
a common Dutch confusion.

I wonder when his second chin
protruded, when his nose bulbed,
if he doubted himself, felt like a fraud,
or trusted the craft. He faces me

head-on, disappointed
I-told-you-so eyes.
It’s 1669, the year he will die,
so I shouldn’t take it personally.

As for Homer, he’s got a few years on the others,
looks like he’s been dragged through the dirt,
or maybe that’s just old age—

I wouldn’t know the difference.

What light is left shines
on his dirty coat and white beard. Soon
he will amble out
into the dark unknown.

“Repurposing Throwaway: A Detritus-Illuminated Guide to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”

PENELOPE WADE



98 Rolls of tape (so far): Six-week Bread Loaf Course; Opening oneself to Joyce as Lived Experience and Found object; Letter to my father in Ireland

Hello. Thank you for this opportunity to share. My detractors and champions might say that this guide to *Ulysses* is a most salient example of *Diasporic Joyce* because it is literally all over the place. In fact, a girl friend at Bread Loaf, Meredith Morris, told me she had a ‘found word’ for my book: “Thesislessness”—the Greek God of wandering Prosody. Despite its capacity and opacity, I’d like to spend some time clarifying and illuminating this Gesamtkunstwerk: a guide to the guide if you will.

I will highlight how Throwaway can illustrate Joyce’s philosophies on time, genius, art, and the Protean nature of reading, and rereading.

Also (AND! AND! AND!), I would like to speak to the democratization of this artistic process, to the self as reader, and remind the crowd that in Ireland, the emphasis *Ulysses* is on the you.



Background from the abstract:
Title of paper: Detritus and Scribbles: A Throw-Away Illuminated Guide to James Joyce *Ulysses*

Brief abstract:

“I don’t mind you looking down on me so long as you’re looking at me.”- Graffiti viewed in Dublin, 2012

How might Ireland’s greatest artist be recognized? Ireland had no Shakespeare. The Irish people were regarded globally as merely as human landfill; the Potato Famine’s death toll brought Ireland world fame, and put it on the map. As John Eglington, the Quaker Librarian from the National Library in the *Scylla and Charybdis*, Chapter 9, of *Ulysses*, ‘censures’, “Our young Irish bards, John Eglington censured, have yet to create a figure which the world will set beside the Saxon Shakespeare’s Hamlet though I admire him, as old Ben did, on this side of idolatry.” (*U.* 9.44-46) Ireland was in desperate need of a literary leader, and Joyce as Stephen Dedalus, feels discarded. *Ulysses*, (emphasis on the “you” in Ireland), re-incorporates that loss of identity emphasized by diaspora and lack of recognition forged in the smithy of Stephen’s soul

an uncreated consciousness of his race.

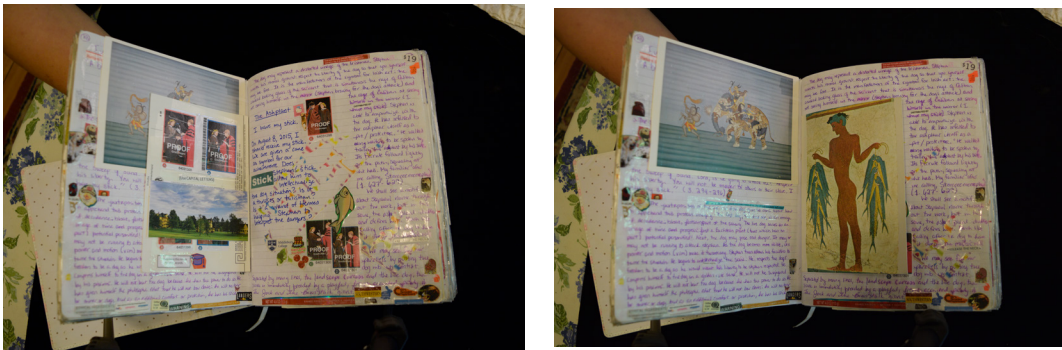
Subsequently forged, in the furnace of Joyce Society member, and UVA faculty member Jennifer’s Wicke’s *Ulysses* course at Bread Loaf School of English in the 2015 Summer Session, my (affectionately-referred-to) ‘madness’ became manifest.

Described by Bread Loaf School of English Emily Bartels at commencement as a “revolution in textual Hermeneutic analysis in a creative-interpretation-art piece of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”, and, in prose, couched as an extensive letter to my wandering father in Dublin that self-same summer, I created a 170-page bricolage notebook guide to James Joyce’s *Ulysses* richly illuminated with “throwaway”. (id est Postcards from a bin in the Social Studies department of my school (marked “throw away”), advertisements, wrappers, junk mail, promotional materials, coffee shoppe literature, and even a discarded Library copy of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, to name a few sources). Whether one thinks of *Ulysses* as trash, disposable, pornography, or unparalleled genius, one cannot turn away from it.

This project celebrates the joy in Joyce, especially appreciating the interplay of text, image, and the lost or revised morsels when reading, and rereading Joyce. It is a viewer’s guide to being audience to James Joyce’s works, and one’s correspondence as reader.

Many find this work overwhelms. “Overwhelming”. The materials for my smithy of creation are that which would otherwise be disregarded: Junk mail, coffee shop literature, promotional flyers, end-of-the-school year recycling bins, packaging, advertisement, and how it interplays with the text. Here I will read directly from pages 19 through 22 as example.

“A point, live dog, grew into sight running across a sweep of sand. Lord, is he going to attack me? Respect his liberty. You will not be masters of others or their slave. I have my stick.” (III. 294–296)

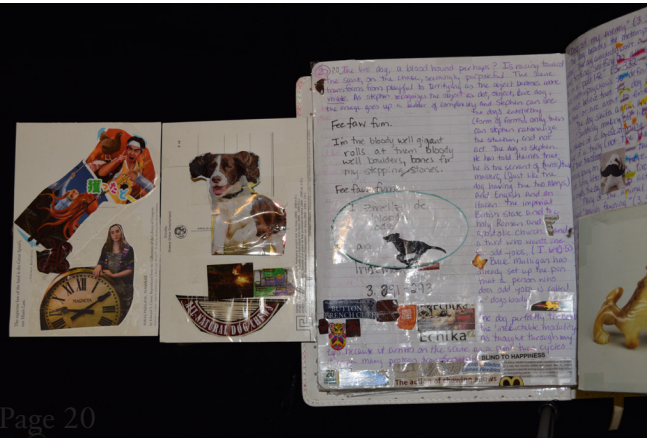


The juxtaposition of the live and dead dog give us clues about how to apprehend this Protean imagery. The first dog, the dead one, is an image of decadence: ‘bloat’, ‘lolloped’, ‘bladder’, yet detritus, flotsam, and camouflaged in the scenery. The live dog is an image progresses through time: first Euclidean, “a point” (Euclid’s first definition ‘a point’ =that which has no part). Non-individuated, continuum, potential personified. Next, the live dog as threat: the dog may pose real danger. It may not be running to attack Stephen. As the dog becomes more visible, its power and motion (vim) make it threatening. Stephen then allows his faculties to tame the situation. He begins to intellectualize the scene. The dog’s freedom to as dog respected as Stephen’s own liberty respected. Stephen sympathizes with the dog, comparing the dog to himself through the ‘golden rule.’Stephen will not be subjugated by his passions. He will not beat the dog merely because he has the power to do so. He has given himself the philosophic edict that he will not bow down (*non serviam*): he will neither be owner, nor dog, but as additional comfort or protection, he ‘has his stick’.

Page 19

The dog may represent a distorted image of the Irishman. Stephen asserts his moral ground: ‘respect the liberty of the dog so that you yourself may be free’. It is the manifestation of the symbol for Irish art: the cracked looking glass of the servant. Letters] {img laureled Penelope Wade shaking hands with Emily Barthels at graduation 2015}{img receiving stick from Emily Barthels } {Bread Loaf School of English landscape} {img under landscape, two images of President Laurie Patton 1st adjusting laurels, then with hand on shoulder} text under postcard:

The Ashplant
I have my stick.
On August 8, 2015, I
should receive my stick.
We are given a “Painter’s” cane
as symbol for our
achievements. Does
Stephen’s stick allow him to
intellectualize the dog situation? Is it
a thrysos or talisman?
Is it a wand of Hermes
helping Stephen to
interpret the dangers?



The live dog, a bloodhound perhaps? Is racing toward the scent, on the chase, seemingly purposeful. The scene transforms from playful to terrifying as the object becomes more visible. As Stephen recognizes the object as dot, object, live dog,—the image goes up the ladder of complexity and Stephen can see the dog’s entelechy (form of forms), only then can Stephen rationalize the situation, and refrain from action. The dog is Stephen. He has told Haines that Stephen’s a servant of (three) two Masters, (just as the dog has the two Marys) an English and an Italian: the Imperial British state and the holy Roman and apostolic church...”and a third who wants me for odd jobs.” (I.

650) Dogsbody! Buck Mulligan has already established the pun that a person who does odd jobs is called a ‘dogsbody’.

The dog perfectly transmutes the ‘ineluctable modality...as thought through my eyes’ because it arrives on the scene as a point then cycles through many protean transformations. [BLIND TO HAPPINESS]

[POSTCARD; ATHENS NATIONAL MUSEUM. Statuette of a flute player from Keros (2300-2800BC) {img: long-necked stone carved statue holding what look like ivory tusks}]
FLIP-SIDE [POSTCARD: HASCHOGAN, NAVAJO [The supreme law of the land is the Great Spirit’s, not Man’s Law.] {img: photograph, feathered crown, fur long wavy hair, mummy-wrapped face with eyes visible, squirrel tail bisects face, ever-green branch ruff, leather tunic, metal amulet}]

text under POSTCARD

Fee faw fum.
I’m the bloody well gigant
rolls at them bloody
well boulders, bones for
my stepping stones.

Fee faw fum.

I zme llz de
bloodz
odz

an

Iridzman.

(III. 291-293)

Page 21

“Dog of my enemy” (III.310-1) [RUFF DAY? {Img dog laying down}

The dog becomes a metempsychosis avatar, “Their dog ambled about a bank of dwindling sand, trpttong, sniffing on all sides looking for something lost in a past life.” (III. 332-3) Why does Stephen posit metempsychosis so definitely and declaratively here? We, as readers, must believe that the dog is a stand in for other characters we have encountered or are about to encounter in this text.

The dog shifts again, and by simile becomes a prey animal.

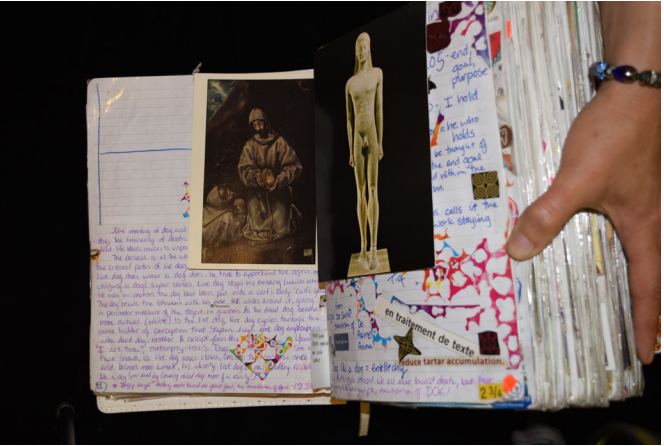
“Suddenly making off like a bounding HARE, chasing the shadow of a low-skimming gull.” (III. 333-4). It is the image of an animal, (not the bird itself, but the shadow of a bird) that transforms the predator (dog) into prey (gull). [PARE] The text gives us evident mirroring. There is mirroring going on in this passage, and like a glass it is brittle and shatters. The dog does not have the gull’s scent, and in the dog relying on its eyes, it is not bounding after a live target, but it is a bloodless umbrage that impels the dog to action.

The dog-hare concatenation is not stand alone in the metaphorical chimeras in this chapter. Many of the Proteus chapter’s animal images, as aforementioned, are con-fused, or amalgamated bringing to mind the chapter’s namesake: “bearish fawning” (III. 345) (both bear and fawn); “a rag of wolf’s tongue” (cf.); “Calf’s gallop” (III. 348)--[text obscured by POSTCARD] none of these animals are present. The descriptions further the chapter’s protean, shape-shifting tenor, but elude the capture of the Ding an Sich. We, as readers, have only a swirl of images and cannot gain access to the chapter’s thesis, reality, or truth. The chapter’s style, and Joyce’s mode of writing here illustrates the Homeric parallel. Once it seems that we have captured the old man of the sea, Proteus, and he is about to impart his knowledge to us, the scene shifts. The insights gained are ephemeral. Therefore, the chapter intimates seemingly profound surface meanings, but it turns out to be as useless as “throwaway.” As reader, what I think I have gleaned in one metaphorical deep dive does not seem worth ‘holding on to’; the process inspires more dizziness than confidence.

Live dog intersects with dead dog and the imagery coalesces. The dog imagery takes over. The similes and comparisons with other animals reincorporates on the line where the dog sniffs “like a dog” (III. 348). The dog, live dog, when sensing the dead dog with a receptor other than its eyes is now put back into a ‘dog’s body.’

[POSTCARD: CHINESE JADE WINGED CHIMERA, Han dynasty, 1st century BC-1st Century AD FLIP-SIDE [POSTCARD: a buffalo from Gomara 1553.]]

Page 22



H

[text obscured by POSTCARD]

[POSTCARD: El Greco 1541-1614; St. Francis and Brother Leo meditating on death] [img; Kneeling Assisi, who is famed to have the language of animals, holds in his hands a human skull. Brother Leo crouches at his side with hands held in prayer.]

[H]is speckled body ambled ahead
of them and then lopped off at
a calf’s gallop. The carcass lay
on his path. He stopped, sniffed,
stalked around it, brother,
nosing closer, went round it,
sniffing rapidly like a dog
all over the dog’s bedraggled
fell. Dogskull, dogsniff, eyes
on the ground, moves to one
great goal*. Ah, poor dogsbody!
Here lies poor dogsbody.

(III. 347-352)

The meeting of dog and dog, the liminality of death
and life leaves much to unpack.
The carcass is in the way: the crossed path of the live dog.
Live dog does what a dog does: the dog tries to apprehend
the object utilizing a dog’s super specialized senses.

Live dog stops its ambling (which when in motion, the dog is metaphorically placed into a calf’s body: “calf’s gallop” (348)). The dog reads the situation with its nose. The live dog walks around the dead dog, giving perimeter to the dog object, a perimeter measure of the object in question. As the dead dog becomes more actual (visible) to the live dog, the live dog cycles through a similar ladder of perception and affinity that Stephen experiences when viewing the lie dog. Live dog empathizes with dead dog: “brother” (349). A concept from the Upanishads, “I art thou,” reminisces of metempsychosis. Dogs ‘see’ with their snouts. So live dog “nosing closer” (349) begins to truly apprehend dead dog. Live dog circles the carcass, the perimeter measurement is reminiscent of scientific observations. These modes of observation flesh out both the live and dead dogs. Live dog becomes more itself in the process; it identifies with the object. Object and subject fuse, revealing the live dog’s identity. Live dog “sniffing rapidly, like a dog” (349) over dead dog supplies dead dog with reality (as absolute as a corpse).

*Deasy says, “All history moves to one great goal, the manifestation of God.”
(II. 381) (ARROW--->)

[on Page 23]

Dog like a dog= entelechy

(ARROW POINTS ----->) Here (III. 351) is a Stephen-style Joycean wordplay self-referential reversal. All life moves toward the one great goal of death, but in passages 347-352, history is moving toward the one great goal, the Manifestation of DOG!!!

“I don’t mind you looking down at me, so long as you’re looking at me.”

Avocado Incident

DEIRDRE A. KOENEN

I see now my careless grasp, the excess
of passion with which I thrust the paring knife,

hoping to get that hard, slippery heart;
how the knife slid too easily through flesh,

through the black skin that yielded without a care,
letting the blade pierce through my own flesh,

right past the bone, coming to rest
in the nerve where it stuck;

and even when the doctor pulled the weapon
from my numbed hand, the pain had only begun:

sleepless nights, drugged days, dull pain at the heart
of my hand, where the only sign of the injury

was a slowly healing scar and a swollen ring finger,
an all too real reminder of a freak incident

I never could have predicted,
never would have wanted, and yet, even now,

I don’t think I would have stopped myself.

Louisa’s Quest

JACQUE HEALY

Dear Diary,
Today was the worst day ever. At choir we all had to stand really close together and some of the Poppies (Popular girls) were saying “what’s that smell? Like garbage?” and lifting their noses, and I got afraid it was me bcuz today I didn’t have any clean clothes. I heard Amy tell Ashley that she washes her hair EVERY SINGLE DAY. I didn’t know I was supposed to do that. I wish I was pretty. I hate zits. I asked Morgan (not a poppy but almost one) if they were very noticeable and she said yes. The Poppies all stand around in a circle at recess and they all have puffy baby blue or pale pink coats. I got one too for Christmas but the Poppies say I’m just a copycat. And Mrs. Allen wants us to bring five dollars for our field trip to the zoo but mom says she doesn’t have five dollars until maybe next week after her sale goes through. Amy’s mom always brings her lunch to school when she forgets it. It always comes in a perfect brown sack with her name on it. I have school lunch and my last name starts with R so I have to stand at the back of the line with Nora Wazinskie. No boys like her bcuz she’s so weird and ugly.

Miserably,
Louisa

P.S. The poppies all write with gel pens and they wear sparkly white eyeliner right now. They all look soooooo pretty. G2G! (that means got to go)

Dear Diary,
So guess what, good news! I’m almost a Poppie! On Friday I got invited to a big sleepover at Amy’s house. I felt super special to be playing with them. But what’s weird is that it wasn’t really that fun. Erin and Amy mostly talked about the Back Street Boys and their friend Ashley’s spidery eye lashes and how they look fake. They don’t even talk about deep stuff like God or books and they don’t make up stories. So I came home yesterday and played with Samantha (my AG—that means American Girl in code so that you can talk about them in front of boys). Later I stayed up all night reading a Nancy Drew mystery all about a mannequin in a window that is actual real. So FREAKY. I loved it so much.

Most ardently (I heard that in a movie),
Louisa

Dear Diary,
Guess what? I am so embearessed. At lunch someone threw a donut at me. I didn’t know who did it, but I ran to the bathroom and cried my heart out. Later I was walking home from school and Caitlin (not a Poppie) told me that Amy (definitely a Poppie) told Dane to throw it at me. Maybe because they think I’m trying to be like them and they don’t like me. At afternoon recess, Amy came up to me and whispered “Can you please tell Nora to stop following us?” It made me sad bcuz that means she thinks I’m in the same group as Nora. So I said no. Plus, I kind of liked seeing their faces when Nora was following them. They had no idea what to do!

Wickedly,
Louisa

Dear Diary,
Listen to what happened today. You’ll never guess. I was bored to tears at recess. The boys always play soccer, but most of the sixth grade girls just stand around in circles. I want friends and stuff but no one plays! I hate it. So I found a group of big rocks where a plant with crazy large leaves grows. I picked some of those and pretended they were tortillas. Then I put gravel and grass inside of them and rolled them up to make burritos. I was pretending that I owned a restaurant and having a good time when I saw Nora Wasinski close by on her hands and knees.

“I’m looking for some stolen treasure, haven’t happened to see any lying around, have you?” she asked me.

“No,” I said.

“Pity,” said Nora. “I’m Nancy, Nancy Drew. Let me know if you find some, will you?”

She started to walk away. I looked at her; I looked at the poppies huddled in their circle. Then I just thought, ‘oh who cares,’ and cried “Nancy! I think I just found a gem in one of these burritos!”
We played together all recess. Can’t wait for tomorrow!
joyfully,
Louisa

The Hipster’s Prologue

(Written in the Style of Chaucer)

FORREST BROWN

Among our group there was a gangly man
A boy with twenty-one years to his span
Who told us of the hardships of his life,
Which was, being from Greenwich, filled with strife.
His hair was perfect, plastic in its form,
For clothing collared sweaters were the norm
Along with skinny khaki pants or jeans
I’ve often seen in catalogues on teens.
He disliked spending money with his friends-
Could not afford to fund their petty ends-
How could he when each day he had to buy
A custom cup of coffee to survive?
Convictions that he had were always strong,
Not weak, so things like facts could prove them wrong.
His tastes were elevated and refined,
To show off his sophisticated mind
His shelf was filled with many heavy books,
Their covers with intimidating looks
From little suffering of wear and tear,
Because removal from their place was rare.
The music he enjoyed was quite exclusive,
Their melody and meaning was elusive,
He said he only liked songs that could get
Played in a Starbucks, but that hadn’t yet.
He drank the finest scotch, bourbon, and wines,
And only twice did he earn drunken fines
That to be fair, he barely could recall,
So they might not have been his fault at all.
With girls, his manners were the height of class,
It took two drinks before he’d make a pass,
And then he’d speak in soft, poetic phrase
To give their breasts or buttocks words of praise.
He liked to say when anything was wrong,
And did, with passion, while we walked along.

the cliff

JOAN WEBER

she stood on the edge of the cliff and looked down at the water below not
knowing whether flying was really possible if it was then she should jump but if
it wasn’t she shouldn’t

she felt her mind fill with the hum of static she stared down and then she just
walked away

she walked slowly away from the cliff edge as she saw someone else come to
take her place she turned and saw him jump but she didn’t look to see if he
could fly she refused to look

she walked to her car kicking herself that she didn’t jump but now she couldn’t
because she would be seen as a copycat she felt herself getting angry she could
feel her heart ba-bump

he seemed to hang in the air for a moment lifted up by the wind he was flying
then gravity exerted its force and he felt himself plummet which was a differ-
ent kind of flying he put out his arms to slow his pace so that he could feel the
sensation for as long as possible it was thrilling

he felt his body hit the water it did not slice through like a knife and he felt
the cold water encompass him though he hated getting wet especially since he
thought he would splat on the beach but he must have miscalculated the force
of wind that pushed him out to sea enough to miss the beach

she drove down to the beach below the cliff to look up at the wall of rock for
perspective and awe but the man was on the beach too like a real jerk who
wasn’t dead as though his goal was to thwart her every need she thought he
would be swept away to the sea but of course he wasn’t

she kicked sand on him to see if he was dead but she saw him twitch and breathe so she walked quickly away because she didn’t want to talk to him or anyone else for that matter she sat in the sand far enough from him so that she could claim that she thought he was sleeping she was innocent

he woke up and felt like someone had pummeled him while he slept he didn’t remember swimming to shore or lying down here in the sun why was there sand on top of him he must have turned over he sat up slowly wincing with the pain to look around and saw someone sitting down the way on the beach too far away to talk to without shouting and he didn’t feel as though he had enough oxygen in his lungs to talk yet so he sat he looked out at the water and wondered what had happened and if he were dead but he decided he wasn’t and that was fine he had flown

he looked again down the beach and saw that the woman was looking at him she was glaring but maybe her face always looked that way he looked up the beach nothing there but dancing seagulls fighting over a fish head

she saw him sit up and she hated him even more for not being dead because if he were dead she would at least have the satisfaction that he had no memories anymore but if he was alive then he would remember flying and she wouldn’t and that wasn’t fair she thought why should he have what she wanted she hated him so much

she waited maybe he would leave and she could at least have this little beach to herself she deserved it more than he obviously

neither moved neither spoke neither anything
the wind blew and the sun shone and the earth rotated on its axis and the beach became engulfed in late afternoon light

he moved to see that he could move she did not move though she did look up voluntarily when she saw him move in the corner of her eye she got mad all over again thinking he was controlling her actions through his actions she moved to show that he did not control her but he did not see her do that what a bastard she threw a stone at the water and felt satisfied by the plop sound it made when it hit he did not move she knew it was on purpose

he shouted do you have a phone she did not turn her head
he shouted it more loudly she turned her head
he repeated his question

she looked at him like she knew him and had hated him all her life he did not understand

the sun hung low in the sky reflecting off the cliffs bathing them both in a dark golden

We'll Try

KURT OSTROW

I remove my nail polish before the interview, but I am otherwise forthcoming. I heft my binder of unit plans and samples of student work, talk of eighth graders nearly getting arrested at a Bank of America action. “Working here is my dream job,” I say. I mean it. The principal, an immigrant from the Azores, tells me I have a fire in my belly.

As we duck into the public high school classroom I will inherit, a new boss whispers to me, “Start by taking down those posters. We don’t need any white savior nonsense.” My boss is white, and I am white—no less white, surely, than Hilary Swank or the teacher she plays—but I rush to agree. The next week, I relish the destruction, delight in ripping down each movie poster. White, yes. Savior, no. But as each Ms. Swank flutters to the floor, don’t I already feel like the saving has begun?

“Or perhaps,” Eula Biss writes, “it would be better if we simply refused to be white. But I don’t know what that means, really.”

Everyone gets to write a secret on a post-it note. We fold them and put them in a shoebox, then pick one at random to share. Some are funny. “I braid my armpit hair.” “I steal air fresheners from other people’s homes.” Some are vulnerable, regret over losing virginity or missing an absent father. “I am bisexual, and I love my best friend,” writes one student. We snap in support.

I wake up having sweat the bed. I realize I can’t explain away another sticky blur of men and muscles. I watch my dog’s chest rise and fall on what used to be my baby blanket. I am 21, in my senior year of college. It’s Halloween. In spite of eight disciplined years, and without a hint of irony, I decide that today, maybe, is no longer the day for costumes. I reach for my laptop and open an incognito window. I watch a series of lesbian, straight, and gay pornographies to test which ones will make me hard. I cum as two pixelated twinks suck each other off on a couch.

Every two weeks, I crate home a heavy box of marble notebooks. They are collaged with Chance, Bernie, and lipstick brands. They fill up with stories about my students’ lives: an addicted mother who yells too much, the sweat and tears behind a fast-food counter, a first queer kiss. In this elective, Freedom Writers, two questions propel us: Who are we becoming? and How will we get free? What we study in class, and what we write in these notebooks,

constitute our attempt to answer them both.

Most of my students are white, like me, and grew up poor, unlike me. They live in Fall River, a depressed mill town on the southern coast of Massachusetts. One student raps in his notebook,

Ya, I know it sound mean
But this city is weak
Ya, friends turning on you like autumn’s leaves
Man, can’t you see?
Fall River’s a city that ain’t for me

The mayor, who’s my age, with a nasty penchant for privatization, just revised the city’s motto from “We’ll try” to “Make it here.” I don’t know how to encourage my students to make their lives in a city I won’t live in myself. There is nothing to do, they tell me. And, as much as I like the spinach pies at Sam’s bakery, they’re right—not even a movie theater.

J. often wears a homemade Black Lives Matter hoodie and, in a poem to define his gender, calls himself “the child of Saturn’s moon.” When his class interviews each other with the Times’ 36 Questions to Fall in Love, he is outraged that some would not radically alter their lives if they knew, for crystal-ball sure, that they’d be dead within the year. “Do you have any idea,” he demands, all eyes on him, “how much *ass* I would be eating?” “J.!” I shout. “You .. you can’t say that!” “Fine!” he shouts back. “Anilingus! Better?” Busting up, I throw my pen across the room at him.

A monster runs for president and wins. During his election, he suggests a ban, so I hang a sign, “Muslims welcome,” in English and Arabic, by my classroom door. When I come back to school during winter break, I notice an ugly brown *not* scrawled in between my words. I hand it off to the principal, but ask for nothing more. Nothing more happens. A year later, after the election, students and I erect a whole display of love. “Sometimes you have to build your own wall,” we say. Our signs struggle to stay up. Every day, one or another peels off and falls down.

I debated policy in high school, an activity so inaccessibly white and middle class that whole parallel debate leagues of color sprung up in response. Our senior year, my then best friend and I argue for a revenue-neutral carbon tax. At Georgetown, though, he becomes a climate denier, then goes to work for Credit Suisse, a financial services company that settles for hundreds of millions over its toxic mortgages and racist predatory loans. In college, I coordinate

the RI Urban Debate League, watched working-class students new to English, or to the academy, wrestle jargon like hegemony into lightning-fast speeches. I still use debate in my classroom to wake kids up, to force opinions, to disrupt false notions of inevitability. Should the U.S. federal government legalize drugs? Or abolish prisons? “Don’t look at me,” I remind them. “Talk to each other.” It’s also about skill. I don’t want the first time they’re negotiating for better healthcare or equity in scheduling to be with their boss. So we simulate collective bargaining. We model Congress. My room, in so many ways, is not a democracy. Neither is our country. That doesn’t mean we can’t always be practicing to live in one.

The class, in its circle, has settled into quiet. That means Antonio is asleep, his head resting on an outstretched arm, and Jessica is sitting with both her arms and legs crossed, nothing on her desk. The rest of us, however, are reading—books we’ve chosen from the small library I have grown ever since, late in college, I knew with certainty that I’d someday have my own classroom. My egg timer is set for ten minutes. We are reading a lesbian retelling of Cinderella, or a crude story of a dying girl, or 2Pac’s poetry, and it is quiet.

Arthur Russell died, relatively broke and unknown, from AIDS in 1992. His cello rises and falls. “Each step, each step is moving me up,” he sings. “This is how we walk on the moon.”

We start a unit on literary theory by way of a moonwalking bear. A video asks viewers to count basketball passes (there are 14), but, in doing so, we miss what’s right in front of us: a bear that moonwalks across the court. It reminds us that when we look at texts through Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial lenses, we’re trying to unearth messages and assumptions we’d otherwise miss. I will never forget the way Brendan, who, left to his own devices, might never leave the gym or open his mouth, took to theory. On the unit’s summative assessment, a Sylvia Plath poem about mushrooms, he annotates, crosses out, and boxes in until he’s ready to make a trenchant feminist argument. For him, the lenses endure. “I was watching Sausage Party the other day,” Brendan mentions, “and I was reading it through a Marxist lens without even trying.” I understand this to be a raunchy animated comedy about a friendly sausage, and so I felt, for once, my work here is done.

The work is never done. There is the classroom, which is not enough, and there’s everything outside, never enough. How much does it matter, I wonder, for students to write their pens dry if the material conditions of their lives never

change? So I organize in both my local and state unions. I knock doors for ballot questions, walk picket lines with students and their families, make motions to support progressive legislation at the statehouse. This is a hard row to hoe in a country determined to decimate an already imperfect labor movement, often myopically concerned with wages and benefits. But shit, we’ll try.

By the time *I watch 13 Reasons Why*, my students have mostly forgotten about it—a marvel of the Netflix generation. At one moment in the series, a boy implicated in Hannah’s tapes says, “What happened to Hannah is what happens to every girl in high school. She didn’t have to go and kill herself over it.” I teach plenty of girls, of course, just as caught up as Hannah Baker in the patriarchy of the American high school. On my way to lunch one day, I see one of those girls, who moves from boy to boy, and invite her to catch up. “I’ve been thinking about you,” I say, as she sits on a desk. We chat about the show, about which characters we liked and which we hated. “I want to make sure no boy ever takes advantage of you,” I tell her. “And I want to make sure you never feel bad, or wrong, for having sex.” “It’s too late,” she says, after a pause, all of a sudden in tears, crumpling under the weight of girls’ eyes and boys’ phones, of reputation. “It’s too late.” I hold her close.

I refer often to Jeff Duncan-Andrade’s paradigm of effective urban educators. “Ridas,” he theorizes, “are people who would sooner die than let their people down. There are almost always a few Ridas in schools where students are suffering...but they are the exception, not the rule. They risk deep emotional involvement with the great majority of students, and they are sometimes hurt because of those investments.”

Which is to say, fire or no fire, fuck this job, this job fucks me up, I love this fucking job.

L. writes a letter to her younger self. She considers, among other things, her blackness (“at first, brown will mean dirt”) and comes to terms with her asexuality (“The words bubble in your throat like nausea”). She confesses life will be painful, very, but in the end, she promises, “We’ll make it. You just have to take it one Tinkerbelle light-up sneaker at a time.” For her memoir, L. wins a gold key, and then a national gold medal. She’s to accept her award at Carnegie Hall. We jump up and down in the hallway. This is big. The School Committee recognizes her, as does our department. I raise money for the trip. “To me,” she says in a recording we have to submit, “the future looks much brighter because college has never been something I thought I could achieve

with how poor my family has been. But now, winning something as big as a national award, I feel I could do whatever I want to.” L., I realize, cannot do whatever she wants. Here, fear and anxiety take over, or maybe her parents do, afraid they may no longer be able to understand their child. Either way, L. never boards a bus to New York, never takes the stage at Carnegie Hall. I am pissed, devastated. Can her sneakers carry her to college? I know this isn’t Hollywood, and I’m not asking for that kind of happy ending, but I want her to have the future she’s imagined, the future she deserves. I don’t know how to help her get it.

My mom, a nurse, and my dad, a poker dealer, pushed me out of the nest. They played word games with me growing up and tell me as soon as I ask that school is my job—there would be no singing for tips at Cold Stone for me. And so I go, unlike most of my cousins, far from New Jersey’s suburbs: Brown University. I even graduate debt-free—the result of my family’s hard work, savings, and whiteness.

J. dropped out of college this year. C. never went. They are both, I am sure of it, much smarter than I am.

I lose my shit whenever we study Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* in class. Early on, the story’s protagonist, a slave girl named Florens, comes into the orbit of Daughter Jane, a white girl being hunted and mutilated by her Christian town because of her lazy eye, which they believe makes her a demon. The town’s attention suddenly turns to Florens, though: they have never seen someone so monstrously black. Daughter Jane snickers. She takes Florens to the woods and shows her how to get free. Florens thanks her, starts to run off, but then turns back. She asks Daughter Jane if she is, in fact, a demon. Daughter Jane’s wayward eye goes steady. “Yes,” she says. “Oh yes. Go now.”

“From the bottom of my heart, I appreciate all the work you’ve done on this,” a history teacher says from the back of the library, “but this sucks.” He is, ironically, holding up a list of benefits the bargaining team, for which I am the high school rep, had just won at the table. “Every year we give back, give back, and I’m sick of it.” No one speaks up. So, I walk over and smash his teeth in. I misdirect my anger at his misdirected anger. He rants that teachers are underpaid and overworked, over-tested and undervalued. I fucking know that, motherfucker. That’s why I do all of this. I wave my arms, wild. This is the thanks I get? I know this is not enough, but what more can we do in a profession consigned to a sexist female wage, in a city whose mills are abandoned, in

a country whose wealth is concentrated in the hands of too few? “Any other questions or comments about the tentative bargaining agreement?” I ask, for real. There are none. We vote the following Monday. The membership votes to ratify, 481 in favor, 130 against. We need to do more.

A trans student, Colton, comes out to us in class. At the end of the year, he writes me a note: “O., you are a superhero with painted nails and Jesus sandals.” Every day, as a public school teacher, as an organizer, I am a superhero. Every day, too, I am a failure. A demon, and a faggot.

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Acknowledgements

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This has been a summer to consider Democracy. In cultural discourse, truths are more ephemeral now than they seem to have been in the past, leaving many of us with a fog of anxiety regarding what’s real, and some with a drive to be right, above all.

In this light, our time at Bread Loaf seems particularly important. We are all working together to find truth in facts, ideas, and experience. We’ve listened to discussion on the absolute necessity of choice and agency for young people in their educations; we’ve learned how to apply theory in our classrooms (and maybe our lives) to make room for voices that are not always sought out or heard; we are rethinking poetry as a medium that allows us to connect our most intimate truths to the rest of humanity.

Matching this spirit of plurality, our Journal this year is larger than in years past—a chorus of voices. Thank you to all of the writers, makers, thinkers, and feelers who lent us work and a new way to know you. Thank you to Lauren Frantz, a graceful partner in the editorial contra dance. Thank you to Dana Olsen for your kindness, reminders, and investment of time and close attention. Thank you to Valerie Costello for your work to design and lay out this publication. Thank you to Emily Bartels and Tyler Curtain for making sure we have resources to continue this tradition of sharing student work in print.

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