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maybe one day it can be enough.

tova g.

after *what the living do* by marie howe

i've been thinking about you recently in moments like
when the j train is late, or when a string of
light hits the brick wall outside of my window & i haven't
yet been asleep, or when words are foggy

like morning coffee that is neither hot nor cold. in those
seconds that don't feel like seconds
i catch myself remembering how food would get stuck
in your beard & how you always kept

your books covered with that stretchy fabric that left traces
of itself on your fingers long after
it was stowed away. when trying to jam a citi bike into its lock or
cleaning off crumbs from the kitchen counter i

wonder if involuntarily i live like you lived, if i tie my shoes or
talk to strangers or fall in love like you.
i never learned to notice if onions made you cry too, or if
you compulsively bit your nails, or if

stress acne popped up near your nose. now i have to
teach myself what detergent to use, &
how to trap bugs under cups, & what stretches will lessen
the persistent tension in my neck.

i don't know how to love these reminders—refilling the
hand soap or looking for my keys or
wiping summer condensation off my glasses—that i am living
if you are not living too.

it is too much to live for you; the air in my lungs cannot
sustain two beating hearts, nor can my brain

comprehend the sheer magnitude of you, but as marie howe
said, i can live remembering you

& if i hope & remember & live relentlessly
maybe one day it can be enough.

She Is Another Insect Entire, But It Still Stings

O. Captain

I wish I had eaten you earlier,
when you were a fig
 and not
the womb of a wasp.

As it is, you are stinging
your way out
 of my stomach, through
the dark caves of absence

inside of me. Alongside my blood,
humming, is your engine, your
 thousand-per-second wings
fluttering like your hands

over my skin—but under.
I wish I had torn you open
 with my teeth, to see
if you would bite my tongue

or go down easy.
If you were a wasp,
 then, I would open my mouth
and make you complicit.

Eyelash, Promise, Two Dimes

Emma DeNaples

I give a piece of myself to the kettle, I give a piece of myself to the fish, the mailman takes my morning greeting and the stalwart black moth takes four hairs from my head. I give a piece of myself to that eldritch thing at the treeline, his mouth is not a mouth, he thanks me. I sit in the sunless stream, and she takes my dead pieces and carries them out to sea. I give a piece of myself to the hardwood floor and whatever lies beneath it, I give a piece of myself to my fleeting swain, she bites my cuticles and fingers my pulse. I give a piece of myself to the cellar, to the snapping apple, to the rainbow carrot, to the soda bread. The bog turtle and the brown bat warn me to stop but they take, too, they take my left pinky and my first memory. Something quiet takes my emerald ring. My mother takes a shot at my ugliness and leaves with my wisdom tooth. I am being bled white by goodwill and godspeed. I give a piece of myself to the laundry line and a dozen tiny pieces to my studies. At the market, I give out my words and wellwishes like raindrops, I give three pennies in exchange for three ounces of thyme and with my time I go dancing, go walking down to the basement, I don't open the little door, I haven't in years. I give a piece of myself to that cloud shaped like a sycamore leaf. Do you see? I bloody myself for the moon and clean myself for a green linen dress. I give a piece of myself to some yore-time woman and she gives me a token of brass. When I am all emptied out I will lie in that yellow place where sky meets deadening earth. I will sleep and be mostly whole again tomorrow, I'll be whole enough but by each cockcrow a little weaker, I will be lessened piece by piece until I am only a ribcage, I am just my rib, tomorrow I will give myself back to the start.

LEGACY

Will Tway

(CW: Blood, Discussion of Weight, Swearing)

CHARACTERS

DAVID

28. Compliant. Physically tall, but not intimidating.

CINDY

26. Easily angered and in over her head.

CATHY

60. David's Mother. Needs control, and has it.

(We're in a new apartment's living room.
There's nothing much. Just a sofa, chair,
and an outdated TV.)

DAVID

Come on Cindy she asked you to.

CINDY

I know she asked me, I was there. You don't need to explain to me who asked.

DAVID

Just give it a-

CINDY

I won't honey, I won't. I'm sorry but I seriously cannot stomach it.

DAVID

Oh come on, it won't be that bad.

(CINDY throws her hair out of a tight ponytail and rips off her
heels, throwing them at DAVID's feet.)

CINDY

Put them on.

DAVID

What?

CINDY

(steely)

I said. Put. Them. On.

DAVID

I don't get it-

CINDY

(sighs)

And you never do. But if it's "not that bad" then put them on. Fuck it, You wanna wear my dress too. You wanna be paraded around "The Southern Society of Caring Women" like a piece of meat, then put them on. Try walking in heels and having washed out hags that have nothing better to do scoff at you cause you didn't sit right. Or I grabbed the wrong fork. Or I somehow tripped and almost yanked one of the sticks out of their ass!

(CINDY drops down on the sofa. DAVID comes in to hold her. She scoots further down to avoid him.)

CINDY

I'm never going to be enough for her.

DAVID

Come on, she loves you-

CINDY

When she says "I love you" it means a completely different thing than if I said it. Or if someone with a heart said it.

DAVID

You know you aren't on her good side.

(CINDY stands up, trying to unzip her dress.)

CINDY

It wasn't that bad.

DAVID

You called her a cunt.

CINDY

And...

DAVID.

Jesus.

(CINDY walks out of the living room to take off her dress. Almost the moment she leaves, the doorbell rings. DAVID looks confused and answers it. CATHY barges past him. She's wearing a large pink hat and small pink heels that don't really match- they are a little more red than pink. CATHY is also wearing a shin-high floral summer dress. She looks annoyed.)

CATHY
Where is she?

DAVID
I-uh.

CATHY
Don't leave your mouth open honey, you'll catch flies.

(CATHY sits down on the couch and gingerly picks up a sock. She tosses it out of her way in disgust.)

CATHY(cont.)
I thought it would be fun for Cindy and I to carpool together!

DAVID
Oh.

CATHY
Don't act too surprised.

(CINDY walks out of the bedroom. She's wearing a pair of sweats she's owned since college and has her hair up in a messy bun. She's taken off almost all of her makeup. She strolls in without noticing CATHY—she's staring at her Blackberry.)

CATHY
(Clearing her throat)
Hmm.

(CINDY drops her Blackberry on the floor- it shatters apart and the battery flies out.)

CINDY
JESUS FUCK.

CATHY
I don't think Jesus would approve of that.

CINDY
(To DAVID)
What is *she* doing here?

DAVID
Uh.

CATHY
(to CINDY)
We're running late dear. You really should get dressed if you want to make a good impression.

CINDY

Actually I-

CATHY

You know I had to pull a lot of strings to get you invited to this brunch.

CINDY

Yeah uh-

CATHY

And it was really hard to get you an invite after your outburst at the Women's Outreach Tea-

CINDY

All I said was-

DAVID

How about you go get ready.

(Beat)

CINDY

I-okay. I'll just...

(CINDY'S strength falters. She picks up the pieces of her phone and exits to her room.)

DAVID

Sorry about-

CATHY

You've put on some weight.

DAVID

Uh.

CATHY

What did I say about leaving your mouth open?

(CINDY comes back into the room wearing the same dress as earlier. Her hair is back in a tight ponytail, but not as clean as before. She still has no makeup on, and the back of her dress is unzipped. She turns her back to DAVID, forcing herself to stare at CATHY while DAVID attempts to get her zipper up.)

CATHY(cont.)

We should leave soon. Are you sure you want to wear that?

(CINDY shoves DAVID off of her. Her dress is still unzipped.)

CINDY

I'm doing you a favor, you know.

CATHY

No. No, I don't think that's what's happening dear.

DAVID

Mom, I think it's nice that-

CATHY

Let me finish.

(Beat)

(CATHY runs her hands through CINDY's hair, trying to pat it down.)

CATHY (cont.)

I know you don't like me, dear. But this isn't about liking.

(beat)

And it isn't about love either. This is about survival. And I'm doing you this favor. Having you at this lunch-in, so that you can survive.

(CINDY steps back)

CINDY

Survive what?

CATHY

You want to have children right.

DAVID

Sure.

CINDY

Maybe one day.

CATHY

And how do you expect those children to succeed?

CINDY

Get to the point Cathy.

CATHY

The most important thing is making sure you leave something behind. Our family name means something because we uphold its class. Its morals. Its *Dignity*.

(Beat)

My grandchildren are going to need a mother who can use that legacy to her children's advantage. One who can pull strings to get them in the right circles. We want them to marry up the social ladder, not down. It's the least you can do really, I mean. You have to bring something to the table.

CINDY

The least I can do for what. For just existing. God, you know your such an uptight B-

(Cathy smacks CINDY across the face)

CATHY

Listen.

CINDY

Bitch.

(CINDY lunges at CATHY. DAVID leaps from the back and pulls her away. CINDY never touches CATHY, but CATHY steps back in shock. CATHY trips, her heel catching on the carpet. Her head flies back- smacking into the ground. A thin pool of blood forms.)

(Beat)

(DAVID screams. CINDY gets on the ground. The couple sits down-staring at each other for a moment. Then DAVID checks for a pulse. There is none. He leaves through the front door without a word. CINDY sits in silence, she lets her hand graze into the blood. CATHY gets up, she wipes the back of her head. CINDY screams and crawls away towards the wall.)

CATHY

As I was saying-it's all about-

CINDY

Family.

CATHY

Yes. Now, I think we're running late.

CINDY

But you're-

CATHY

Dead.

(CINDY nods.)

CATHY (cont.)

This is about survival. It's survival of the fittest. Survival of a legacy. That's all I really wanted. To be remembered. If you leave an impact, and I mean *really* leave one-then people can't forget you.

CINDY

So I should go get ready.

CATHY

Yes, dear. And please try to wear something less whore-ish.

CINDY

(sarcastic)

Would that not leave a legacy?

CATHY

Well, I suppose it would.

CINDY

But not the one you want.

(CATHY nods in agreement. CINDY goes to clean herself up. CATHY runs around the house, cleaning things up. She leaves bloodstains on everything she touches. She gets a mop and wipes the floor with it—marking her territory. Every stroke of the mop just covers the space in more blood. CINDY comes back out and is in a new dress, very similar to the floral one CATHY is wearing. CINDY hasn't quite cleaned the blood off her hands.)

CINDY

What should I say?

CATHY

To the other ladies?

CINDY

Yeah.

CATHY

Not much. Try smiling.

(CATHY inspects CINDY, physically adjusting her posture.)

CATHY (cont.)

Stand up straight, and ask about people's grandkids. They love that.

CINDY

Okay.

CATHY

I wasn't trying to be overbearing, you know. I just... I wanted you to make an impression.

CINDY

I know. I know. And... And I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry!

(CINDY repeats "I'm sorry" over and over again. Reality is shifting. CINDY grows more emotional. She's not quite screaming, but she's close. Both of the women are lowering themselves back to the ground. CINDY is sitting on the ground, where she sat to look at CATHY when she first fell. CATHY places herself back on the puddle of blood.)

CINDY is still weeping. CATHY puts a finger to her lips and CINDY stops crying.)

CATHY

It's not over dear. You still have time left.

(she looks at the door where DAVID left)

CATHY(cont.)

He should be back soon, and he's going to need someone who can take care of him. You know he can't take care of himself? I think that's why I always liked you. That's why I pushed you at least. You have potential.

CINDY

Shouldn't he be able to take care of himself?

CATHY

He should. He can't, that's why he found you, and you're in too deep now.

(She points to CINDY's ring)

CATHY(cont.)

That's a trap you know. And you can't escape it, not around these people. So you have to play the game. You need to know how to play it. How to smile, when to smile. You have to know how to start a rumor and how to end one just as easily. There's purpose in this life, there's an art to it.

(Beat)

CATHY(cont.)

Beneath the tea cloths and the pushpins, there's survival. If you work hard, if you marry the right person, then your children might have a chance—you understand. If you run in the right circles, you can survive.

CINDY

I don't want to live just to survive though, I want something different.

CATHY

Oh, it's too late for that dear.

(she lays down now)

It's much too late.

(DAVID comes back inside. CINDY walks up and kisses him, her hands leave stained blood on his face.)

CINDY

I gotta go, hun. I have to make a good impression at the Ladies Lunch. Now be a doll and clean all this up.

DAVID
What, I-

CINDY
Don't leave your mouth open dear, you'll catch flies.

(CINDY exits. Blackout.)

I Can't Believe It's Not Butter

Matti Apse

My mom wants me to wear the socks she bought me
to bed. "You have bad circulation," she says.
"Do you want to lose a toe?"

I envision a life without toes. I'd have to wear
Smaller socks. Wire sutures: my temporary souvenir
Of lost limbs. I'd no longer enjoy wiggling a pen
Between them, like an artistic monkey.

In the present future genetically alchemized monkeys
Will do our jobs for us. In the future future, perhaps
They will rule us. In this future, bananas will be forbidden
For human consumption. We will have to make do
With banana peels. Fruits of any sort will be reserved
for our usurpers.

*Sit up straight, don't sit on your feet—
Do you want to lose your toes?*

My sister has baked for us banana peel muffins,
With fake butter. "It tastes like the real thing," I say.
"Thanks," she says. "I hate it."

It's 2:16 am, some time in April.

Once, when I was maybe 11, I watched my mom wash her hair kneeling over the bathtub.

I could never do it. I was too much limb for the short silver faucet.

But now I am 20 and I am bent on my haunches in the bath scrubbing cigarette smoke from my hair.

And I think about my mother. I'm 19 but I say I'm 20, I don't feel 19 anymore. 19 has made me so, so old.

I need some sort of grace. So I say I'm 20.

I think about my mother. I'm going to text her in the morning about Ana's father, who I knew when I was 11 and now he is gone. Passed on. I don't understand strokes and I hate them even more.

I think about my mother. I think I am becoming her in her blue lady way. Sometimes I yell and I hear her.

I am always reckoning our orbit. And you know what I think? How I will never fully know her.

How no one ever really does.

She is image and curve and besides she doesn't tell me things. There are no words, not in our language.

Not in this one. You know what she told me?

I don't really know what your voice sounds like.

Have you ever watched someone bleed for twenty years?

How do I respond to that? I didn't. I shut up. I can forgive her this. There are other ways of hearing.

Loafing in Asmara

Naomi Bahta

I lifted the book I was reading up to my forehead to mask my skin from the sun. It was mid-day, and the sun was high, and my great-grandmother was brewing coffee in the living room. It was my third week here out of six—then I was to fly to Dubai, and then back to the United States for school. Only a handful of airlines flew to Asmara and most of them came from the Emirates, Yemen, or Ethiopia. My family usually liked doing transit in Dubai because my mother liked to buy at least three or four beautifully intricate dresses at the world-famous mall. My brother liked Dubai because of the fast cars and fancy food. I wish we could've voted on where to stop in between during the trip. I would've voted for Yemen, but I knew I would've been embarrassingly outnumbered.

My days here were full of loafing. I'd walk around the embassies, try to eavesdrop on foreign correspondence, and fail. Sometimes, I'd meet with my friend by the cathedral, and we'd walk up the hill to get gelato at the quaint parlour by the mosque. I had no real tasks to do, so I was always bored by noon. It felt very different from university life, and I was still trying to manage how to work that all out.

There was no internet connection in Asmara, save for the few Internet cafés that were littered around town, so I couldn't spend my time typing away on my laptop. Instead, I filled up journals I bought for 15 nakfa—one U.S. dollar—at the store across from my great-grandmother's house. Then I'd buy pasta, eggs, a large loaf of bread for my family, and a chocolate bar just for me. I wrote about a lot of things—little descriptions of my days, how I was feeling. In the margins, I'd write down the names of my friends back home in complicated cursive. Time moves differently here. I'd only been here three weeks, but it felt like I'd been here three years. I wondered how my friends would look when I flew back to the states. Would they look different? Would they be taller, prettier, more mature? Would they remember my name and face? I thought that was silly of me to think so I tried to stop.

I thought about what to do with my day. I could wait for the next episode of the American teen drama that aired at two o'clock each day. I desperately wanted to know what happened next. Or I

could walk around aimlessly with my mother. The last time I did that, though, she kept pointing out to me where she used to hang out with her friends during high school. Coincidentally, she went to high school during the war, so the stories usually ended with a mention of somebody's death. She'd say it so casually that by the end of our walk, I would start to feel very uncomfortable at the idea that my mother had seen so much death. Before I could get up and ask her to walk with me, I remembered that she went to a hotel to meet with a friend today, so I couldn't walk with her even if I wanted to.

I said goodbye to my great-grandmother, yelling out, "Ciao!"

Cringing, I thought about how our word for goodbye was still reminiscent of colonial times. It was very ironic. How could we truly say goodbye to those times when the very word for goodbye was a product of the exact time we want to get away from?

Outside our gate, there is a man that lives in the house across. He often mistakes me for my mother when she was younger. There was no doubt that my mother and I shared the same silhouette, the same flowing black hair and upset face. He'd call out her name and I have to gather the few words I know of the language to correct him. Sometimes, I'll feel bad, so I just yell hello. Today was one of those times.

I passed by a group of young women. They were laughing about their night before. One of their friends, Hadassah, went home with a man they described as loud, gawky, and pitiful. I felt bad for eavesdropping but maybe I'd come across Hadassah on my walk, and I could tell her what they were saying about her—then I'd have done it for the greater good.

Fifteen minutes later, I was deep in town. I found myself at an Internet café. I walked in and tried to ignore the jumble of languages—Tigrinya, Italian, English, and Arabic. I felt bad that I could only understand two of them. I sat down at an empty computer. The screen reminded me of those very old computers my father used to have around the house when I was a child. They all seemed to disappear when I got old enough to know how to use them, replaced by newer, sleeker models.

I looked around at the people in the café and turned my attention back to the computer in front of me. After a deep breath, I pressed the 'on' button, fully expecting it to take forever to turn on. In my head, I pointed out the compartments of the computer—the monitor, the keyboard, the

computer box, and the mouse. I thought, *if the President wanted to restrict criticism, he should've put out computers that were missing a piece*. Who could say anything if they didn't have a mouse to click around with? Or a keyboard to type with? I laughed to myself and an older man gave me a mean look. Surprisingly, the computer only took a few seconds to load up. I logged into my email. There was one from Michael. The subject read: 'Esther.'

My heart quickened like a runner reaching the finish line of a race. I felt very silly, getting excited over an email like that.

The email read:

Esther. I hope everything has been going well and that your summer has been fun. I am leaving for Croatia tomorrow and thought this might be as good a time as any to tell you about everything that has been going on. First off, I decided to take a year abroad. My father thinks it would be a good experience. I'm not so sure about that yet. So, I won't be seeing you until next fall or in the spring. By the next time we see each other, we'll be seniors. Crazy, right? Secondly, I feel like communication has been difficult with you. I was aware internet connection is hard to come by where you are but I feel like it's been unexpectedly difficult. I'm aware that you might not even get to see this email immediately so I won't ask you any questions. Shelley and I have been seeing each other and she will be visiting family in a Croatian village that neighbors where I'll be. I love her so don't think this is a matter of convenience. Even though, yes, that is a part of it. But a very small part. I still care about you very much and I think of our time together often. I hope you have a good rest of your trip. Michael.

I looked at the date he sent it—July third. It was July tenth. He was already deep in Croatia and I was too late. I spent 15 minutes reading long articles about Croatian culture. I looked at photographs of Croatian delicacies. What was he *doing* there? Some moral code that was probably taught to me when I was a child washed over me. I quickly realized he was probably thinking the same thing about

me. I tried to muster up an email. I must've typed and deleted at least five different paragraphs. They were all different but they all started the exact same, with 'Dear Michael.'

All of a sudden, the cafe felt like it was closing in on me. I logged out of the computer and decided to walk home.

*

I tried to walk back home, but I kept stopping to admire the rain-soaked flowers. We were right in the middle of the rainy season that ran from July to August so it seemed like every day was just like the day before—damp and disappointing. I walked to the cathedral and observed the people around me. Linen-veiled heads came out of the church, flocking together like geese—mid-day Mass was over. I decided they resembled seagulls, due to their loud yelling. A little boy came up to me and asked if I wanted to buy some candy. I obliged, took out money, and picked out a dark chocolate bar with a seafoam blue wrapper. A cat was sleeping on the steps of a shoemaker's store. A mother reached out for her daughter's hand. I could smell tasty macchiatos and hear people laughing.

I thought about the conversations Michael and I shared back at school. He'd usually come to my dorm and sit down in the kitchen that I shared with my suitemates. We'd sit around and talk about a lot of things. I remember thinking then how important the conversations were but now, when I tried to think of the subjects, my mind went completely blank. Was I making it all up? It felt like I was. I wondered why our brains did that—exaggerated events to fuel even more sadness. Michael was an intelligent person but our conversations usually consisted of him complaining about his work, me offering to help, and him declining my offer. It was sad, really. Reality was incredibly dull, I thought, so we made it theatrical in our heads to make our lives seem interesting. We retold stories with extra lines to garner more laughs and imagined our lovers speaking to us in sweeter tones than they actually did. If anything, our inner lives were richer than the dullness of interacting with other individuals. Humans allow themselves to be much more creative when they aren't worried about what other people think. If our relationship was like the movies, I didn't know what I would do. If what Michael and I had was

some earth-shattering, blockbuster love, and he had broken up with me in an email while I was in a different continent against my will, I'd probably cry child-like tears—unashamed and eternal. I didn't cry but I did feel sick. I felt the sickness in the pit of my stomach like it was digging towards the bottom, like a spoon-wielding prisoner searching for sun.

While our conversations in person were dull, our emails felt like we were in a different world. When Michael and I were studying apart, he'd send me long, beautifully written emails. They'd always start with 'Dear Esther' and end with 'Yours, Michael.'

I remember, in one of the emails he sent, he wrote:

My trigonometry teacher gave us two days to finish an extremely difficult problem set. I'm sitting in the library and finishing it right now. For some reason, I'm not upset. Actually, I haven't been upset at anything lately. I'm feeling such a rush of love and compassion for everything around me. Is this your fault? Do I love everything because I love you? Do I have you to blame for this?

Thinking about this, I smiled for what felt like the first time all day. I felt bad for the CIA operative that looked over our emails. They were probably very tired.

*

After a while, my head started to hurt and I thought it useless to think about Michael for any longer. I decided to go get gelato. When I was a child, my brother and I would beg my mother for three cones of gelato. I used to think of this as purely a thing a child would do—beg for more. But I knew that that was wrong. If I could, I'd take more time with Michael. I asked the man for a scoop of vanilla and he tried to start a conversation with me. I tried to explain that I couldn't understand him but that was a lie—I just didn't feel like talking.

I took the cone and sat outside on a bench by the mosque. It was old and rickety and moved when I plopped down. A prayer was playing through the speaker. Afterwards, I watched people walk

out and go back home. They were all complex, full of uniquely tragic experiences. I couldn't fathom understanding them all. I couldn't even understand Michael. I thought about it for a while and realized I didn't even understand myself. Maybe that was a completely normal thing for a young adult to feel. There was a little boy who lingered and stared at me and the cone in my hand. I went back inside and bought him a cone. He said thank you to me. I finally felt like crying—but that was unrelated to my disheartening emailing experience.

*

When my mother got back from her meeting with her friend, she tried to get me to go out for dinner, but I refused. I said I wasn't hungry, but I wasn't being very convincing.

“What did you do today?” She asked. I thought that was nosy of her, even though I had no right to feel like that. I told her: Internet café and then gelato. I left out the aimless walking in between. She'd know what was wrong if I told her that. I tried to piece together how she would know and how I knew that she would know. The best answer I could come up with was first, mother's intuition and then, daughter's intuition. She eventually left me alone when I told her I had been reading and that she had interrupted. I could hear her rummaging through the tiny kitchen and opening a Coke bottle. I thought about the email again and how if the internet had been slow, I wouldn't be feeling like this. I cursed the President. I thought, *maybe if he took the computer mouse away!*

I finished the last few pages of a chapter of the book I was reading. I tried to focus but failed. All I thought about that night was Michael.

*

I was alright for the next couple of days. I still loafed around. It wasn't until the fifth or sixth day after I had read the email, the start of my fourth week here, that I started to feel everything very deeply. Were we still friends? I mean, surely our friendship wasn't *over*? I thought about everything at

length. I reread the email about a million times. Was he, somehow, telling me to come to Croatia? Was I supposed to read in between the lines? Why couldn't I remember what he looked like? Or sounded like?

Everything *was* over. I needed to understand that. Trying to search for hidden meaning in something that was so obviously transparent was like wishing for the rain to stop in the middle of a thunderstorm—so silly and fruitless. I thought about blaming my parents for it. If I wasn't forced to be here, maybe I'd still be with Michael and maybe he wouldn't be going abroad and we'd still be going to school together in the fall. It felt foolish to think that way but I couldn't stop myself. I felt like I had a cool hand around my neck, choking me tightly, and if I turned, I'd see Michael's familiar face. He wouldn't let me go. He was going to Croatia and then abroad and all I had was this city and the suffocating feeling of familial obligation.

I went days without leaving my room and only eating rich chocolate. I reread all the books I had finished during my time here. I counted down the days I had left until I could go home. I took long walks and got lost and had to take taxis home. Sometimes I'd be too weak to wave one down so I would ask a local to help. I'd point to my ear to explain that I could understand but not speak and then I'd point to a bright yellow taxi. They'd nod, understanding what I was trying to say, and help me out. Today, I was sitting in a nearby garden and reading a book. Up above, the palm trees provided a nice form of shade, but still, gaps of sunlight blazed down on the back of my neck. The rain had stopped, but there was still a mist in the air. I reached the end of the page and found this quote: "We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget. We forget the loves and the betrayals alike, forget what we whispered and what we screamed, forget who we were." I felt like that quote was meant for me to see right at this moment, similar to the way prophets in the Bible knew that the angel that had come down from heaven was there for them and only them.

Things were going to get better, I thought. They had to. I had to go on living and looking at beautiful things. The breeze tried to carry me home but I stayed. There were so many beautiful things I hadn't seen yet. I looked up at the palm trees and back down at my book. I remembered how beautiful everything at night was, how even the deepest night wasn't dark at all because of how many stars were

scattered in the sky. Everything was lit up like God was shining a dull lamp on us. Once, as a little girl, I walked outside at midnight and it felt like I had entered somebody else's dream. I remembered thinking to myself, *were the aliens coming now?*

*

When I got back to school in the fall, everybody—from professors to students to the ladies at the library—asked me what I did over the summer. I told them all different things and none of them the truth: that I did nothing all summer but wait to be myself again.

Red Shirt

Theodore Heil

I am wearing your red shirt
and leaning against
the cauliflower wall that

smells like a cup of whiskey,
or my mother's perfume.
Like a little kiss on the cheek—

small enough to love and small
enough to hold in the crook
of my fingernail to press

into my palm when I
forget that I need to be
loved or I will die.

The shirt is not something
I would normally wear to a party,
but I am trying to be less mean.

It has been two hours since I
laughed at someone,
especially in the mirror.

It has been five minutes
since I decided to change.
Your shirt is a dawning.

I have forsworn all others
and let myself become a
bright red open wound.

Let me put it like this:

I am walking through the room
and you are every shoulder I touch;

yours was the only kiss
that tasted like pink lemonade;
when my father didn't notice

you were gone, I felt a tiny grief
put up its tent in my sternum and
I could not talk about you anymore.

I drank, kissed someone else,
led my hand from nape to
empty collarbone and left you there.

I threw up from the window of
my sister's car as it sped down
the highway and the barf burned

holes in my nose like two twin cigarettes.
With my head hanging out the window,
I could smell your cologne, but

it didn't smell like you.
These shoulders I'm sipping,
this grief I'm touching,

the lemonade that is not pink,
but only my reflection in the citrus
pulp pool at the bottom of the cup

will never be a replacement
for the real thing

which is love.

Jack Rabbit

Bella Ciovorelli

“My boy’s first kill!”
He holds my limp body with pride by one of my hind legs.

If only I could have been a laboring hare.

My flesh will barely have any payoff,
I apologize for my sinewy and tendinous meat.

Hold me by the scruff of my neck.

Son with his rifle in one hand and his prey in the other
Gives her a wide grin.

Crimson breadcrumbs lead to their doorstep,
A puddle gathers, soaking Son’s sock.

She already has something boiling,
My flaccid body is laid down on the kitchen counter of their cabin.

He scurries out of the room to
frolic with Father in the woods.

Mother turns to the counter and lowers an ear.
Strained and wheezing breath.

Grabs me by the ears with her right hand,
Props her left knee on a stool,
And hurls my body over her thigh,

Splintering my neck and spine.

OF THE SWARM AND SOLITARY

O. Captain

ONE

1 Before the Swarms arrived, we
grew our shapes around the
Angiosperms, our beloved and our
sustenance,

2 each according to their most
prized; the orchid bee to the bee
orchid, the squash bees to zucchini
flowers, and so on.

3 And it was good, and we lived
with the others of six legs, and eight
legs, and four legs, and two.

4 In winter, the trees and the
earth give to us rest, and we are
prosperous. And in the spring and
summer and autumn we do our duty
to the Angiosperms with whom we are
each entangled,

5 taking of them their sweet
nectar and their pollen, and assuring
their perpetuity with our varied
wanderings. So it was.

TWO

1 A Swarm is a thing like a
Hurricane, but worse than their legions
are their bipedal gods, faces like a
thousand comb-cells.

2 The Swarms came, and with
them their gods, that uprooted our
pasture and made the land all of one
thing, that lonely monoculture,

3 and gave it to the Swarms, that
which was once ours, and was vibrant.
Here is the law:

4 Bee shall not kill bee, even as
the Swarm devours. A malevolent

cloud, drying lakes of nectar with their
unending armies of hunger.

5 Should neighbor band with
neighbor, trade our solitary way for one
more social, or will that lead us into the
ruinous temptation of the Swarm?

6 There are no answers, no
Queens among our number. We are
each a family apart, devoted only to our
own cell, to our mother.

THREE

1 In the Heavens there is
War—the gods of the Swarms have, as
all who flit across this surface must, a
natural enemy, those who defy and
displace their legions,

2 and present to us great lakes of
nectar, safe from the ravenous hunger
of the Swarms, build for us homes out
of the rain, places to rest our wings.

3 But lo, says the Prophet
Near-Extinction, there are gods enemy
to both, and though the Swarms will
for-ever persist

4 their scourge, we and they alike
may face destruction, for where
Swarms and their gods turn good
meadows into monocultured deserts,
these new gods unmake the earth itself!

5 Never shall the solitary bee join
with the Swarm, but neither shall we
allow our own obliteration!

6 For the Swarms may have
inherited these lands, but we were born
to them, shapes in the ground, and we
shall not be removed.

7 So let us keep our bargain with
the ground, with the Angiosperms, and

let us hope the gods above do also
attend to their duty

Oyster Date

Sparrow Murray

I might one day rise
with the sun,
implicated in nothing.
I have placed no plate of
orange marmalade and yet
here is the scarlet tanager
on my windowsill.

Lathering in the river I see
such movement,
the salmon making their annual ascent,
the brown bears,
winsome and shimmering,
huff in a moment of repose along the bank.

The waterfall pulses,
the wind carries the
silver tones of erosion,
and I make no consideration
of stifling the groan that escapes.

However, today is one for rest.

I could have stayed and lolled
in bed, but I venture
to profuse and brackish waters
to see you,
little oyster.

So, in the winter months,
little armored beast,
I eat you
because I am moderate and because
this icy plate is uncomplicated.

I turn you over and see
your diaphanous body
darkening at the suture
to your lustrous inner shell and

I am not reminded of my
forcefulness, thinking:
“citrus, drip, quiver,
slip, tongue, trip,
palette, kiss.”

doctor's appointment

Greer McAllister

2 fruit flies trying to suckle on 2 peach pits, one in each pocket of my jeans, creeping up the iliac crests—flies! don't you know there's no fruit here! no more sweet juice! they ate that stringy dreamsicle flesh right off the bone! get out of here, go find some other girl to love on.

another knock at the door..... now, what does God have to say for himself? he holds out an orange lollipop, as if this were enough: to lick that wet palm, for my lips to graze that flirting, exultant eye—I shove his sweaty hands away. he wipes them on his white robe and

leaves without looking back, the 2 fruit flies floating, following. quickly now, I tear the 2 peach pits out of my hips and hide them away. I'm afraid he'll come back and take them!make me his god-wife. I won't be able to bear him any children.

scant studies – of poor quality – to either support or refute this assumption

b.a. hyland

the body rotted, rotting, will rot,
it's bedtime, time for bed. I stand
up, try to stand up, fail, sit down
to ferment in blankets til I'm fleshwine
or bloodbread; til I am something whole,
something un-me. to un-self as an infinitive,
to de-self, maybe; to dissociate feels sterile on the tongue. that's too much thought on the matter.
stand up again, breathe–inhale exhale–breathe again.

brain rotting, present tense, screaming–
too melodramatic–
too self-aware–
regardless, brain rotting, present tense,
some strange mycelium eating,
devouring. I breathe (inhale exhale) the un-body electric,
write another seven poems about burial.
here's a burial called consumption:
I lay down and ferment again.

Pygmalion Learns About Masturbation Through Galatea

Ashton Freeman

I have seventeen dolls in my closet. Sometimes I let them sit in my room, I line them up on my old couch. Sometimes they hold hands and sometimes they face each other but I usually like the eye contact.

They don't like it when I put them away but something about thirty-four tiny eyeballs staring at me while I fuck my boyfriend unsettles me. He doesn't know about them. Why would he? We usually go over to his house (his mom buys the good pretzel sticks, the thick on brand kind with extra salt) because my dad can be a dick about boys and closed doors. And if Boyfriend does come here he bikes which gives me a twenty minute head start to place all my sweet dolls in the closet.

I apologize to each one, just a quick *I'm sorry* and a kiss on their vinyl foreheads before laying them down so their eyes close. Nothing to see here!

Each girl has her own name. Some named after flowers (Rose, Dahlia, Aster, Holly), some named after colors (Ruby, Emerald (Emma, for short), Violet, Olive), some named after girls I met in preschool who were pretty and grew up mean (Amelia, Sophia, Ava, Jenny, Aggie), and the rest named after months (April, May, June, September). I close my eyes when I change their clothes out of respect and leave food out for them in case they're shy about eating in front of me (I would be too if I lived in a giant's house).

The truth is Boyfriend probably wouldn't be freaked out by them, he has sisters. I worry he'd start thinking of me as wife material and see my dolls as our children. They wouldn't like him. He once asked to fuck me in my closet. *We'll have to be careful and you can put your legs up against me. If your dad walks in we'll tell him you were dressing me up.* I told him I had a better idea and pushed him into my shower and turned the water on. He said, *I see, this way your dad won't hear us. You're so smart.* I sighed the whole time and masked it as moaning. What would they say if their thirty-four little eyes saw this? I imagined them calling me a slut and came.

Boyfriend asks me what I want for Christmas. *Earrings, a new record for your turntable? I tried getting advice from my sister but she's no help.*

I don't say: A doll. I thought of the perfect name and she would look just like me.

I don't say: A new showerhead, you're messier now and you leave sooner and I always feel empty when you do and I think if I touch myself with my hands I'll die.

I say: What do you want for Christmas?

So I work day and night making a papier mache puppet of myself and coat it in vinyl and silicon. I make hair out of soaked newspaper and fingernails out of stones. I work to hollow out the caves and crevices of my body for him and empty the dusty papier mache water into my puppet cunt then seal it. I admire my work. Doll Me is an ugly thing. Flaky skin, sticky hair, eyes made out of magazine cut outs. She makes me want to fall in love with her.

My girls seem angry, maybe it's because they're getting less attention now that all of my heart is in Doll Me. When I walk into my closet to grab clothes for Doll Me each girl sits upright with her eyes slightly narrowed. I hold Dahlia's little hand and kiss apologies into her palms. Sorry sorry sorry.

I buy Boyfriend a watch and keep Doll Me. Before he comes over I put her in my closet but she can't close her eyes like the rest of my girls.

A technical flaw that I can fix later.

I kiss her lips and shut my door feeling like Pygmalion.

Boyfriend gives me bead earrings. I think about how they would look on Doll Me. I thank him by letting him fuck me in bed.

When he leaves I bring out Doll Me and poke holes in her hollow ears and put the earrings from Boyfriend on her. They detract from her eyes so I take them out.

My other dolls grow jealous. I wake up and find them in a pile outside my closet door. Their faces remain static but I could feel their hurt when I got close. *I'm sorry*, a kiss on their foreheads, and they were back in the closet. Doll Me and I need alone time.

Can I call you Gigi? (Let the record show I was not expecting an answer.) The holes in her ears freak me out so I cover them with tape. I never got my ears pierced so I soak a needle in hot water and pierce them myself. They're uneven so I do it again. The earrings make me look like Gigi. I place my palm against hers and we fit together. I rest my forehead against hers. Warm girl against crusted girl. I

curse myself for making her whole. I desperately want to step inside her. I hear a crash in my closet. It's becoming increasingly clear that my dolls can hear my thoughts. Or am I talking aloud?

My dolls are standing in a line, arms raised. They can't move as long as I am looking. I place them back on their shelf instead of moving them into my bedroom and don't kiss them. Gigi and I start spending time in my closet. My dolls can learn to share me and I don't want them out of my sight. I start chipping away at Gigi with a pocketknife. I want nothing more than to be whole with her. The earrings from Boyfriend get caught in my hair and hurt so I rip them out and give them to my dolls. They don't smile but their eyes widen back to their normal state and September seems to slouch more. I give them my shirt and hair tie too.

Boyfriend stands in my doorway. *You've been ignoring my calls.* I tell him: I've been in the closet.

I don't tell him I'm: Trying to make a body out of paper bones and she feels so real I think there's a person inside.

I hand him a pocket knife and lead him into my closet. *Is this a kink?* I tell him: Chip away. He stares at my dolls first, all sitting up and staring. His first move is to push me against the door, then he adjusts so he can look at my dolls while he fucks me. He stops when he sees Gigi. He straightens his shoulders, squaring her up.

I like that he seems scared of her.

Who is she?

I say: Chip away.

Odd name.

His left hand rests on my thigh while he works. He's much faster at this than I am and he doesn't ask about my girls. The more we work the less I believe that she is still hollow on the inside. Her shiny magazine eyes fall off and her skin barely flakes. My dolls crash against the floor.

There's only one way into her. I don't use a knife for this. The intimacy of going into myself is too much for me and Boyfriend watches intently with his hands down his pants.

She feels like the inside of a cheek. There is something inside of me and I squirm. I place my hands on her inner thighs and push until it hurts. I expect something to crack or for Boyfriend to moan but I only hear the small clicks of seventeen blinking pairs of eyes. I focus on Doll Me.

I am inside her and horrified at all I find.

apacolips

Matti Apse

You are playing a zombie game. A game where the goal is to kill zombies, and people, too. So you shoot anything that moves. Let's say it's not a zombie game. Let's say it's real life, or possibly a dream. The difference doesn't matter.

So you go at it for days, maybe weeks. Some indistinguishable length of time. Above all else: You survive. You're an expert killer. And after you've dispatched thousands of zombies, hundreds of people, the sound of drums and kettles starts to clear away. And then all there is the sweet rainfall of shells hitting the ground. And then all there is is silence. No crows caw. Even the wind is afraid.

After some time it becomes clear. There is nothing left to kill. You're the last thing, living or dead, around for miles. Looking out on your wasteland, you wonder if there were things you could've done differently. Raised a family. Cultivated farmland. Bought guns from more ethical sources. Why were you even killing those zombies? What did they ever do to you? Apparently nothing.

You start hearing things that aren't there. The telltale squelch of rotting footsteps. It's coming from inside the house! It's coming from inside your body. There is nobody who could be responsible for this.

Seeking Advice from the World's Information; or, Are You There, Internet? It's Me.

Melissa Dittrich

Doing dishes, I cut myself on the kitchen knife.

The internet said I might need stitches, if the wound bled through three paper towels, but it stopped bleeding after the first wrap. Next, the internet said to buy Band-Aids and Neosporin, and I did.

The internet said to keep the wound moist, unless it's a wound that should be kept dry. The internet said, "Keep an eye out for infection."

I spent a day at home elevating my finger and noticed my cat slept the entire time. I asked the internet if my cat was sick and the internet said yes. The vet said no. The internet said, "If your cat isn't sick, check out these other cats who are!"

When the cut felt better, I asked the internet if it was time to take the Band-Aid off. The internet said, "I guess you can, if you want."

I told the internet about my neighbor who watches me when I come home, opens his front door just a crack and peers out, that it was starting to get creepy. The internet asked who I was to judge that man.

I asked the internet to help me break my lease and find a better apartment. The internet said no.

Later, I asked the internet what happened to my neighbor — I hadn't seen him for a few days. The internet said he was arrested for tax fraud.

I asked the internet why I feel so jealous of my best friend's relationship, and the internet said jealousy is unbecoming.

I told the internet I was feeling sad, and it gave me the Suicide Hotline phone number: 1-800-662-HELP. I said, not *that* sad. The internet said, "Then why are you telling me about it?"

I asked the internet if it was gaslighting me and the internet asked, "What's 'Gaslighting'?"

I cooked a soup recipe from the internet and I followed every step. It was too salty. It felt like needles on my tongue. I put it in a Tupperware and didn't touch it until it spoiled.

I thought of my best friend and her relationship, and I asked the internet where *I* could find a boyfriend. The internet said, "You came to the right place." The internet showed me Tinder, Bumble, Match.com, OkCupid, Coffee Meets Bagel, eHarmony, Elite Singles and Hinge. I told the internet a little bit about me: nice girl, living in the city, likes long drives out of the city, has a cat.

The internet said, "Have you tried Singles with Cats?" Then the internet said, "Just kidding, that was an article from *The Onion*."

I went on a date with a guy who worked in sales for a company that promotes restaurants. He told me he made over three hundred cold calls to various food spots every day. He said his goal was to break four hundred. He said, "When I break four hundred cold calls, I will get an Official Recognition." I asked him if he ever made any hot calls, and he didn't laugh.

The internet said guys who work in sales are hard to date.

I went on a date with someone who made me laugh. He asked me questions and listened to my answers. He acted like the things I said were important. I asked the internet if it was possible for one nice person to find another nice person. The internet said, "Lol." The internet said, "You wish."

I asked the internet if I should get a new job. The internet said, "If your current job is not fulfilling you. Have you looked on Indeed? Did you know Monster.com is a real website? Remember their old commercials? With the monster? Are you a good person? Then try Idealist." The internet said, "Don't bother with LinkedIn. LinkedIn is dead."

I asked the internet what I should get my new boyfriend for his birthday. The internet said, "You have a boyfriend?"

I didn't ask the internet what I should wear on our first double date.

I went downtown and bought a new outfit for a job interview. My friend put in a good word for me.

And I let my cat sleep all day.

Months went by.

But then my boyfriend ended it. I cried all night. I looked up solutions to puffy eyes. I ordered groceries online. I didn't understand. I asked the internet, "How could a great thing just end, with no explanation?"

And the internet said, "I tried to warn you. Don't you remember?"

Mama's Kitchen

Chloë Fontenot

I was born the year the June bugs came too early,
all twisted and wrapped in March.

The crops that year grew crooked, hollowed
out and filled with rot.

That year still haunts my Mama
with every sugar-pill filled night,
with slanted spring-like-summers melting
out her mind, empty

she wondered if that's what ruined me (the moisture
in the air). Still, she cradles the first peaches, plums, and pears.
Pickling them, they ferment; soft claws peeling
back their skin. Spoiled

pits and bruises, bloody chewing on her lip,
whispering the words of angels (something solid growing idle).
You'd never know boredom *'til it's packaged in the air*
'til Mama's sitting in her kitchen, twisting into me—

With seedless thumbs, I try to root (in that warm place in her head).

Argos

Brig

My dog was dumb.

He couldn't play fetch, he would just hold the ball in his teeth and if you threw it too far he'd lose it. And then he would just bark at you. He was afraid of everything: of riding in the car, of water, of animals on the TV that he thought was a window.

But my dog was also *good*.

When my first girlfriend told me she wanted to break up he greeted me at the door without barking, which was rare for him, and nuzzled his head into my thigh. I hate talking to people, but I loved resting my head on his stomach. He hated staying still, but when he could feel how badly I needed it, he would stay still, breathing steady, with my head bobbing up and down with his gentle panting. When my mom got sick, he followed her everywhere and he never stopped. He was afraid of everything, but he believed he could protect her. He knew who to hate. When we walked past the Republicans' houses, he would bark, and he was always mean to teenage boys.

Argos waited twenty years for Odysseus to come home. When Athena disguises Odysseus as a beggar, no one recognizes him, not even Penelope. But Argos runs at him immediately. He knows his father. After licking Odysseus all over, Argos falls and dies at his feet. One Friday morning I felt in my gut that I needed to drive back to Boston and hold Coby just one more time. I knew it would be the last; I think he knew too. I held him and cried into his fur, and he knew to stay steady. I clung to him, fervently memorizing the tendrils of his golden hair. I drove away on Sunday afternoon; he didn't even bark as the car pulled out of the driveway. That Monday morning he died in my father's arms on the way to the vet.

My dog was dumb, but he was smart about what mattered. And he waited for me. He was my modern, idiotic, half blind and half deaf but brilliantly kind and beautiful Argos.

karl Is Dead In Virginia

Cat Winski

karl is dead in virginia,
and i am eating soup dumplings with a boy tonight,
and i think i could fall in love with him.

when he was alive in franklin square,
dziadzia, now only karl,
kept chruściki in a plastic box
on the too-smooth counter for his
twin grandchildren to eat when they visited.
for my dad, chris,
black coffee, anisette in the espresso.
even when local law made it too much work to smoke indoors,
the leather chairs kept a jacket of newport smoke-scent around their backs.

when he was Dad,
karl tore a sawed-off shotgun from the wall
that holds my senior portrait today,
and, like the barbarian,
shot chris' dog, conan.
i still don't know why—
i'm not allowed to ask.

karl beat the promise and polish tongue out of babci, now lydia,
until all that survived were recipes
for pumpkin bread and blueberry pie,
and two sons.

karl said i'm *too sweet, too pretty to bring back the kielbasa empire in greenport.*
get a good husband from the homeland, he said, he can handle it, or your brother can.
sure.

i said to karl that i'm a real bitch, honestly,
and i don't get called pretty these days.

then karl said he raised good sons,
greater grandkids.
in some vodka-dulled sense he was right.

the men keep so much of the world
in their hands.
they always crush it.

i have the luxury of loving this boy
in the way karl, chris,
lydia, and conan never could:
softly and without remorse.

i do not mourn,
but i remember.

Thoughts I Had When Watching a Play

Ruby Haack

There is a persistent pinching under my lower left rib cage that makes me think I'm not going to live forever. Sometimes I feel it in my back, and I convince myself that it's just the effect of my poor posture. I slouch. I've been told this isn't attractive when you have a neck as long as I do.

I think about this while a boy's hand rests on my knee and his fingers play with the seam of my jacket sleeve. It's black and velvet and damaged from the rain. We're at a play and sitting in the mezzanine, watching from above as someone yells on stage. His eyes are fixated on the actor as she falls to her knees. Her son has just died, and she received the news on the landline, which now hangs limply from the wall. She dropped it in shock. She rests her elbows on her thighs and hides her face in her hands. Her shoulders tremble. I can only imagine that her palms are wet and salty. The audience sits still in our seats with closed lips and a synchronized pulsing in our ears. I chew on my cheek, in fear that if I exhale, she'll have to start her monologue all over again. So, I suck the air between my teeth and hold it in my chest until she finishes. "And the geese float in the river," a man on stage says. I forget the context.

I grew up on a gravel road in a neighborhood that had no sidewalks. In the spring you could never turn left from our driveway, because if you turned left, you'd drive into a makeshift pothole-pond where two Canada geese would idly drift, conscious of nothing but their benign wandering.

I imagined that Mr. and Mrs. Goose swam happily. If they had hands they would hold them, but since they were fingerless, they just glided side by side, swimming in circles and leaving a faint wake behind them. Geese are typically found to be threatening because of their brash demeanor, their serrated bills, and their unsettling ability to remember faces. But I was told geese mate for life and so they became my favorite animal.

The two moved together with the fluidity of a single soul. It was mid-October, and I was sitting on the crumbling stoop behind my driveway, watching the geese enjoy each other's company. They took turns, almost like a call and response, dipping their inky heads into the pond water and scooping their crowns up until their black beaks were pointed straight to the sky, an homage to the second heaven that loomed above them. They looked at each other with coy smiles. They floated complacently, unable to see their own reflections in the murky water that gathered from rooftop runoff. Mrs. Goose batted her wings, lifting her chest above the water's surface, just so slightly so her tail feathers were the only things submerged under the water. She craned her neck towards the sky in a desperate search for the treetops, and gently rested on the water's edge, just to once again float in the current she made with her own webbed feet. Mr. Goose surrendered to his left side and frantically splashed his wings in the water, turning himself clockwise like a canoer who broke a paddle. He spun himself around with such ferocity that I feared he was drowning, that he had forgotten how to be buoyant the way geese often are. But he righted himself when he felt sufficiently clean, water dripping from his wings in an oily way. Mrs. Goose came to his aid, nibbling at his nose as if it was a peck on the cheek.

We moved a river away when my mother divorced her second husband. Our new neighborhood had paved roads and you could turn left in the spring.

I had never met anyone who mated for life before. Besides an old great aunt and uncle, whose partnership substitutes imagination and romance for unabated stability and two separate beds. They are happy I think, but not goose-happy.

I look at the boy sitting next to me and watch as he digs his teeth into the side of his lip, gnawing at the chapped skin that comes off in flakes. The blue stage lights leave half of his face in a ghoulish shadow, contorting the angles of his cheekbones and dimming the light in his eyes. The woman is now singing a song about loss. Her feet are planted firmly beneath her, her power coming from the soles of her shoes

and her vibrato coming from the base of her gut. She points her chin upwards towards the mezzanine and surrenders her sound to the God who hides in her spotlight overhead. She has rehearsed this song hundreds of times.

The pinching is a shoestring wrapped loosely around my upper intestines, and every so often the little man that controls the beating of my heart, the inflation of my lungs, and the closing of my eyelids, tugs on that string a little tighter. Perhaps it's my body pulling on the reins, reminding me that these blue moments are fleeting, that they turn to wisps of winged memory as soon as you close your eyes for the night. That moths, those ghosts who sleep in the shadowed corners of your closet, will once again gnaw holes in your velvet jackets. Or perhaps I am a morbid hypochondriac.

I shift in my seat and press my knuckles to the base of my ribs. I try to stretch out the pain while I pretend it's just a muscle spasm. The people behind me must think I am relentlessly fidgety. The boy whom I love so much cocks his head and leans on my shoulder while we watch a woman come to terms with her grief. I intertwine my fingers with his and hold his hand in a way two geese can't. I can't imagine loving anyone else, and in the blue light, this haunts me.

FKING ACNE!**

Colette Shaw

Scene

A young teen's bedroom. Posters of a popular boy band and musicians cover the walls. Pink is a central color. FLAVIA (13), sits at a vanity, facing away from the audience. She wears a long sleeved shirt and sweats. The desk is cluttered with makeup and acne products. A blanket covers the mirror.

Flavia takes a deep breath. She holds a hand out to grab the blanket, but retracts it before touching.

FLAVIA

You can do this.

You can do this!

It's just your face. My face.

It can't be any worse. Maybe it's better, even.

Flavia reaches up to touch her face, but stops herself.

Don't touch. Can't touch. It'll make it worse.

She can't resist. She touches her face. She gasps! Then retracts her hand.

It's fine. It's just one. One big, juicy-- It's fine. I'm fine.
It's just my face.

It's *just* my face.

She takes a deep breath.

One.

Two.

Three!

Flavia snatches the blanket off the mirror. She gasps.

Flavia's face is covered in acne-- mostly deep, deep cystic pimples, with some whiteheads strewn about like snow capped mountain peaks.

Flavia looks out at the audience, through the mirror.

FLAVIA

That is *not* my face.

She gets up from the mirror, turns her back to it and faces the audience.

FLAVIA CONT'D

You have to believe me. *That* is not my face. That... That is some creature's face. Some troll that crawled out of the depths of hell has that face. Not me.

Sophie Herron has that face. She had the worst acne of everyone in middle school for the entire year. It's disgusting, I mean, does she even wash it? She always had these big, red bumps, and white heads-- like a range of snow capped mountains had like *risen* on her face. And she would pop them *in class*. Like, it was so disgusting I can't even-- she even wiped her pimple puss on Marcus Grayson once cause he called her pepperoni pizza face-- so I guess he kinda deserved it--

Oh my God.

OH MY GOD!

Do you think Marcus Grayson is gonna call me pepperoni pizza face?!

He wouldn't.

Would he?

No. No, he likes me. We made out WITH TONGUE for a whole 15 seconds on the camping trip this year. He likes me. Becca-- Rebecca Fisher, my BFF-- said she thinks he might ask me to be his girlfriend this year cause Cleo Hampton told her that she overheard Marcus's best friend Leo Alvarez telling JJ Bernstein that *he* couldn't ask me out cause Marcus likes me.

So I'm fine. As long as Sophie Herron still has a pepperoni pizza face.

OH MY GOD WHAT IF SOPHIE HERRON DOESN'T HAVE A PEPPERONI PIZZA FACE ANYMORE?!

Flavia whips around, looks at her face in the mirror, touches it.

FLAVIA CONT'D

I'm gonna be pepperoni pizza face girl now. He's gonna mock me-- *ME!* The girl he used to worship!

Marcus Grayson isn't gonna want a girl with this face to be his girlfriend. This isn't the face that Marcus likes.

Flavia pulls out a big photograph and holds it out to the audience, displaying a picture of a young, spotless, perfect face. Her old face.

FLAVIA

This is my face.

This.

Clean. Clear. Beautiful. Flawless, even. This is the face that every boy in the 7th grade has a crush on--well, except Ethan Sullivan cause he's totally gay-- I mean, he's not like, out of the closet or whatever, but like when you know, you know. Y'know?

She refocuses, looks at the picture of herself again.

This girl had Marcus Grayson. This girl could have had any boy in junior high. This girl could've even gotten a ninth grader.

This girl had everything.

This girl was *me*.

And now that girl is DEAD!

She rips up the picture of herself. She stamps on it and screams a little bit.

Once she's finished tantruming, Flavia sits and breathes heavily.

That girl died, two and a half months ago, the last week of seventh grade, when the first pimple showed up.

I tried not to freak out at first. Pimples are like, a teenager's right of passage, you know? And it wasn't super visible, either-- It was here,

FLAVIA CONT'D

(She touches the spot)

On the edge of my right cheek. Not super visible. It wasn't even that big.

And then I tried to *pop* it.

Perhaps a video of pimple popping is projected onto a screen here. Not simple blackheads-- ooey gooey gross pimples that gush out never ending streams of white puss.

FLAVIA

It got so much worse. Like, so, so bad. It's disgusting to even like think about.

And then, a few days later, summer break officially started, and the other pimples started popping up.

Pop, pop, popping, *all over* my face.

You can still see it. That first pimple. The scar of it, anyway. It acts as a constant reminder of my deed.

Maybe it was punishment. For trying to pop the first one.

I know that's not how science works.

But maybe that's how God works.

Flavia looks up to the heavens, distrustfully. Then she looks out to the audience.

I've been going to all these stupid doctors, these dermatologists. They're all B.S. They're either all like 'oh we'll get you smooth faced in no time' or they're like 'deal with it *biatch* that's puberty for ya, you'll be clear in a few years'.

Years?!?!

I don't have a few years. I need to be clear now. I need to be that girl--

(she points at the ripped up picture.)

Now.

But I can't. That girl is six feet under pimples!

FLAVIA CONT'D

I don't know if I'll ever be able to get that girl back. Half of these are gonna scar whether I touch them or not. They're way deep. Cystic acne-- that's what the doctors call it.

They say I can like get products or use lasers to get rid of the scars. But I don't know if I believe that. I don't think I'm that lucky.

I think God might hate me.

Woah, got a little too deep there. Flavia looks up to the heavens again, nervously, then turns to her vanity.

I've been to like, 50 different dermatologists this summer and they give me all these freaking products--

She goes to her vanity, avoiding looking into the mirror, and picks up her facial products and medications and starts throwing them everywhere.

FLAVIA

Freaking proactive--

She throws it,

Freaking Cerave face wash--

She throws it. This reoccurs with each product.

Freaking Aczone--

Freaking tretinoin cream!

Freaking Clindamycin!

Freaking Doxycycline!

FUCKING ACNE!!!

She screams, throws the remaining products everywhere.

Whatever they give me either doesn't freaking work, takes 6 months to work, or my mom freaks out and won't let me try it

cause it might make me 'infertile'. But like, mom. If I'm stuck with this disfigured face for the rest of my life then I won't even ever be able to find a husband to impregnate me!

FLAVIA CONT'D

Also-- adoption exists? She's just like-- so infuriating! Like, she won't let me try birth control cause she says I'm "too young" and it might "make me Infertile" or "give me ovary cysts" but really it's just cause she thinks it'll encourage me to have sex and I know that cause I over heard her saying that to my dad-- MY DAD! And it's just like Jesus effing Christ mom which is it gonna be do you want me to have sex and make babies or not?!

Flavia returns to the vanity, staring herself down with self pity and hatred.

No one's gonna wanna have sex with this face. No one's gonna wanna kiss this face. No one's even gonna wanna look at this face.

Which is why I can't go to school tomorrow.

I can't hide it. I can't make it disappear overnight. I can't even put makeup over it-- which like wouldn't even hide the bumps-- cause the dermatologists say it'll make my acne WORSE!

Maybe it wouldn't. Those dermatologists are all idiots anyway.

Flavia picks up some concealer. She moves to put some on her face, but stops at the last second.

FLAVIA CONT'D

Maybe I shouldn't risk it.

She quickly puts the concealer away and turns away from the vanity, repulsed by her own image.

No one has seen me all summer. I lied to Becca, Charlie, Cailey, Sarah, Bea, Lizzy, and Cara and Marcus and his squad. I said I was vacationing in Italy for the summer with my lesbian aunt and that I wouldn't have like any cell service. I almost ran into Cailey, Sara, and Bea at the mall cause one of my dermatologists had his office nearby and my mom insisted on parking at the mall cause they have free parking and so I had

to hide inside this like, maternity store and it was super embarrassing.

I've missed out on a whole summer of socializing because of this. I've missed out on a whole summer of birthdays. I missed out on my own birthday-- MY THIRTEENTH FREAKING BIRTHDAY-- because of this face. It was going to be epic. The theme was 'Paris fashion week'. We were gonna put on a fashion show and I was going to freaking win, obviously.

FLAVIA CONT'D

I missed out on a whole summer of MARCUS, shopping, pool parties, movie premieres, and beach trips, and concerts, and selfies, and sleepovers, and I'm about to miss out on the first day of EIGHTH FREAKING GRADE just because of this face!

Flavia looks at herself in the mirror.

This ugly, oily, pimply, PEPPERONI PIZZA FACE!!!

Flavia punches the mirror. It doesn't break. She curls over her hand in pain.

OW! ow ow ow ow ow--

Flavia sits at her vanity, sideways in the chair so that she's facing out to the audience.

FLAVIA

I can't go back to school like this. I can't go back into the world like this.

I wish I could just run away and live in some cave. Or the desert. Or like, Arkansas. Somewhere no one would care that I'm ugly, and disfigured, and oily.

Somewhere that I could just be.

Pimples or not.

Flavia turns around, and looks at herself in the mirror.

FADE TO BLACK.

Bog and Desolation in New York

Sparrow Murray

I forgo the meter
at Astor Place,
taking the six
with the orange seats
that bruise my tailbone,
worn down to a soft knob.

Beneath Union Square
I find that Coleridge and
“Frost at Midnight”
have been ennobled to grace
the MTA’s new lightbox program.
The oracular Romantic
halfheartedly glows
like that film on that grate —
folkloric “stranger.”

The subway car’s awful scraping
hints that the sliding doors
need just to be ravished by
a ruptured pipe,
stray sheet of aluminum or H-beam

to be freed from their servitude as eyelids.

Their rubber flaps touch tremulously
at the base, opening up for a moment
a space for an unintended light to
make itself known,
reduce me to witness.
Anonymous and distant structures
flash somewhere in the Stygian air.
White and then white and then blue

down the narrow corridor.

It is the same light atop radio towers
reminding planes that they are beyond
the age for roughhousing.

It is the lampposts,
silent icicles reflecting in pairs
off the East River,
the monogamous species of their genus,
the kind of eyes that mate for life.

It is the gloss striating

warbling electrical wires
spanning the boroughs of post-industry,
those dark dirty places
where I must wipe the ground thrice
with my sleeve before sitting.

This nameless fluttering light,
“that sole and unquiet thing,”
my voyeur,
reminds me that “remnant” and “omen”
are not mutually exclusive terms.

This city,
this light,
this blank verse,
breeds apathy.

persephone

mollie gordon

the other day a flower landed on my nipple
waiting on a brooklyn sidewalk by my friend's new apartment
in broad daylight i felt it shimmy down past my blouse my bra

-- so many layers of protection and/or separation --

to find a resting place
fastening on tight like a bur, usurping my lover's lips
obscuring tender pink in pale yellow and blue
at first i thought i'd just leave it be
because the people with these parts aren't meant to touch them even if we
want to
like to
need to
but then i felt the
itch
of something aching to uncover and blossom
the kind you can't ignore even if you want to like to need to so i
reached beyond the deep v of my blouse
fingers probing

-- possibly flashing a squirrel and/or pigeon --

until i found the flower and pulled it out and
gifted it to the wind on an
exhale
and then another flower fell and landed on my belly
envious of its ancestor's course, wanting to do better
it started to rain and more flowers followed suit, dropping like meteors
julie by the carousel said that flowers fall when they're supposed to
so i let the rain tether the belly flower to my skin to remind me of my
hunger --

-- i used to think i was frozen beneath the earth, only half a handful of pomegranate seeds,
plucked before i was ready but
now i think i'm like a larkspur at daybreak
still fresh and dripping with dew.

Crabapples, Crisp and Red

Jude

I.

October begins with the scent of
amber: my mother is hunched over
the kitchen counter,

hands slicing through crabapples,
crisp and red against the white-marble
cold. She swipes them

into a pot, one by one, over the burner,
wafts of that warmth and cinnamon
and cardamom drifting

so slightly through the air.
She turns towards me, and tilts her head
towards the washer –
a wordless question, paired with the flick
of the kitchen knife, gripped idly between her fist.
I slip from the sofa,

as a liquid, feet first, bum next, all sinking
towards the floor until I am a mess
amongst the carpet, amber still

filling my senses, all amber. My ankles crack
as I pile myself one atop another
knees and waist and ribs

until I am standing as a pile of rocks, tilting.
When I take a step forward, I fumble over myself,
one foot then two,

until the counter is the only thing in reach.

II.

My mother clears a place for the plates, the bowls,
the utensils. I try not to pour them atop her concoction,
her life simmering in a single pot,

moments from boiling over. She rubs her caked knuckles
against her palm, folding her skin
like pastry dough. I place our dishes down.

When will be the last time we have this moment?
I worry about this daily—
the eventual break in her body,

first her hands, next her knees, until she cannot stand
nor slice through the crabapples, crisp and red.
She says she has at least twenty-five years left.

I cannot believe her to have any less.

Those I've Lost

Zoe Stanton-Savitz

1. *Goldie*

When my dad flushed her down the toilet he hummed “Ave Maria” and I cried, yearning for the swelling of her tiny orange gills and her soft swirling fins swimming through an unwashed tank.

2. *Great Aunt Lily*

A brand-new Malibu Barbie in tow, I sat on the musty carpet of Sunnyvale Assisted Living Facility, as a youthful nurse watched my mother, stone-faced, as she took a step back and nodded at the news. At the funeral I watched my extended family — cousins and uncles and distant relatives — cry for the woman who smelled faintly of mothballs and tea tree oil, and planted slobbery kisses on both cheeks. I unfocused my gaze to a sea of black and took pleasure in the ritualistic uniformity of it all.

3. *Paris*

We were both sixteen when she passed — a friend of a friend. We had spoken at school once or twice and had shared an exceptionally poignant drunken connection at a house party the spring before. I read her obituary with immobility, paralysis — “Paris was joyful,” it read, “generous and kind,” — but I remember a girl who couldn’t spell “rhythm” and wore skinny jeans with flowers embroidered into the cuffs and sang Taylor Swift songs with the choir and crunched on Hot Cheetos outside of the band room at lunch and told me I was pretty with tequila-soaked breath — not the “gone too soon” not the “bright smiled girl” but a girl to whom I should have said goodbye.

4. *Dad*

It was cancer of the liver — he had been suffering for nearly two years before the final relapse. The day before he died he leaned back in his favorite leather armchair chuckling at Tom Hanks in *Big*. An hour later he was looking into a voided distance speaking to his mother, an invisible entity. “It’s nice there, huh? It’s good and nice?” I held his hand, grasping it tight, begging him with the warmth of my palm and the clutch of my knuckles, “don’t let go, don’t let go, don’t let go.” But soon his grip softened and a chill moved through his bones, turning his flesh white. I spoke at the funeral about how he sang to my dead pet fish.

5. *Me (almost)*

I sit in a hospital bed with my wrists wrapped in wrinkled gauze bandages, brownish red splotches peering through its frayed edges. I look down at my sneakers, shoe-laceless, and hope for chocolate pudding, breathing in the simulated hospital air. I shouldn’t be here. I killed my fish — I was

irresponsible and reckless — I didn't cry at my great aunt's funeral — I was devoid of emotion, a numbness that enveloped me in a hazy draft — a girl at my school had died and they'd planted a tree — I'd rather be a tree — I no longer had a father to sing "Ave Maria" and hug me tight. I was infinitesimal, a tiny freckle on the earth's scarred complexion, and nothing I completed, good or bad, would have any impact on the world at large. I was steeped in death, practically born into it, so I might as well assume the position that I, and everybody else, is bound to endure one of these days. But I peer out the window, at a canary perched on a nearby tree and wonder if my mother might buy me a fish.

A Quiet Dreamer

Snow Li

behind the half-closed window

some wild breeze hides;

in the blue silky blankets

where grey lights scatter,

a quiet dreamer lies;

because she could not

speak to the dead,

he kindly spoke to her.

they met by the orange cotton beach

and sipped his saccharine water;

she sat on his bike and pedaled

towards 2004;

they climbed to the fifth floor of apt. 5

on xiaobei st. & saw the wind chime that

her mother and father

hung up with silver stars;

they passed sandy dunes and crescent lake &

heard the inky camels line up

against sods of melting gold and red;

they arrived at the purple hills

in her brain and

greeted painted smiles and

danced with bronze saints. his

eyes guided the road ahead &

she stared into the dream

sinking behind her seat
until the early canaries
awakened her from sleep.

Barbie's Dreamhouse

Ash Freeman

Eva lived in the yellow house three houses down from mine. Before I worked up the courage to be her friend, I passed her everyday on my walk to the grocery store where my mom worked. She could usually be found tending to her clover garden or eating a granola bar on the sidewalk. We became friends in the way all kids do— nobody on our block understood us the way we understood each other. We were a year apart (Eva, my elder) and walked around with Polly Pockets in our sweaty fists and coins for gumballs in our pockets.

We used to sell pink lemonade on my porch steps in the summer. We split the money in half. One day we made seventeen dollars and each bought a Barbie doll and made them kiss. We had one Ken doll between the two of us but he was left in the E-Z Bake Oven and had flat and gooey stubs in the place of feet. He was ugly and Eva was possessive over him.

In the winter, Mom picked up extra shifts and I was often bored. Our heat worked too well so I propped the windows open with dish soap and dirty towels. I made a dress for Barbie out of snow. It melted fast and left her body wet and cold and bare. Eva told me we were getting too old to play with dolls. That was the year she started bleeding. I used her mood swings as an almanac and kept Kit-Kats and pads in the house. I made a bed for Ken out of one. It stuck to my arm and smelled like chemicals. Winter went by slowly.

Instead of selling lemonade the next summer, Eva and her dad had a garage sale and she sold all her dolls for \$9, including Ken. She got a record player and started listening to The Beatles and thought she was better than me. I learned to enjoy my own company. I learned how to make bead necklaces. Mom taught me how to make mac n' cheese from a box. I started selling the things I made and used the money to buy something practical (yellow sneakers). I got my own almanac. Eva started eighth grade and brought new friends home who stepped on her clover garden. I made fairy houses out of popsicle sticks, mud, and daisies to watch over her.

In October I found Eva behind the grocery store, tongue misplaced. The boy had two full feet, unmelted, and he looked awkward against her. It was already dark and my mom was waiting for me, she had groceries for me to carry home (turkey slices, stale almonds that tasted like soy sauce, potato bread, a dozen eggs). I wasn't afraid of the dark back then but I was afraid of speeding cars and deer and middle school boys. I sprinted past them, seemingly unnoticed, into the store and exited from the front entrance to avoid them but when I came out Eva was waiting for me. The boy had disappeared. Eva stared at her shoes, folded her fingers together, opened her mouth and shut it. She smelled sour, like sick and ginger ale. She said, *Let me walk you home.*

To My Twelve Year Old Self

Aubrey Baker

Mom and dad don't love each other. You'll learn that at eighteen. Of course you'll see it beforehand at seventeen in the parking lot of the Salve Library. You'll go there to get away from mom's excuses and dad's meaningless bark. It'll be a cold night in December. The heating in your car won't work and your hands will feel invisible against the steering wheel. The family group chat will notify you that the woman dad thought he married wasn't the woman who makes us dinner each night—the one who rubs our back when we have a migraine. They won't get divorced though, no matter how many times he'll threaten it. Mom says that she'll never leave him, and his credit is bad anyway. You'll notice the silence most when Jeopardy's on and mom has retreated to the kitchen, or when dad's pants begin to sag at the waist because he's stopped eating to spite her. It'll hurt, but that type of pain can be suppressed with a long drive through Stowe, Vermont or dispensary weed from your brother. I'm not encouraging you to smoke and I'm not saying it goes away. It will still find ways to seep in silently, and then all at once—your first night alone in New York, your honeybees not surviving the winter. I think about you a lot, and often I wonder what you would think of me, now, at twenty. I weigh more than you will at fifteen, which if you're wondering is one hundred and fifty pounds. I don't go to the gym—I know mom makes you do that. It may sound crazy but I even have sex—with the lights on. I know taking pills scares you, but you'll be diagnosed with Bipolar II, and pudding can't disguise a pill of that size. Things will feel hollow for a bit, and you'll live with a girl who owns a cow and makes the best broccoli cheddar soup. Together you'll categorize wildflowers for her Botany class and carve alien spaceships into pumpkins. She'll die, and you'll spend that night in a hot tub sobbing to strangers about an orphaned cow, just twenty miles away. The boy from the football team—the one you'll leave snacks on the porch for—will also die. You'll be sixteen, and he'll visit you in a dream. She hasn't visited yet, and I worry she's still in the house on Hilltop Ave.—running up and down the stairs, unloading the dishwasher, watching the X Files. You'll be in the kitchen making dinner in November, and you'll confess to her your desire to be buried in the dirt after you die. She'll agree that coffins are restrictive and growing into a tree would be sublime. She'll be buried in a pine box and you'll have to view it as a compromise to get any sleep. Love on her, because mom and dad don't love each other.

Nutmeg and Butterfly

Jane Scheiber

And at our deaths, we shall be nutmeg
and butterfly (or so you believe,
so you say).

I consider the life of a butterfly, and first
their straw-tongues, the unraveling
fall into the heart of flora, but then
I remember the moths without mouths.

I want to ask you if people are born with mouths, but
the damp cricket song lets me float
the question on air for a moment, before sweeping
it away under my sleeve, like chalk.

You look so beautiful, turning in the forever-night, and I want
to thank you for your forgiveness, for
stuffing your fingers into the bleeding chambers
of my heart and pumping my oyster flesh.

In after-death I will miss these human features, these
nostril flares and the gaps between your toes, your thoughtful brow
cinched at its center, and the ridges
through the tops of your hands, their contours beneath my rib.

On the west coast, I will dedicate my butterfly life
(2 weeks or more, I will fend off mates)
in pursuit of
nutmeg.

At each perfect round shell, I will shake
your small shape in case you may fall out sometime,
in case the perfect exterior may split open like the earth, and I may
see you sleeping, pink and new.

If we get there, could you leave a stripe for me? Or a mole, a scar?

In this grand summer night, in the kitchen light
that falls weakly onto our outside heads,

I want to be nothing at all.

Magnolia Tree

Hannah Emilius

Grandmother bark, gnarled and grey until the rains which speckled you green, the coils of branches, your arms aching for the sun. The magnolia tree which held me in your shade as I made potions of your green pear leaves and fuzzy flower bulbs, as I smeared pulpy pink petals over my wrists and called their fragrance perfume. Dear magnolia, did you see my grandmother through her wood-headed husband and her doomed daughters, did you see the children on children and the grown-ups on grown-ups, is there some of their silence in your roots? Will the rot and the axes which took you finally take us all, raging and frothing to destruction? You were my cradle in my dawn days, your trunk separated into a stairway, your body that only let me climb so high. You suffered the occult symbols I carved into your skin, you sustained my ferocity, my knees scuffed in dirt and my back speckled with black bruises, you mothered me in quiet, through tempests, through branches cracking against the roof. You are gone. You are a thing which has died as no person should die, in a storm of silver metal and men with shredding teeth, made bodiless, sawdust, sticks. I snagged a twig through the massacre. You are my family as much as the rest of them. You contained the generations of us, and all I have left of you is a twig. There are no headstones for trees. We will hold no firework funeral, no solemn kitchen toasts. I am left with the roots of mourning and my earliest luxuries: crushed petals, virid magic, a set of woody stairs from which I would never, ever fall.

repose

b.a. hyland

I sleep & let dream-seasickness rule my body.

I sleep & think about blood on a cutting board
(unsteady-hands) & cake (tomorrow).

I sleep again & think about cards, turn
each over and shuffle again (finishing rounds
of solitaire in ninety seconds or less, now).

to breathe. to look. to not-look.

to breathe. to feel weight on my chest (fear? or
exhaustion, bloated ego)

and to breathe again.

outside, carrion-birds sing.

I will hum along with them and try to not think about the subjunctive mood.

(there is blood on the cutting board, yes. but nobody's dead, and there might be cake.)

Flossing through ears, through palms, through soul

Chiara Lindsay

Languid in the way that she moves.

Sticky shirt like rice; too much water.

Dusty light partially on,

wavelengths were mild and damp.

She infused herself with floor,

her feet smoothed over wood,

codependent. Skin/fabric/floor

music curved the way her body did,

she made sounds through motion.

Almost wishing that she could carve
into herself, scooping out parts of body

and place them onto floor like a prop.

Gentle care.

Hefty breaths through mask, a strain

to get air into working lungs, she fought

breath itself. Mouth/fabric/atmosphere

soul screeching to bust out of

stomach. Part of her is always falling;

experiment is to off-balance

on-purpose.

Testing mobility to its furthest point of

stretch, how far her circumference

can be drawn while maintaining her center of

gravity. *I am Sun. I am orbiting the body*

that is my own. Entire studio at her disposal,

she expands into ceiling. Constellation tracing

beyond personal space, she engulfs the room;

black hole.

Syrup colored glow that surrounds her,

embracing the surface layer of her skin,

coated from above, as it casts its

soft, orange-tinted light down,

down,
down.

Limbs heavy, she lies on her back to breathe,
to immerse in weight of muscle. Episodes of
that evening came into studio with her,
only to be shed onto floor. Gamy thoughts
plagued her mind, only to be shed onto floor.

All she knew was breath in and out and through,
reaching all space between each ligament.

Twenty minutes expire.

Salt seeps into eyes, stinging. Sight
not needed; sight removed. Blood/muscle/bone
fusing in restlessness of a fluid night, in its capacity to inflate, body boundless.

On Becoming a Ghost

Chloë Fontenot

The town liked to hold its breath when I walked by. Mouths glued shut in a collective wonder.

I moved here at six with just a mom and a dead man's house to fix up.

They knew that house. Whispering what it stood for, stories of the people who live there. The ones who came out. The ones with brains peeled back, hollowed out by their own reflection.

They knew (even then) that wickedness can crawl into children.

And, they knew I came from that house, the one built backward. Burrowing towards the soil instead of the sky. The one with wasp nests resting on the crust and crooked window panes.

I loved that house. It's shedding walls and creaking chandeliers.

The grey tabby in the window and the slant of the porch light at night.

I loved the stories my mother would sing about her rose garden. The one we planted under the moonlight and rare August rain.

I didn't understand why chubby cheeks and preteen fingers dared each other to get closer to the house.

I didn't understand why no one played with me. Why they let my uneaten hopscotch course wash away in the rain.

I didn't understand when the milkman stopped delivering or when no one showed up when I didn't go to school.

I didn't understand the whispers that followed me. (The ones that started at nine.) Foreign words turned familiar: *They're tangled in the weeds of their garden. Broken down by the mother's knife.*

They told me something in me turned into a snaggle tooth. That I lived in that house too long with her to smile.

They told me I had wings burrowed beneath my shoulder blades, grinding at the base of my neck.

Yet, I couldn't fly. Not with a running start. Not with enough of their eyes pressing against my spine.

The day I tried my back didn't blossom, the wings that broke away at my bones didn't burst.

The seesaw of the window seal. Painted broken toes.

Crashing in the garden, I tangled with the rose bush, loose limbs chopping together.

They told me there was such a thing as ghosts. Such a thing as hauntings.

But it was getting dark and I fell asleep nestled with my mother at the root of that house.

A Block Away

Jude

When I'm a block away
I'll find Peter's cousin in the alley
behind the tattoo shop. He'll whisper

in my ear and tuck a hand between
my legs and suck silently on my teeth,
one, two, three seconds deep.

If someone told me I'd be in this dump
I'd have punched them in the lip,
blood to the knuckle, flesh hardening,

skin on skin. Another
hand. Another touch in the dark.
I scratch my spine against the bricks

just to feel something. Just to
get it over with.
It is autumn and I am sweating.

It is autumn and I am sweating
up a mess in here. A neon sign
buzzes above my head: open 24/7.

Eat

Theodore Heil

i.

In the kitchen,
I cut open:
a mango,
a quart of strawberries,
a difficult bag of flour.
I lay the dough to rest,
simmer the strawberries,
and slice the mango into
two strong halves.
Setting the pie away,
I shed the skin
from the mango
and eat it hungrily.

ii.

I watched two men
play tennis from the lawn
of an old ex-boyfriend's house.
I shed my skin
for a moment
and let only my eyes
watch the motion
of their arms
back and forth.
Two eyes floating
back and forth.

iii.

My face disappeared
behind the mountain
of your shoulders.
I wondered

when your hair would turn gray,
if love or hate would change
the fine details of my face.
I let you pass,
your laugh a pleasant pain
in the valley of my ribs.
I bit the back
of your hand until
I tasted blood,
until I swallowed
you whole.

iv.

We made dinner,
measuring cups passed
back and forth
between us,
little glass points where
our fingers brushed.
We ate.
We made love.
We shared a cigarette.
We shed the shared parts
of ourselves, and
we were still the same
after.

v.

I thought this might
be all love is—
the consuming.

aura

Greer McAllister

she tells me I am like a wine red,
spirit so dark it's almost brown, rust, or plum.....
I'm not sure I can agree (I am in her eyes anything, as she is
in my eyes everything):

but I am no Midwest venus, who emerges
from that murky lake, cattails her throne, her water lily feet!
although I've tried to make you believe it. I am more of an eyes closed,
yellowed sheets, fatty-soft girl wrapped in yellowed leaves.
thank god that I am, in your eyes, something,
at the very least.

The Year I Disappear

Aubrey Baker

Ma, last week I was driving, and the evergreens lining the highway grew into the house I shared with Leah—the one in Rhode Island. My one-track mind put me in the kitchen, making breakfast. I could smell the corn tortillas being toasted, her fake bacon—cherry red and warped—popping on the stove. I could see her, alive again, slouched over the living room loveseat, her hair, purple and blonde, blending to form a kaleidoscope violet. I could hear her, voice thick with sleep, calling out to ask whether the oil was hot enough—if the burner would need to be turned up.

I'm in New York—I repeat it until I feel real again. I treat this modern-day grounding spell like the prayer you would say to me every night before bed. As I got older, I would ask you to repeat it until I felt safe enough to curl in on myself.

Thank you, God, for Aubrey Bird.

Thank you for sending her to our family, God.

We love her so much.

Keep her safe while she sleeps,

And send her good dreams.

Ma, I have one foot in the door, and one foot out. The seasons are changing and I'm not. The leaves are falling and my windshield ices in the morning, but I can't escape the humid heat of her dying—the heaviness of his hands.

Two nights ago, when we talked on the phone, I sat heaving in putrid smoke, hoping you couldn't sense sexual assault in my speech. I want to spell it out for you—the nights spent in the Bronx, empty bottles of Pappy Van Winkle's famous whiskey, medical pagers that emit a screeching sound *only* after

he's finished—but you know him. I showed you his photo earlier this summer. He was in a grey suit, black hair pushed to the side, accepting some award for research on cardiovascular systems. When I told you he was thirty-one you asked if I was joking, because surely no man that attractive, that successful, would align himself with the likes of us—you and me Ma. It's always been you and me.

When dad told you to leave, I packed our bags. At sixteen, those high-school assemblies on domestic violence consumed me, as I told you to transfer enough money to last us a month. Dad never touched you, but I took the extra car key for good measure. You said you would take us to a meditation retreat up North—yoga and forced sobriety would do you good. We ended up at grandma's, just a mile away.

Ma, I keep thinking of the photo of us at the beach, the one that sits in the gold frame on the mantle in the foyer. I'm maybe three and you've wrapped me in a Ralph Lauren teddy bear towel. I'm swaddled close to your chest and you must've said something *so* funny, because my mouth is open, revealing the chicklet teeth of a toddler.

The night when he was inside of me, he called out my name, and I answered with the whooshing sound of waves lapping the shore. I wasn't there Ma, I was with you—on the beach. It's been almost two months since it happened, and I know what highways to follow, what exits to take, but I'm lost. I'm still in Rhode Island—wrapped in a terry cloth towel, stranded on this simple shore—and you're not.

Ma, I want a man to love me. I want the antidepressants back, and I want to be around long enough to deliver my friend's babies. I want this feeling in my stomach to go away and Leah to be alive again. I want it all for us, but the days are getting shorter and I'm going to sleep earlier. Last night, standing naked in the sweltering silence of my room, I realized this is the year I disappear. Look for me in that photo on the mantle, Ma. I'll be there.

yes, I will. Yes.

i've been thinking about you
that time you called *tender buttons* infuriating
i had just declared i found it
brilliant; the rest of the class
seemed ambivalent
i thought to myself this girl might ruin me
and god i would let her

(about the you who was you
before i really knew you)

i've been thinking about
Your all encompassing kisses
and the way you seem
to devour not just my lips
but the depths of my soul,
as if you kiss to swallow me whole
i want you to

i am trying to figure out
when i first thought about you
like this like more; like i want every part of her
engulfed in every part of me when did you become
every 11:11 wish every star in the deep blue sky
when did i start staring at the moon
and, in its pale light, see your face?
i don't know

(i know that i knew i was going to fall in love with you sooner than i knew what your favorite color was and that it didn't make me want to run away from you i know that even though you hated *tender buttons* i could write a thousand gertrude stein-esque painting poems about you and still fail to capture the magnetic pull i felt towards you when all we were to each other was a set of pixels on two computer screens and i know that i've been trying for nine months and all i have is *thank you for melting my stone* and a million half sentences about your eyes your hair your lips i know that when we kiss it still feels like the first time i know that my heart skips like it did when you ran down the front stairs in january it still skips like that when i get a text or when you open the door to your apartment god it skips like that

when i hear you say my name—even though you never say my name you say brigothy or sir or five letters that make me want you more than i've wanted anything or anyone in my life—i know that i think about you every second of every day so when i start this poem by saying *i've been thinking about you lately* that's not really anything new and i know that you're every word i've written up to this point and i know that your face is etched into my mind and into my heart and it has been since you said you hated *tender buttons* and suddenly i wanted to know everything about you and i know that for some reason i thought you would ruin me and yet here we are it's been a year and i am quite the opposite of ruined and i'll say it again love i'll say it again: *thank you for melting my stone*)

Autumn Tie

Emma DeNaples

We gag with laughter from inside your Chevy Camaro;

the crows are screaming outside;

it is just crowsound, nothing more;

don't listen for your name.

It is autumn time and the land is belly-up;

we pass hot cider between cracked hands and sip and

dribble down our shirt fronts because we are still laughing like goons.

It is 4:00PM; the sun has been buried for hours.

"Don't leave me," I gasp between belly aches,

and the crows pick it up;

"don't leave me

don't leave me

don't leave me."