

VIEW FROM THE HILL

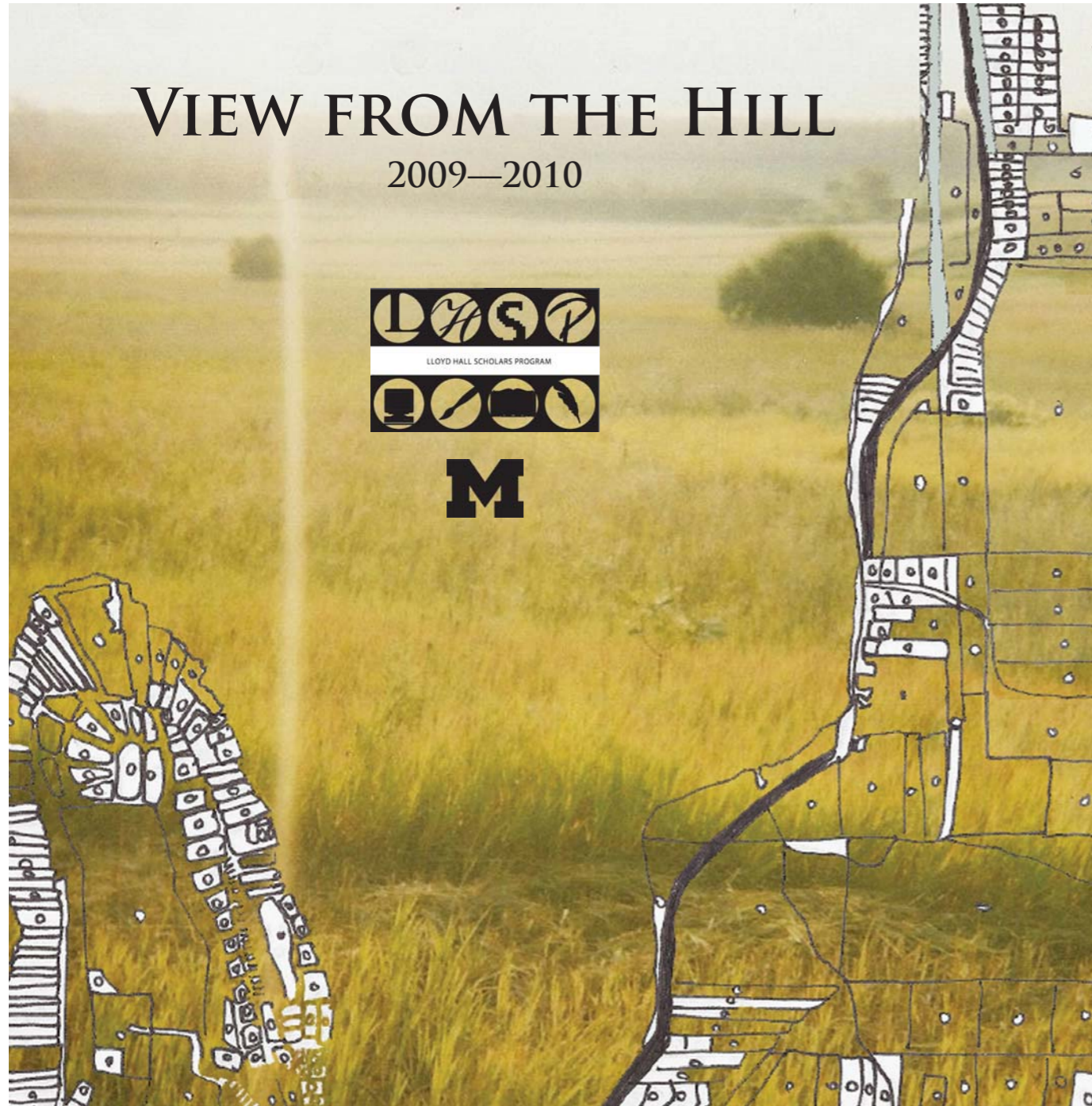
2009—2010



LLOYD HALL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

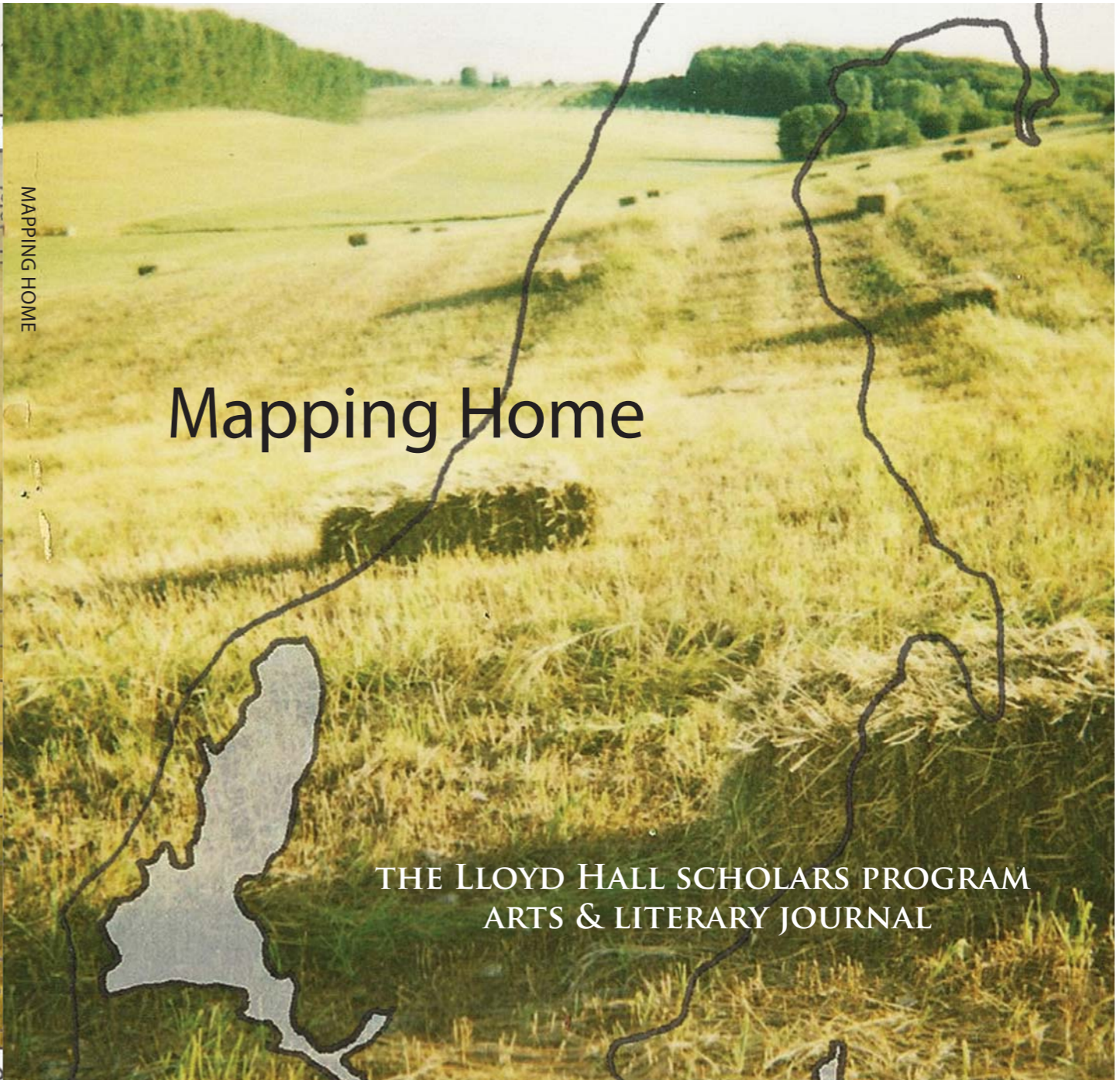


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MAPPING HOME

Mapping Home



THE LLOYD HALL SCHOLARS PROGRAM
ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL



VIEW FROM THE HILL
THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

Mapping Home

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VIEW FROM THE HILL

THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

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FOREWORD

The academic year is over, and I am currently re-discovering my parents' old summer house in the mountains of rural Vermont. My husband, daughter, and I take the afternoons to explore off the map, discovering new territories that usually involve old dirt roads. Yesterday we got lost on a road that, we realized later when we consulted the map, is called "Cowpath 40."

So, yes. Mapping Home. This gorgeous book of creative work by the LHSP students of 09-10 is appropriately titled. Taken from the cover artwork by Lindsey Eldredge-Fox, the title resonates; we all take journeys out and back again, and what are maps but visual representations that explain—for others and ourselves—our experience of a terrain. An outline and record of discovery. I like, too, what "mapping" implies—not the noun or artifact, but the act of making the artifact, a continuous present. We will continuously search for but will never quite reach our version of home.

The beautiful prose, poetry, and artwork here sketch out the intersections of roadways and highways, they narrate short-cuts, long-cuts, scenic routes—but above all they are records of discovery. Many involve the arts—from the performance of an unforgettable musician to the aesthetic display of a taxidermist. These pieces are multifaceted: raw and polished, subtle and loud, carefully described and deliberately cryptic—above all, sincere and startling pieces of narration and revelation.

I am proud of the work that went into the making of this book—a lively editorial team led by the extraordinarily talented editor-in-chief Kendra Furry, who is not just a poet, but also an actress and singer. This year's journal advisor, T Hetzel, has led the journal staff in some brilliant new directions. Thanks also to the LHSP staff, as well as our poet-in-residence Vievee Francis, who graced us all year with her passion for poetry and dedication to teaching. And especially thanks to you, the students of LHSP 09-10, for mapping out your own unique directions home. Someday I'll show you how to get to Cowpath 40. I promise.

CAROL TELL, Faculty Director

Kellen Braddock

ENDURING TOKENS OF THE TAXIDERMIST

I.

With a parallel cut,
the elk becomes an object to us pickers

as I portion down this place we call “the middle”

rather than the universal gut.

My hands
lay down applications of salt

and pull the moon knife, the shoe knife
through this open sack of wet sapphires.

No bones now.

In a pelt of human charge,
I flesh the skin upon my tanner’s frame.

II.

The immediacy of a fishhook, steel trap or 30-30 rifle...

to provoke death to postpone it, afterwards

I forget your process of arrival—

every back story

 of top branch and dirt hole buoys off

in my mind and your mind

because your mind is in my hand.

Next step, I gauge your legs—

they could have only carried you this far,

plus or minus.

III.

We assign our samples to represent
the greater species; #1a. through
two-hundred hummingbirds.

I glue poppy-eyes and babble beaks
on a precise spectrum of shut and cocked.

Embroidering this rainbow of dead gems—emeralds, rubies, topaz—
into an artificial shape of flight

has left a kaleidoscope of color
beneath my fingernails—

credit these scientific hands
to this fowl sculpture of moving upwards.

IV.

When histories, on behalf of the skin,
are told through the older methods

of wooden teeth and hay bellies—

stuffing manikins with the phantoms
of their would-have-been consumption:

underbrush, dirt, field.

Three goats from New England, 1850,
bloat with rot

along their grease holes and flossy stitches—

this decomposition as if only to mock us.

Frighteningly natural. Naturally, we are frightened

by this anyways-aging.

V.

I post an apology
next to the irregular hoof slip
of mammal #63b

and leave a pressing note to correct the spine
of bird #34f—

these exhibitions aren't even a year old

as we find errors no, rather

our own limitations.

We make endurance tokens

to forget the pelting weakness in our own bodies.

Kellen Braddock
WITH THE PROMISE OF FIGS

I imagine them sliced open in elegant paltry
and sun-dried, of course—

well, perhaps pickled
or in the form of relish
how else?

For there's something monstrous about raw foods in winter evenings.

In this season, nothing is freshly picked outside
of the plaster mould.

You and I know this
as the ones who stole every living silhouette
from the garden.
Months ago,

in support of immortal sculpture,
we carved a fear within ourselves

against the sufferance of seeds:
the flesh of these dark little hearts, sickled on their sides,
aching in the cold—

everything, now, is cooked

or indigestible

like the chicken wire that keeps our still lifes standing.

So when the figs came out from the kitchen
inflated with their authentic waters
and fresher than a mouth to kiss,

this read as an eye inverted to God.

Even the darkest fruit
within the oil painting froze into ornaments

and then fell. Heaviest now
in the orchard dirt
like the mistakes of others—

my own, an unfounded pit,
sewn in the throat.

Molly Ann Blakowski

ONE MAN'S TRASH IS ANOTHER MAN'S ORNITHORHYNCHUS ANATINU

My wife doesn't like it.

In fact, that's an understatement—she detests it.

I brought it home the other day. Yes, it must have been on Tuesday—the Natural History Museum has reduced admission prices on Tuesdays, and I reap the benefits of this hot deal like clockwork each week. I punch out, zip my jacket over my dirty uniform and drive the old Toyota downtown to my glorified Tuesday sanctuary.

"My mother's sick again," my wife said with a voice as saggy as her gravitationally-tailored memories-of-breasts, mashing her utensils into our usual Wednesday night dinner. Meatloaf and potatoes from a box. "I'm driving over to stay with her this weekend."

"Oh. Send her my get well wishes," I offered. What a joke that was. Things haven't been so hot between my mother-in-law and me since last Thanksgiving, and quite frankly, I wouldn't give a damn if the old broad finally fell over and croaked somewhere in her dusty, old ranch house on Featherston Avenue. The one that smells like sour cottage cheese and mothballs and everything else old and unpleasant. Serves her right.

"I will."

You know, any sane person would let bygones be bygones after a whole year. But my mother-in-law, she's definitely insane. What happened was, last Thanksgiving, after we'd polished off all five pounds of the post-feathery meal that Ben Franklin once wished to make our national bird, and had grown drowsy from the tryptophan, I'd slipped down the hallway and into her bedroom to...admire a few collectables while the ladies prepared hot coffee and pumpkin pie. And well, I'm surprised how she even saw that pink, little porcelain cat tucked into my shirt pocket, what with her failing

vision and all. Clearly, she overreacted. Anyhow, ever since, that old, senile bat has treated me like a complete criminal.

I chewed my meatloaf loudly to compensate for my wife's sudden silence. It worked for a few minutes, until she cleared her throat and gave me the look.

"You know what I'm going to say to you," she glared across the table with the ferocity of a rabid lynx, like the one I saw two Tuesday's ago at the museum. Though that particular one had no eyes—it'd been a mere skeletal representation. "Don't you?"

"Oh, sure, sure," I rebutted casually. "Water the flowers, keep up the kitchen, sure, sure, I know the drill."

Phew. Safe.

"Phil. Don't beat around the bush. You know I'm talking about that...thing."

"Thing? What thing? I certainly have no idea what you're getting at," I responded, twiddling my sweaty thumbs.

Oh, Lord. She was going to say it.

"Phil, you've got to get rid of it. All of it. Especially that."

Then I began to lose my cool. "Shelly. Please. Not that—it's new! Give me some time, at least. This stuff, it's sentimental," I begged like a pathetic dog. "It's got value. Don't you understand?"

Her plate not yet cleaned (which was utterly unheard of, since Shelly absolutely adores meatloaf), she rose from her seat and pointed a threatening fork straight between my eyes. "If you don't get rid of that shit, Phil," she growled, "I swear to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I'll leave you!"

"Oh come on, Shelly! You said that last time! You wouldn't dare."

Becoming cross-eyed, I watched as two forks trembled in her hand briskly like two, evil hummingbirds hovering mere centimeters from the bumpy bridge of my nose.

“Well, this time I mean it.” She stomped off, and I listened to her high heels clattering with the volume of a hundred drunken bridesmaids. I waited until they silenced, then grabbed her plate and transferred the abandoned meatloaf and potatoes onto my own. So wasteful, Shelly.

I don’t see what the big deal is with her. After all, I could have brought home something far worse. In fact, considering the other options, I’d say my selection was quite reasonable.

I’d begun my habitual educational visit this particular Tuesday by browsing the museum’s expansive fossil selection. I imagined the paleontologists who unearthed those prehistoric treasures high-fiving each other like big, meaty jocks at a university football game.

I like to think that my job is a bit like that of a paleontologist.

My job: a high school janitorialologist.

Go ahead and laugh, but at the high school, I’m constantly digging up artifacts. And sure, I don’t always find something extraordinary—there will always be apple cores, empty, plastic water bottles and sticky Twinkie wrappers competing for my attention. Typical high school detritus.

“DO NOT TOUCH,” read a sign mounted ahead of the towering allosaurus. Using my tiptoes as fulcrums, I leaned in precisely, at the rate of a slightly-caffeinated sloth, extending my arm as if to shake its ancient claw. I stroked its skeleton with my fleshy, pink fingertips. These bones were dug up in Utah, and I figure if I did this roughly 200,000 years ago in Salt Lake City, this guy would’ve stripped the tissue clear off my bones. Of the two of us, maybe then I’d be the freak show hanging in the

exhibit museum.

After that act, my hands became feisty, piranha jaws. Suddenly I needed to touch everything. Everything. Like the bony tail of a mastodon. I wasn't worried about the meandering museum staff members chiding me for my unorthodox museum conduct. No, I was more concerned about the giant sauropod foot a couple of exhibits to the left. That foot could've crushed me in a second, crushed me to punish me for the molestation of its fellow, fossilized friend.

But it's all worth it, my toilsome janitorial efforts, when I find them. The Big Juicys. How I savor unwrapping those crinkly, loose-leaf gifts, with their reliable three-hole punches and teal and red lines.

The mastodons were beautiful, but I realized my desire to kidnap them and claim them as my own was unrealistic. How on earth would I fit them into my pockets? I considered settling instead with the horns of a Pleistocene bison. These horns, I thought, they look like Viking hats, and I must have them. Bison preoccidentalis, bison rassicornis, or bison latifrons? How hard it was to choose between them. I scrutinized each like a genetically modified fruit at a grocery store. Any would be a great addition to the mantle above my fireplace, or to wear as a hat on various special occasions. It's hard to believe that 10,000 years ago, these Goliaths grazed the lands of lower Michigan, along with terrifying, giant beavers depicted in the diorama to the right. I wondered if they might have even lived in my own backyard, a place that today, accommodates no such creatures, besides the ceramic garden gnome with the pointy, purple hat that my wife thinks I got rid of last June, when in all actuality I've hidden it expertly behind the tomato plant because I know she's a terrible gardener and never, ever waters it or pays it any mind at all.

I wandered over to another exhibit and squatted carefully in the Ojibwe dug-out canoe, catching three violet-colored, reflected versions of myself in the sheen of jagged quartz crystals in an amethyst geode from Brazil. From within the shiny cluster of purple teeth, I saw three of me pick up the ancient oar, saw three of me paddle down the elegant, marble steps, through the titanic entrance doors and straight out to the ocean, white-capped waves, beluga whales, sunken treasure and all.

When I'm lucky enough to find them, I read these rare gifts carefully as if I'll be tested later on their contents. "Dear Jake," they may start. "U and I both no we need 2 talk." Oh, the scandal! "Dear Debbie," they may read in inviting shades of Sharpie pen. "I can't believe what you did with Chris last weekend!" Chris? Debbie? It couldn't be!

"XoXoX, Leslie."

Entering the room titled "Life through the ages," I paid homage to the geologic time scale: Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Mississippian, Pennsylvanian, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, and beyond. I always remember the order because of a silly acronym: Can Orville see down my pants pocket? Tom Jones can, though I better never catch this Tom Jones character, or anybody else for that matter, staring down any pants pockets of mine. What a creep, right?

Each glass case contained thousands of years of evolution. The Permian diorama, for example, depicted towering trees called annularia that resembled a concoction of equal parts bamboo and pine tree. How strange they were, those Christmas relics for Permian pandas. The simulated prehistoric waters, composed of dusty glass painted an opaque, murky green teeming with life. A diplocerapsis swam through the sea of Plexiglas, and out of it crawled a peculiar amphibian, an eryop.

I doubt I'll ever become fossilized. My backyard isn't a great venue for fossilization, on account of fossils generally form in warm, lacustrine environments. Fossils and lakes really hit it off because the bones of dead organisms press perfectly into the mud and silt at the lake's floor. Later, these indentations harden into rocks. Of course, later means thousands of years. It's a long process—much longer than waxing the gym floor at school (though sometimes it doesn't seem like it).

Besides, I'm not too fond of water. That's another reason why I probably won't ever become fossilized. Which is a huge bummer because I'm definitely important enough to be. I would be a great specimen. An excellent addition to a collection of any sort. I could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Sometimes, I can't help but feel left out, like the entire world knows what happened between Debbie and Chris besides little old me. Maybe, though, Leslie will continue leaving notes behind—just for me. I picture notes slipping from the neatly trimmed back pocket of her lightly faded size four, denim hip-huggers, each perfectly destined for my reading pleasure. I like Leslie. I think she's one of the only people who really gets me, you know?

On the third floor, there were hundreds of birds in cages. Little gold plaques marked the specimens as "endangered" or "threatened." Long-eared owl: threatened. Short-eared owl: endangered. I wondered what factors scientists take into consideration upon deeming a certain species "threatened" or "endangered." I wondered if the birds would've flown away if I'd opened the cages. They really ought to be set free. Someone really ought to open those cages. Maybe, one day, I'll be the one to do it.

"I want one of these big guys!" chirped a pin-striped, rosy-cheeked fifth grader.

It was a Great Horned Owl. I wanted one, too.

I'd had one once, a few years ago. It's so painful to think about, though. I mean, that owl was the very first thing I'd ever taken from the museum. My first adoption, if you will. I brought it home, and after a little rearranging, set it in the dining room cabinet and stared at it like a proud soccer parent.

"Where the hell did you get that thing?" Shelly'd asked.

"Oh, just some resale shop downtown."

"Well, I hope you can get a refund, Phil, because there's no way I'll have that creepy thing in my house one minute longer. I can't even look at it. I think it might give me nightmares," she'd shuddered. "Plus, it clashes with my father's urn. You know how he was. You know he wouldn't like that."

So I let it go. I let it free. I've never had any kids, but I wonder if that was what it feels like dropping your son off at college or walking your daughter down the aisle. I always wonder about that owl. I've never let anything go since.

It's all a big game. How will my next message be delivered? I never know, it's all up to Leslie. Will she slyly toss it inside a garbage can? Maybe. Will she tuck it away with her gym socks and Number Seven basketball uniform in the girls' locker room? Perhaps. Will she "accidentally" leave it behind at her table in the cafeteria? It's a possibility.

But the way we communicate, Leslie and I, is perfect. We never have any arguments. There's never anything to fight about. We just really get each other, you know? We always have each other's backs, you know? Like the other day, when some little, pre-pubescent punk puked in the athletic wing, and I had to mop it up. I practically saved her life.

"Floor's wet," I'd said heroically as I saw her running by, one hand motioning towards the dual, yellow "Caution!" and "¡Cuidado!" sign, the other gripping my mop handle tight enough to give me permanent slivers.

"Thanks," she said, and continued upstairs towards AP Biology with Mr. Kuzinowski, which I knew she was running late for because she always takes cigarette breaks between third and fourth hour in the bleachers overlooking the football field.

Smoking's a dirty habit, but I'll never judge her for it, of course.

I'll never judge that Leslie. Sweet, sweet Leslie. She'd never argue with me or tell me to get rid of things. She accepts people for who they are. She smokes Camel No. 9s.

A glass case protects a wallet, a pair of boots and a belt crafted from the skin of a sea turtle, all of which would be a nice addition to my wardrobe. I pictured myself strolling into an elegant cocktail party sporting the Nile crocodile handbag and the Colobus monkey skin as a shawl. Porcelain skinned dames and mustachioed monsieurs kissed the air beside my cheeks and asked, "Wherever did you learn to dress so stylishly?" to which I replied quite coolly, "Oh, these old things? Darling, you should see the rest of my collection!"

Still, I will always want to know about Debbie and Chris.

I like to check out the stuffed animals, too—not to be confused with the sorts found in toy stores. I saw a badger: *Taxidea taxus*. It looked like a man I once knew who, coincidentally, made a hobby of killing badgers who so happened to intrude upon his one hundred and fifteen acres of land near Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I saw a red

fox: *Vulpes vulpes*. I shrugged, curious how the same word could mean both “red” and “fox.”

Anyhow, I finally saw it, then. It was perfect. Genius.

I knew immediately that I’d take it home and make it my own. I knew immediately that we’d hit it off just great.

I knew immediately that I would kidnap the stuffed platypus.

Also known as the duckbill, the platypus uses its broad and horny bill for dissecting and ingesting worms. It is mostly an aquatic animal; it has strong limbs like wrought iron paddles, and it’s small enough to zip into my jacket semi-inconspicuously.

A few weeks ago, I consoled Leslie after she failed her history test. I dropped a crisp, five-dollar bill on the floor outside senior girls’ restroom, where I knew she’d locked herself away in a stall, crying terrible tears of defeat into the school’s sand-papery toilet paper and smudging her Maybelline “Almost Black,” brown eyeliner and mascara. It cheered her right up, of course, when she found it lying there like an unopened Christmas gift. Yeah, I’m really good with those sorts of things.

You know, the little things that make a relationship work.

As soon as I returned home, I set my prize on the foot of our queen-sized bed. It looked nice there, beside the Least weasel: *Mustela nivalis*, (a weasel the size of a child’s fist), the faux meteorite samples, and the three-foot long, giant-puffball mushroom with its seven trillion fungal spores. It didn’t just look nice—it looked, well... perfect.

But once again, my wife hates it. She thinks I have a serious problem.

When Friday arrived and she finally left to wipe her old broad's ass for the weekend, we all had a real ball back at the house. A perfectly dandy time. We gathered in the living room to watch film noir and eat grilled mozzarella sandwiches, some with crust, and others without. We listened to Arlo Guthrie's, "Alice's Restaurant," on my old turn table, and held intellectual conversations on key national events such as Watergate and Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction during her 2004 Super Bowl performance. I even bought a pack of Camel No. 9s to celebrate. Though I smoked them outside and made sure to alleviate myself of the stench with a lemony, Lysol spray before reentering the party and situating myself on the sofa between Ornithorhynchus anatinu and the flakey slab of biotite. They're intelligent creatures that are perfectly aware, I'm sure, of the harmful effects of second hand smoking, and under no circumstances would I allow them to suppose I'm putting them in harm's way.

Yeah, things were going really great until Saturday afternoon when I received that phone call from my boss, in which he alleged terms akin to "financial crisis," "district pay cuts" and "you've served our school loyally for nearly eleven years, and it pains me to have to let you go, Phil." Cowardly prick didn't even have the decency to let me know in-person. When I go in Monday to collect my belongings and turn in my uniform, I'm going to hide a hard-boiled egg somewhere in his office, somewhere where he'll never find it, and it'll smell, and it'll be painful and awful, and he'll regret ever firing me—ha! I'll show him some decency of my own.

I pray to God I'll have access to the boiler room that day. That's in the basement, where I keep a good portion of my stash, my collection of gifts from Leslie, dating back to the first day we met. I'll never forget that day. It was the second semester of her freshman year (yes, I'm still shocked and embarrassed it took me that long to notice her). I saw stars when she approached me; her lovely blonde curls flouncing

hypnotically with each step of her plush Ugg boots.

"My locker's, like, jammed," she'd confided.

I stared at her like I was Mary Magdalene, and she my newly resurrected savior.

She coughed.

Finally, I managed to utter my first words to her. "It is?"

"Yeah."

My eyes lit up. "Oh, so your locker is jammed?"

"Yeah. Can you, like, fix it?" she asked, twirling a curl between her fingers. It pained me to hear the utter sincerity of her concern. Right away, I knew she was an intelligent girl. Mature beyond her age, devoted to her studies. No way would I let an inconvenient locker hinder her from the valiant achievements she is destined to make in the world of academia.

My collection of all things Leslie is modest. Just a few hundred Camel No. 9 butts, seventy-four notes, six tubes of cherry lip balm, and a couple of snapped hair ties. Oh yeah, and an Algebra test dated January 15, 2007. She got an A+, the best grade in the class.

We were both so proud.

I don't think she knows I have it, though. I swiped it from Ms. Dune's classroom one time when she left to take a twenty-four minute shit in the faculty lounge, which may or may not have been the product of somebody slipping a subtle laxative into her coffee during lunch break, and made a copy for myself.

Surely this won't mark the end of our relationship, though. I mean, I expect things may be rocky for a little while as we adjust to seeing each other less. I'll promise her that though my career has changed, I haven't, and I'll continue to attend all of her

varsity basketball games. Home or away, I'll be there. Front row. You betcha.

Well, it's Sunday now. Shelly will be home in a few hours so I'd better box everything up. The animals. The gems. The petrified plants. She'll be upset enough that I've lost my job so I'd better just go along with her evil schemes. I'll relocate Leslie's notes to the attic along with my other treasures. Carefully, with several layers of protective bubble wrap. I'll merge my cigarette butts with her cigarette butts and feel the nicotine spark.

I feel terrible, that's for sure. I hope the guys don't think I'll neglect them while they're up there. Between you and me, some of them are pretty sensitive. Especially the volcanic rocks—they're always getting heated up over nothing.

Of course, I know Shelly is wrong. I don't have a problem. There's nothing wrong with me. But I won't blame her. I'm not a bitter man.

Some people don't know good collectibles when they see them.

Molly Ann Blakowski
DON'T BE A TOMBOY

Or do anything daring at all—you'll just get hurt. After all, you're prone to it, to getting hurt. What with your condition and all. No, nothing even remotely daring. So before you do anything, and I mean anything: picture me. Would I approve? If you have even the slightest doubt, don't do it. Don't think twice. The answer is firm. The answer is "No." No climbing of trees. No climbing of mountains. No shoes without proper arches (and they must always be clean). Take better care of your shoes. I don't even know why I buy them for you. They're always ruined. Don't walk in the rain, stop walking in the rain. Your shoes will ruin and you're really better off staying indoors, anyway. If you walk in the rain you're liable to catch a cold. Or pneumonia. And don't think you're going dancing in those shoes, either. I don't want you out dancing and drinking. You'll get too tired; you'll stay up too late. Your friends will forget about you and leave you behind. And worst of all—your shoes, they'll scuff. A proper lady keeps her shoes clean. Don't listen to music loudly. Eat your food slowly. Order a salad. At home, clear the table. Don't tell your boyfriend, "I love you." I know you don't. When you break up, wait a while before finding another boyfriend. Not long enough and you're trash. Too long, you're a lesbian. Don't tell me you're a lesbian. Your reputation is only as clean as your shoes. You have too many male friends, which makes me suspect you're a lesbian. You spend too much time with them. You sweat with them. You're going to get hurt if you carry on like this, with your hiking, your camping. You can't live out of a backpack. You can't just gallivant about the wilderness. You can't fight the elements. Listen: You're going to get very hurt, or maybe you're going to die. The mosquitoes are terrible out there. I'll bet you contract West Nile. Your asthma's getting worse, too. And for God's sake: remember your blood condition. I know you're not drinking enough water. I know you're picking your scabs. That's why you have so many scars—don't you listen to your dermatologist at all? If you weren't gallivanting about the wilderness all summer, wearing your hair short in that

bandana like the lesbian you're becoming, you wouldn't have these hideous scars. Or this sunburn. Don't you wear sunscreen? And how many times do I have to tell you to reapply it? You reapply sunscreen every hour. That's every single hour, reapplying your sunscreen. That's the appropriate amount. But you, you're red. Don't you know that this family has a history of skin cancer? And would you please just stop and think a minute, about your condition? Jesus Christ, your condition! Well, once you've gotten another boyfriend I'll continue questioning your sexuality on a semi regular basis, but you better not be having sexual intercourse. Slow down. Don't blow all of your money on train fare. And especially not on airfare. There's a lot of risk involved with air travel. Don't go where I can't follow. Don't walk so fast in those shoes. They'll scuff.

Autumn Neuharth
DELTA FLIGHT 2440

life feels big and then small – an oscillating kaleidoscope of time and space and old and young and home and away

love is coming home? love?

i'm flying home today. missed the mass migration and now my travel companions are businessmen and snowbirds, not students.

i watch an old couple and shudder, dreading the slow, cold death of age. smug and ignorant in my youth, i pull out my laptop and indulge in technology, the lifeblood of my generation.

the sky is bluehazy and stretching on forever like the thought of the long flight ahead of me.

and then, like a bee to a flower, a toddler stumbles up to the old couple. they ooh and aah and pinch his proverbial cheeks. "i like Legos, i play with them all the time with my grandkids. oh and Clifford, yes, he's the biggest dog i ever did see..."

suddenly i feel ashamed of my pride and my youth and my educated potential.

so maybe this is love?

Matthew Berk

GOLDEN ARCHES

The four of them sat at a five-person table. The fifth seat remained unoccupied and would remain that way for the duration of their meal, yet it sat at a curious distance from the table, as if someone had pulled it away expecting that soon it would be filled. Frank joked that perhaps they were waiting for Elijah, but garnered few chuckles from the somber bunch.

Silence billowed like a thick fog over the table. Aside from the steam rising and dancing from their coffee cups, and the cashier, nothing moved that Sunday morning. The sunlight shone through the window and disseminated throughout the restaurant, illuminating the dust and unsettled air, a golden haze in that golden morning. Shaking the rain from their suit jackets, they sat and began to eat.

It would only be a matter of time before Frank would pull them out of their murky mood with a rousing story or a heated debate, but even Frank could not fight the fog that suffocated the four men in its thick murky sadness. So instead they sat in silence, stabbing absentmindedly at their plastic eggs and their plastic sausage on their plastic plates.

Drip, drip, drip.

All that could be heard was the gurgling of the coffee pot. It was Eli who ruptured that eternity of silence. "You know my oldest grandson Danny was just accepted to the University of Illinois."

This seemed to raise the morale a bit and the three men responded in unison. "Atta boy." "Good for him." "WELL OF COURSE HE DID!" Norman, a U of I alum, was the one who shouted, and 'leapt' from the table in the best way a 77-year-old man could leap and hugged Eli in celebration.

Norman hugged Eli and Eli knew he was truly happy for him. After all, the four men have been eating breakfast together every Sunday for over 20 years. They

knew each other intimately and loved each other and their families very much. No one had ever missed a Sunday morning breakfast. Not until today, at least...

"Well, you better hope your son the doctor has been saving money for the boy because that bloodsucking Socialist Obama is going to hold him by the ankles and shake every goddamn penny out of his pockets!" Frank loved berating the newly elected President, and, having found his segue for the morning, exploded into a rant, spitting ketchup and half-chewed hash browns every which way, the veins in his neck slithering like bloody snakes. Frank devotedly followed FOX News's Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly, a profoundly conservative duo, and never held back when something was on his mind. Norman, a retired Democratic congressman, naturally disagreed with Frank, and so they fought. The two men removed their suit jackets and prepared for battle. This typically made for good breakfast conversation, and Eli and Marty fell silent while the pair began to spar. For a little while the four men fell back into their habitual customs, and normal life seemed to resume, at least for a little while. Frank fought because he thought he was right, and Norman fought because he knew Frank was wrong. Eli smirked at the dueling couple. Always levelheaded and honest, Eli often provided support for both sides. Marty would just shake his head and eat his breakfast. Usually Ray would mitigate the fight and return the conversation to a more civil topic, but not today. Eli watched musingly, but Marty just gazed out the window, a quizzical look on his face, as if caught in the grey matter between thought and speech.

Ding, ding, ding.

The door chimed suddenly and the four men spun around to see who had walked in.

"Morning," the stranger muttered with apprehension, not quite sure why four older gentlemen had been so curious and excited to see him, but none the less paid

them respect, purchased his egg McMuffin and left.

Defeated, the four men sank back into their chairs. Eli feebly attempted to resume the conversation about Danny, but Frank and Norman seemed disinterested, disconnected. Marty just stared at the window. He seemed to be muttering something, but his words were inaudible. Who had Eli been expecting? He knew it couldn't be him. But he looked anyway. Maybe it was Elijah.

Twenty years is a long time. A lifetime for some. Longer than a lifetime, actually. Multiple. They live vicariously through each other and their families. The soul reincarnated. Each soul well over 200 years old. Does a 200-year-old soul still like McDonald's breakfast? Is it the food they hunger for on those cold Sunday mornings, or is it the company? Eat the pancakes, drink the coffee. Food is only sustenance for the body. What feeds the soul? For over 20 years they have shared their lives with each other, in sickness, and in health.

Today was sickness, and they all knew it.

Norman wanted to say something, but he could not bring himself to it. He fought back the tears, gazing expectantly at Frank. Bold Frank would surely say it. Good old Frank. He always speaks his mind. But not today. Frank sat with his head in his lap, pushing his food from side to side. Eli just watched as Marty whispered to Elijah, his hands trembling between murmurs.

Another eternity of silence. Would they survive this one? Norman is 77 years old. Frank is 81. How many more eternities do they have? Not many.

The morning like the men grew old, and new patrons began coming into the restaurant. Some ate there infrequently, and some would be eating there for the first time. Strangers. They came and they went, sitting at tables and sharing the room with the four men, but none of them knew the golden haze of that golden morning. They would never know its splendor. Neither would he. Not anymore.

Drip, drip, drip. The rain fell softly all around them, a gentle drizzle carried by the wind, innocuous in nature, yet it cut sharply through the brittle bones and tired flesh of the four men. The women cried like the sky, weeping openly, a path of saline destruction streaked down their windblown cheeks. Only Ray was sheltered from the cruel conditions, comfortably cold in his seven by three mahogany home.

“Yit’gadal v’yit’kadesh sh’mei raba...” The Rabbi began into the Mourner’s Kaddish, his thick black beard buried deep in his thick black prayer book, rocking softly into the rain as he chanted his ancient hymn, facing east. The rain and the Rabbi swayed in unison, religion and nature in perfect accord on that imperfect Sunday morning. The sun, though it fought, cowered behind a curtain of clouds, its golden haze held captive by that murky fog. They stood side by side, the rain collecting in a small reservoir on the damp shoulders of their suit jackets.

Eventually the Rabbi’s prayers ceased, and the casket was lowered gradually into the ground. Moist, sticky earth lay in a pile where it had been removed with a shovel protruding from the center, an earthy door welcoming its guest. The family, with a rose in one hand and a shovelful of dirt in the other, moved in a slow progression toward the gravesite, like a broken down parade, bidding farewell to their beloved cousin, uncle, brother, father, grandfather.

The four men were the last to say goodbye to their friend. Slowly, carefully, Marty bowed to a knee, peering into the darkness Ray would now and forever call home. He carefully examined the hole in the ground. That’s all it was. A hole. Dug eight feet by four feet. Earth’s hungry mouth gaping wide, awaiting its nourishment. Soon it would consume Ray. Soon it would consume all of them. Marty whispered to his friend, a low hum between sobs. “When we met a lifetime ago I never thought it would end like this. We were too young to think about death. Invincible, we were. Untouchable. Our kids and our wives and our work...there was no time.... Where

has the time gone? We're old men now, Ray. Old men! Ha! When did that happen? Maybe while we slept..."

He paused to wipe the tears from his eyes and shifted to his other knee. When he finally spoke again, he spoke slowly, carefully considering each word before it passed between his quivering lips.

"It was really a beautiful ceremony today, Ray. You were a lot of things in your life, but above all else, you were a family man. Your kids love and respect you, your grandkids revere you. You may be gone, Ray, but the name and the family that you established will survive as a living testament to your outstanding character. I won't say goodbye, dear friend; instead I'll say... see you soon."

Marty rose slowly from the graveside, his knees now cold and stiff, dark wet circles freshly formed on his slacks. He pulled the shovel from the receding pile and let it fall softly to the ground. Instead he bent slowly and scooped up a wet heap of earth, allowing it to rain gently from his hands over the nearly covered casket.

Soon Ray's plot was sealed, brimming with wet earth packed tight, but only after Eli, Frank and Norman had their turn to say goodbye. They knew that in time grass would grow over the naked patch of earth, sealing shut the gaping mouth that had swallowed their friend that Sunday morning. Soon Ray would join the rows and rows of indistinguishable headstones, his exact location only known by friends and family. Yesterday, Ray was alive. Today, he lay silent and motionless. An eternity of silence.

The four men went home to their mourning wives and they mourned. They mourned for Ray. They mourned for his wife who needed him. They mourned for his kids, who loved him. They mourned for his grandkids, who venerated him.

And they mourned for their youth and vitality, which also died that day, and was buried right alongside Ray.

And then they left. They had to leave, had to escape the house that they lived in, the bed they would probably die in. Away from the cemetery they would soon lay in and away from the friends they would soon lay with. They escaped to their thousand-calorie salvation beneath those golden arches. The four men filed through the door, the gurgling coffee pot and the cashier greeting them as they entered. They ordered their breakfast, and sat, shaking the rain from their suit jackets. The four of them sat at a five-person table. The fifth seat remained unoccupied and would remain that way for an eternity.

Victor Jones
POEM 4

You could not find Haiti on a map before,
You still cannot find it, the quake took it out.
I looked for it and could not see it.
We could not even spell it correctly,
Or even knew if it had its own language or not.
We never knew what to call them, but Haitians it is for now.
I found America though.
It invaded the map; standing out like the sun
Stands out from the other stars.
Haiti must be Pluto then.
Something seems odd when we have one less planet.

Trevor Maat
MIRROR

You licked your fingers and then pressed the flame
I didn't remember the licking part so I burned myself
I held my fingers to my lips, I thought you just prayed
and I reached out to pinch the yellow, orange glow

I knew something was wrong when I felt the heat
lick my fingers as they reached toward the candle stick
I remember watching wax drip when I pinched the wick
It felt cold, then hot. I was burning. I screamed.

My fingers were beet red, like the tip of your cigarettes
those you'd breathe in deep, and your eyes would close
when the thick, gray smoke billowed from your mouth
your blue eyes would search for me, you were happy

They were lighter than I expected, just rolls of paper
they were thin, white, dry with brown leaves inside
I tried holding it like you did, between my fingers
Between my lips, like a sponge, it made my mouth dry

Your eyes were wide, scared, like I broke something
When you slapped it out of my mouth, I bit down
the yellow tip, bitter leaves inside, rolled around my open
screaming mouth. You washed it out with soap that night

Never touch those! you yelled, one dangling in your mouth
You don't want to start smoking them! You can NOT
end up like me! You shook me as you said this, crying
You were looking in a mirror; it hurt to see yourself.

Isaac Thompson

LITTLE CUENCA

How can you tell? He is only a baby that loves having baths, and hates “tummy time.”

Four months old and he still squeaks from his inner throat like a little duckling.

How can you tell who someone is to become when they’re so young? Should I put pressure on him? Should I start brainwashing him?

I mean, I know his name. I know his parents. I know his Grandparents—both Grandparents in fact. I even know his uncle, so why am I so worried that he will turn into a “Derrick,” a boy so oblivious, and raised from modern technology he can’t even price an orange at a supermarket... “What is an orange, ten bucks?” he would earnestly say.

Is it insensitive to not want him like a “Derrick”? Is it asking too much for him to be a little more like... me? I know that’s absurd, but truly...

When things are out of reach, I don’t know what to do, but worry. I worry for him, and not knowing his future spins me in nervous, lop-sided circles.

His name isn’t the same as mine: Amburgey, and his nose, his eyes, his personality... not the same.

Not even being his parent have I realized how hard it is to let him go. To not comb his hair, to not rub his chubby cheeks, to not even give him a nickname for god sakes!

Elias Steele Amburgey is my nephew. He's in the nurturing hands of his mother...my sister, along with three other uncles, and two aunts. He has an extravagantly large family, with great aunts and uncles bearing gifts to him left and right. So why am I so worried?

I want to pick up his right leg and then his left, and guide him step by step through his life. I want to play catch with him, and keep on placing the ball in his left hand, hoping he will become a lefty. I want to help him with his math homework, and teach him how to punch. I want to show him how to slick his hair back and pop his collar.

There are so many things I want to do, hoping I can direct his future along the same path as mine.

Yet, knowing that is not the right thing to do, to walk him through life... I am going to ignore that and hold his tiny, sweaty hand every moment of the way.

Jack Rosette

JUST DANCE

It's almost oppressive. All of the drug use, all of the loud noises and loud lights, all of the people with loud clothing, each trying to get a handful and an earful. My friend from over yonder, in one of the arenas, has decided to take a trip to go see one of our favorite jambands, a group out of Portland. (I've been to Portland. It's not that great.) He sends me the first of (if I know him like I think I do) what will be many interruptions to my evening. Dropped it a half hour ago. The first tweak of the night just set in. The opening act is pretty sweet so far, a nice hispanic-infused jazz band with a reggaeton KICK. I enjoy it. It will get worse (I tell myself) over the course of the evening. On my end I'm feeling almost limp, numb and powerless in the face of what the people in front of me dictate necessary. Crowd surfing? Check. Pot smoking? Check. Unnecessary removal of underwear? (Dear God...) Check. I'm at their mercy. The music controls me, they control me, I feel like I'm losing myself (erasing myself?). The battle between their presence and mine is continual. (Just dance.)

There's a girl next to me. She's getting the same messages that I am. Fuck you little kid. Do you want to judge me because I'm here in front of you, giggling like a fiend to a joke that my friend next to me told. (Why yes, I do.) Well fuck you? Yeah fuck you. You and your father, both of you (3) look down on me as though I'm some sort of inbred rat whose only (2) kicks lie on paper. Fuck you. Fuck fuck fuck you. This (1) chick is pretty cool, she's found a little space in the corner where she can play with her glow sticks and lose her contact (liftoff!) with the rest of us. Lose herself in the music, (Just dance) to the rhythm beats, noise and feet becoming one, fusing into a neverlasting orgy of life.

My lips and cheeks hurt from smiling so much, hahahahahHAHAHAha. I'm enjoying myself, can you tell? (I don't know.) It needs to get dark again (It can be as

dark as you want it to be.) so this feeling I'm feeling has a home. A place of shelter from everything. Literally. (Separation.) A happy place. (Just dance.) The girl I'm with (her name is Sampi) is in the corner next to mine with bracelets on her wrists, her ankles, and beads (beat) around her neck. Suddenly and without halt she grabs my waist (waste) and we're together. Her neck smells beautiful, her arms glisten as they rest (roost and rust) on my shoulders, while people around us continue their happy horror stories. People are starting to stand up. This is overpowering my sense of awareness time touch money self everything. It doesn't feel real. It isn't, but I perceive it. So it is? (Choose.) It isn't my fault that the bassist sounds like Hendrix when he twangs. The lights just went up on the opening act. Time to pretend I'm with the rest of them. I'm (tragic) one of them. At least that's what I tell myself...

One would be surprised at the vigilanteism around a concert. If somebody disrupts everybody else's good time (compared to what?) it is easily noted (we're not). One would also be surprised at the immediate change in behavior when a security man comes around and (tries to) threatens us (vaguely) with loud verbal (unfeasible) lambastions of what he can (not) do to us if we smoke weed. The people threatened (lie) promise to put the pipe (back in his pocket) away and use it (excessively) no more throughout the evening. (And then he leaves.) A signal: AH THE BAND IS OUT ON THE FIEEELD. THE BEARS WIN!! THE BEARS WIN!! The scent of freedom and disregard for responsibility once again permeates the (wasteland) flocks of folks around us. Sampi (just) dances straight through. She's in a world of her own.

There are so many lights around me I can't even tell which is which anymore the lights the lights the lights mixed with the sounds and the people and the people and the inescapable reality that on whatever level I may be on right now there is a point at

which the rising phantom (volcanic ash) within the guttural instincts of my primordius is reaching out to me and telling me that this...(disco ball) is reality...(surrealism) somewhere... We are definitely not in Kansas anymore, but the rainbows under my feet are as present as ever. The colors all around me are reminiscent of the colors of the rainbow (refracted light spectrum) so I guess I could be (under) over (within) the rainbow (somewhere). The lights are real but the feeling is imaginary. The spots all over the screen right now. Totally made up. But it's so intense. Could it be real? And am I in any position to judge? (Choose.) Forget it. I don't wanna ask questions. I just wanna bathe in it.

Guitar chords ripple through the air, massaging the cilia and sporadically spurring spinal spontaneity (just dance) throughout (my synapses) the crowd. My failure to understand what goes on around me is verisimilitudinous to the (forget it) lack of comprehension that courses through my cold, clammy, coarse corneas up to my cortexes. Whatever you were saying? Forget it. The song's on. (Valid point.) Beats (beats) bouncing on belligerent masses, while in return they respond with echoed clarity and random precision. The band covers Bowie, and I return to my box: The light is rain. I don't want to forget. Light. (Rainbows.) Rain. (Refracted Light.) Same thing... It knocks you back it is so powerful. The raw (bear) hands clapping mean nothing. The pounding (head) heart throbbing means nothing. The only things that matter are (sanity) the light and where it takes you. You smell (tired) weed but forget it. You feel and think (patriotism) vomit but forget it. This little box, these little keys are all I have left now, (dearest departed) man...I will have no reality after this. I send this knowing I will melt away...I have melted into the sinews of solos to the breath of fanboys to the eaves of those who know not. Pound your head a little more. (Okay.) You'll understand. (Just dance.)

Sampi (she) convulses (?). I can't tell if it's (due) good or (terrifying) bad. Perhaps both. When I grab her she lays limp in my arms but is bound to me by a force more powerful than any (weak nuclear strong nuclear electromagnetic gravitational) force. An arm not totally (separate) connected wraps around my chest and wastes (waists) the strength I have trying to suspend her from the air. (It's a game, isn't it?) Ripped in two, split between (Antigone) the queen and (Tiresias) the wisdom. Setting her down won't hurt me (her). (Right?) Her chest moves as does the rest of her legs, emphatically, with the random precision of fate's (fantastic) fickle finger. The choice has been made, and weakened wobbly windows wiggle their way to rest upon the natural foundation of everything. (Chaos.) Stability. The hairy green wall doesn't move (faster than 67,200 mph) and remains permanently prolix in posture (except when it isn't). Of all of the things this is right now. All of the vibrance and beauty and pounding and nausea and sweat and heat and love, all of the things that this could be... describable is not among them.

Set break.
It's break time.
I need a break.

We take a seat on the ever-present. Experience puts us in each others' arms, and extravagance takes us the rest of the way. Lips locking, (we aren't) lovers losing regard for life's little lessons. Confusion passes into swapped spit, a fire lit under us by something (inside) unknown. We (will regret) welcome the wonder. One moment spasm, next one passion, next one...(disdain) rest (just dance). To what? Mouthing memories have disappeared, and grinding gauntlets have taken a respite. The box beeps. The sky squirms... The background music becomes foreground existence. Time

is screwing with me, but I know time enough to know it is my friend. My battery dies. With it, my memory. I hope neither sacrifice has been in vain.

I push. Sampi receives, smiles, and understands (it makes sense) (all of it). She puts it back in her (memory) pocket, and I mimic her, placing the night's (imperative) dead record into the creased cloth that lies in my garments. It beeps its last. The flood comes back on stage and wets our ears again. No more clicking of keys. No more focusing on a drop of light in this tremendous shower of it. No more distractions. (Just dance, I tell myself.) It won't be all okay, but I'll pretend like it is while all around are certain of the fact.

Only motion. (Just dance.)
Only flight. (Just dance.)
Only life.
(Just dance.)

Kellen Braddock

MS. DIXON: FROM THE PRODUCTION OF REPLICAS OF MEMORIES

Williamsburg leaves its hunger-grinds:

Bar Upheaval sound checks
as the French presses gurgle-boil from inside Blackbird Cafe.

The bookstore's shelves are littered
with brittle antlers and dust-ridden bear scraps:

there is no text here in the backroom
where she whets a bone saw

for
from
taxinut.com.

Her latest projects: half a dozen squirrels
and a prize-winning turnip

for
from
the Iowa State Fair,
a nameless garden bed?

These skins were never thicker than tissue paper.
Roots and arteries both leave blots

like echoes shipped through the mail.

Alex Stuessy
THE OUTER RINGS

i float as a white blood cell
in a clear vein
unimportant,

but the Mayans
believed in eternal
night that faces down,
first by heart attack—
when the earth splits
and rivers twist
and i clot
with the others
then i become
important in my destruction

The Panama Canal held me
once, against soft current
my limbs pleated
by the tide
by the moonlight's wake—

my hands wave now
as if to seagulls
i am my own raft
own life vessel
there is no second

transportation option,

and surely the Aztecs
would grant me pass
along the skin of the sea
towards the gaping mouth
of the sun—
a violent death
in abstract peace

from trances again
again from dances

Alex Stuessy
TROUBLE WITH THINGS CIRCULAR

I have trouble thinking
in terms of mud and malice
that best friends are being blown up
lips from hands from waist
in front of the eyes of best friends
on battlefields exported
to huts and fields
beyond the flat edge of the earth's end
outside the time zone of my conscience.

It is tough to believe, now,
that anything happens anywhere—
that Africa ever existed,
the pyramids were anything more
than pictures captioned to death,
and that Ancient China stood
more concrete, than wispy myth—
when there are no clouds in the sky
moving, signaling the earth
still stirs to the same slow turn.

It's with great certainty
dust only collects here

on the top of bald heads
and not upon Mt. Olympus;
just these feet of grass,
these people in my peripheral
hardwired liars that walk
fast away from their own existence
in my eyes.

The heathen European,
who saw the world as a flat wafer
falling, dripping, erasing;
understood that away, afar
standing upside-down
was impossible.
But a thin brittle plasma
flat and straight earth,
you could fall off
and no one would question
your footprints.

Alex Stuessy
SKINLESS SUNRISE

Nothing flows thin
like a passing breeze
through my ribcage—
wind sailing through bone
and skinless you grin,
undressed alone
we are two white sticks.

The empty clattering slide of
our grease bone shuffle
down a crowded street
and in public, milky white—
so breakable so bold,
homegrown stalks of chalk
we bend in an angled embrace
we shimmy shatter
in the airy cold,
an eroding hold;

here silence pours and inward
soaks simple roadmaps,
like pressed leaves on paper
blue and red trails fading

along our frames.
Our skulls
empty and rattle-full,
led by hallowed black holes
to see rain before dawn
in constant fall,
calls a substitute heartbeat
for our empty chest-box—
the day when wind
breathes us.

Natalie Berkus
MY NIGHT DOWNTOWN

Over the summer, I went to a Tracy Chapman concert with my mother. (Hold the snickers, please. All my friends were busy that night, I swear.) As we drove through Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, and Hollywood to get downtown, I exuded faux misery about having to waste a summer night with my mom. Truth was, I couldn't wait to see Tracy. Though downtown Los Angeles can be a dangerous place to walk through at night, I felt instantly at ease walking from our parking spot to the theatre. This was mostly in part due to the herd of lesbians surrounding us as we walked, shielding us from danger like a shorthaired school of fish.

Because our friend Zelda got sick, we had an extra ticket. Now, if you knew my mother, you would know that she absolutely loathes the thought of wasting money. So what is her immediate solution? Join the large ominous male scalpers standing outside the theatre and compete with them for customers, of course. There we are, the mother and daughter scalping tag-team. Finally we sold it to a man wearing a fedora and a shirt that read: "Let's get one thing straight—I'm not."

Upon arriving at our seats, we instantly realized something terrible. We were seated next to a specific breed of concert go-er—one that is rare, but when encountered, can bring down the entire evening: The Screamer. You know who I'm talking about. That annoying, usually intoxicated person that sits next to you and arbitrarily screams: "I love you (insert headliner's name here)!!!" Anyway, we had one of these, and it came in the form of a spikey-haired 40-something man wearing a bejeweled trucker hat and strategically ripped jeans. Now if you've ever been virtually anywhere with someone over 50, you may have noticed their detestation of inconsistent, loud noises near their ears. When these noises are coming from a lagoon creature sitting one seat to your right, this detestation can turn violent. After aggressively screaming at The Screamer, we moved four seats over and awaited Tracy's entrance.

Because my mother has successfully maintained a golden standard of perpetual tardiness, we missed the opening act. However, when Tracy herself came on, I discovered that our sketchy walk down Alameda Avenue and our incident involving The Screamer was worth it. After what felt like a solid fifteen minutes of mannish “whoops” from the females in the audience and prissy squeals from the males, Tracy opened her mouth to sing. Standing at five foot four, Tracy’s small stature was completely compensated for by her thick, syrupy voice. With some performers, the crowd can be inattentive and actually make more noise than the actual artist. However, when Tracy sang, you could hear a pin drop on stage from the back row of the balcony.

For the next two hours, Tracy would go on to wow the audience with multiple talents: between playing acoustic and electric guitar, Tracy also played a bongo while singing Talkin’ Bout a Revolution. During Give Me One Reason, I took it upon myself to spontaneously climb up on my 56-year old mother’s shoulders with my cigarette lighter for arm-swaying purposes. Upon realizing what I was attempting, my mother threw me off in a manner comparable to Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson.

Despite my familial wrestling match mid-concert, the show was fantastic. Tracy was a goddess on Earth, and she even invited the crowd to rush the stage during her finale. The two hours flew by, and before I knew it we were being herded out of The Wiltern Theatre. On the way back to the car, I couldn’t help but feel like a participant in a gay pride parade. Yet I also felt something else—a feeling of acceptance. Even though I was the youngest person there by at least 10 years, I never felt like I was being judged or even noticed. I realized at this concert that the gay community is not only about sexual orientation—it is an enormous subculture of Los Angeles; and getting a taste of it for this one evening made me feel completely at ease and welcome—a rarity when you are a minority in a large group.

A month later, I left beautiful Los Angeles and moved to the middle of butt-fuck Michigan for college. On my first day in the Alice Lloyd Dormitory, my RA, Matt, introduced himself to me. I noticed that he was wearing a Tracy Chapman t-shirt, the same ones that they were selling at the concert (for the very reasonable price of 50 dollars, might I add). I asked if he had gone to the show, and he told me that he had seen her on tour in Michigan about two weeks earlier.

After talking a little bit about her music and the show itself, Matt said, "It was so weird. I felt like I was the only straight person there."

"I know," I replied. "Wasn't it awesome?"

Brad Rock
INTELLECTUALLY

Peace in a storm
Revelation from the floor of a dorm
Gospel in conversation form

Giddy in the backseat
When it's too dark to see the street
The glass is where our eyes meet

Fancying a blank check
For everything you don't reflect
The whole ride from here to heck

You are the default
Baby in my dream vault
Far from being your fault

Handling words exceptionally
Doctrinally shaky but spot on conceptually
I wanna marry you intellectually

Brad Rock
STARRY EYED

The night's gales tell me something new as we are
Running away from cars
You and I are moving
Into a secret well-kept
At night the things we built
In our sunny sandbox in the day
Are waking up, nocturnal, not knowing what they slept through
They're the remnants of migrants to somewhere else
Some place where you never run into anyone
But I am running into you and it is funny

It is too funny, as you tell me, laughing hysterically
We collapse voluntarily
Throats tingling, our faces red
Warmed by the envelopment overhead

The night's hours are a blanket and not
A leather-clad leper with numerical spots
The stars are the stitches in evening's tapestry
And they make up their own moon
Pulling its own tides on your heart
Making your soul let go of a trap
And you howl

I hide in the cattails and you pant in circles
Imagining aloneness, picturing deceit

Almost believing it, almost forgetting the unsaid
And remembering the unimplied
While the strange light
Dances with your perception and judgment
Like the shock of restless ground
Reverberates through your joints and resonates
To a rattling hum, a caffeinated lullaby

It is quiet but for Pheidippides rumbling down the road
You take comfort in my inability to run away
I take comfort in my inability to escape
Your voice is ringing through air that wants to sleep
You disturb the peace, release a bold call, call my name, call me what I am
I'm not supposed to answer but I want to rather badly

The luminescence gives the weary the wherewithal
To tear across dew-strewn fields in a single stride gallant
To make absurdities of conventions and still remain balanced
To testify to the ineffable
With a beaming smile

We are staring at each other as we're covered
In sweat and mud and tears
And I am kissing you and I am hugging you
Without even touching you

Mike McCrindle

COAL (MINE)

The canary was alive and well, or so the miners thought.

The sweet vapours that seeped from the mouth of that cavern formed words, he would swear. They were beautiful words. Words to misread and rebuild into the kind of life he wanted to live. A life of meaning. A life of meaning derived from misunderstanding and misfortune and a large amount of oddly-placed hope.

Oh yes, the canary was alive.

But the gasses that did not kill him had made him stronger and stranger. He saw things that weren't. He tapped the sun with his feathers. The dream world and his own were together. No longer could he separate the two.

So the miners rushed in to pick her coal, one by one, to make it their own. Empires of dark love and black lust. Sand-castles made of diamonds that were not there. They did not know the difference. They did not stop. And one by one, they went mad. Their eyes were glossy and their heads were flooded and they dreamed she was a dream and nothing more. Each one lost themselves in that cavern. Each one came out a different man than they were.

I hear she keeps their heads mounted on her wall. The heads of the people they had been when they first dared to set foot in that dark cave. I hear she has a beautiful second-hand armchair, torn from its years of being well-loved, now donated to her sooty empire. She sits on it with a wine glass in hand and unwinds from the day, and those vapours drift from her mouth like a siren's song to draw in every child that she could love. I hear she has more love than any one of them could ever take. I hear that

they dig, relentlessly, even if it will kill them, and that at the end of the day they are the ones depleted. I hear no one gets exactly what they want. I hear that no one makes it out alive.

Then again, I hear a lot of these things these days, and I can be certain that nearly all of them are not real. This, friends, is a fact, and even facts are myths when you've lived to tell her tale.

Mike McCrindle
TIME

To which;
I am losing weight
And the cigarette smoke
Does not wash quickly
From my hair.

To which;
Eventually, there is night
And comfort and I convene
Sharing our covenant
As lovers until the dawn.

To which;
My skin cracks and dries
While fissures in my face
Become more permanent
And I become less so.

To which;
We will leap forward
Into virtual worlds
Where anything is possible
And violent, bloody,
Dirty, filthy,
Without honor
Falling.

To which;
We will not survive,
And by the gods we will change
And by the gods
We will
Change everything
Before we change it back.



Mike McCrindle
PAGE 37



Lindsey Eldredge-Fox
TOPOGRAPHY

Sarah Bennett
WINTER SUNSET



Xueyi Yao
PAPER ENGINEER





Kirsten Koseck
FIGURE SKETCH

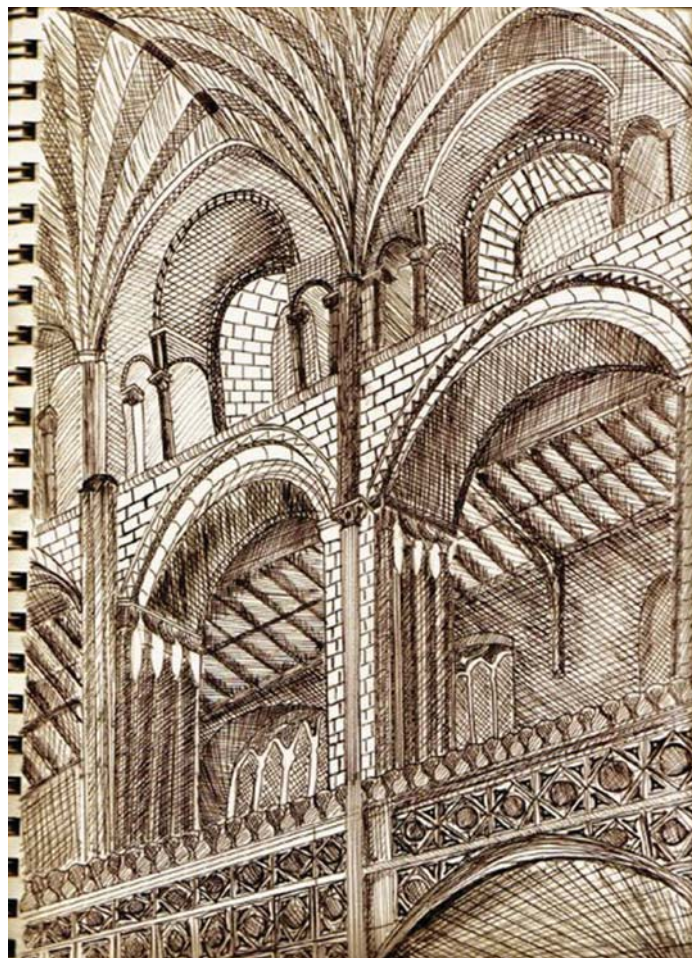


Jueying Liu
UNTITLED



Alex Berger
FLAT IRON

Xueyi Yao
ARCHES

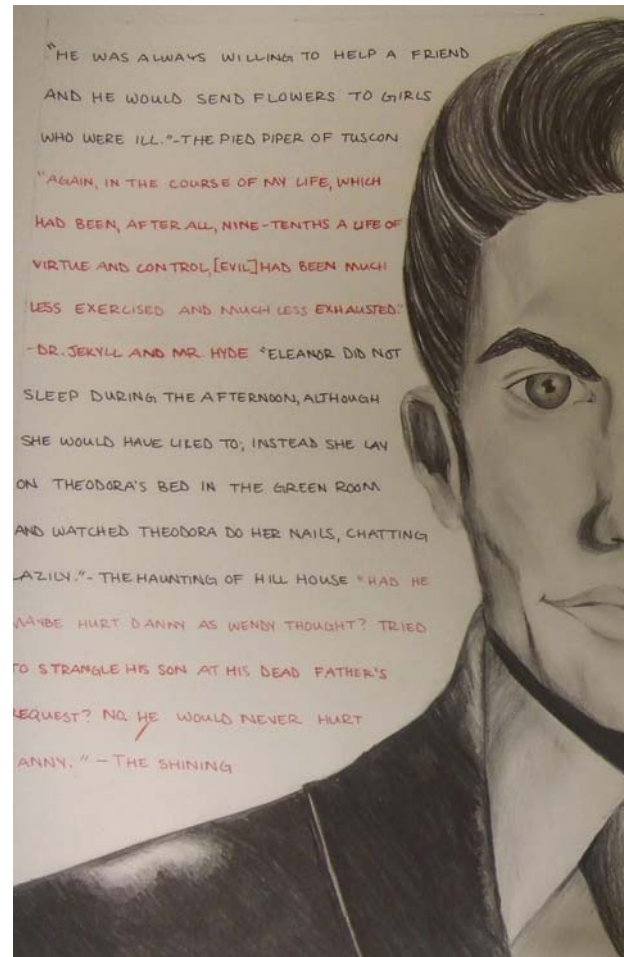




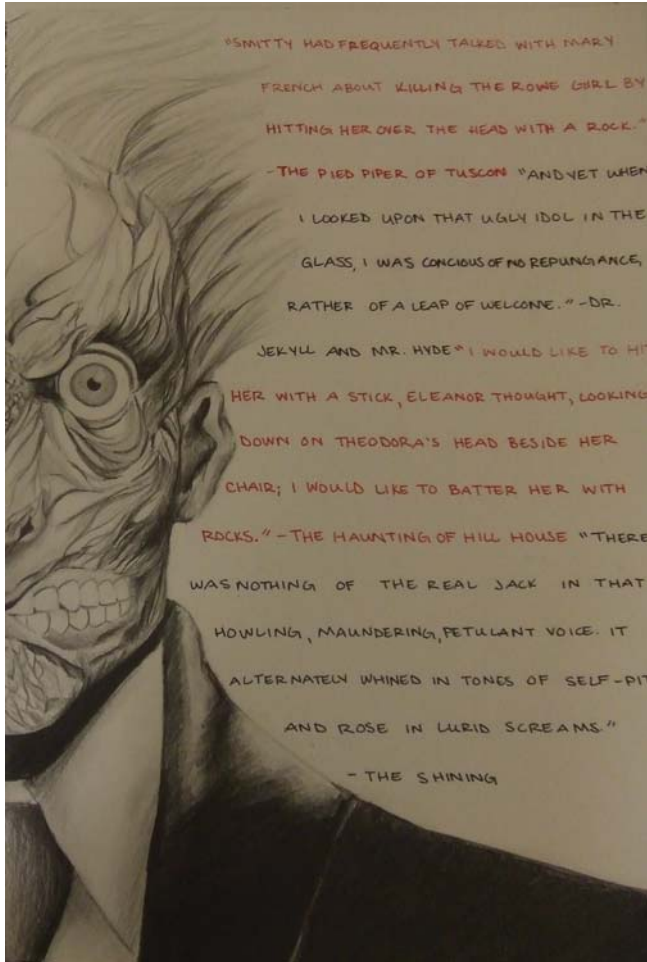
Sara Loshak
COLLAGE



Alex Berger
RAY



Sarah Hall
TWO FACE

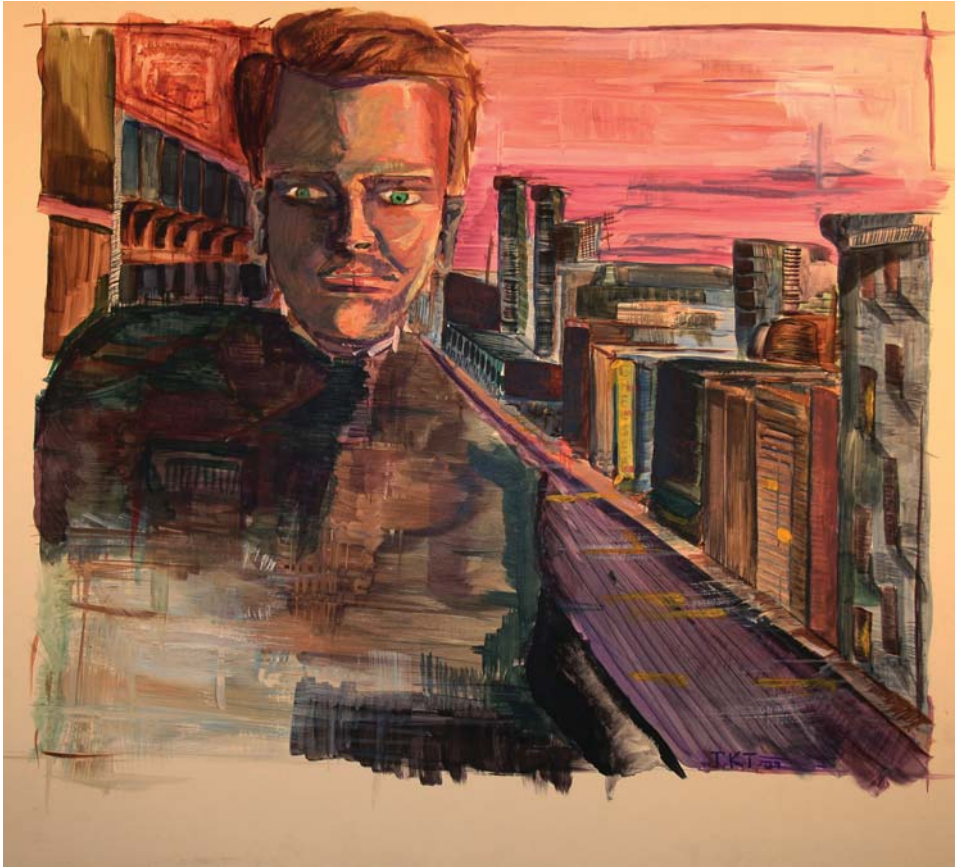




Daniel Gold
M-SHOE



Julie Gursha
LITTLE BOY AND HIS OLDER SISTER



Isaac Thompson
SELF-PORTRAIT

Kirsten Koseck
SELF-PORTRAIT





Jueying Liu
SELF-PORTRAIT



Meaghan McCarthy
PREMONITION

Joy Lerner
PERSPECTIVE





Talia Ribnick
ONIONS



Lindsey Eldredge-Fox
MAPPING HOME





Xueyi Yao
LET IT BE

Helen Keusch
IRREPLACEABLE THINGS

I need only close mine to see the smile
that made you all teeth and cheekbones
we walked the sidewalk kicking leaves
you would answer all my questions
the nights have been long
since Friday the 13th of November
when the starlight was still
I'd never believed in superstition
another future remains etched in my mind
the pathway your life would've taken
I haven't the will to wipe an eraser
across the scribbles and pictures painted
I don't know what strength is
it used to be confidence
muscles and noise
city lights reflected on the rainy road as
you told me with faraway eyes that strength
was the will to get through the day
how did I not understand what you meant?

fragile smiles fall from my face
slicker than melting ice
holes can appear beneath our feet
we are walking on ice
my heart has racked up more miles in these months
than in all my years previous

we laughed ourselves into silence and stomachaches
the king of our combined passion
wrote "why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
and thou no breath at all?"
I looked down on your face
your face that was not your face
your Mona Lisa smile
held knowledge and secrets
you could no longer explain to me
the folds of my memory
have been open and closed as often now
as the cover of our paperback poetry

downtown it smells of cigarettes
still puddles reflect bare branches
I watch my breath disappear
as the nights grow colder
I've never been jealous of the stars before
but they have you and I do not
I need you and they do not
they have no questions for you
they do not need your warmth or wisdom
you talked to me of tomorrow
the promise that it brings
now I don't know where I'm going

or the reasons for doing so
I follow my shoes from one day to the next
will I live my whole life this way?
the pastor's daughter was born into this world
on the same night you left it
all that I call chaos they say is by design

the thread of your life
held most of mine together
and things have unraveled
I watched it go and let the damage run
you took too much of me with you
there's no measure for grief
but there is a sweetness in it
I've developed a touch of masochism
I squeeze the sharp sadness until I'm breathless
stare at photographs
listen to the music you gave me
pain proves that we're alive
lights flash green and red
if I could stop them all I would

details smashed into a mosaic
and the sky was falling
he kept talking but I didn't understand words anymore
strong arms lifted me from the stone bench

half-carried me inside
I haven't been warm since that night
how is it the world continued turning?
we always thought we'd have more time
there's never any warning
maybe in the red lights and cathedrals there's a sign
the shattered glass refractions
scattered across the concrete
don't we always wish we had more time?
crowds cheer and smile
little legs run as the pale sun
moves across the well-worn sky
someone tell me where time goes
sparks and cinders flew up in the darkness
when we talked of hips, lips, and life
I want to shake anyone who says

it's alright

you lived so fully, so loudly
you left your mark on it all
but I don't want to get away
the pain makes too much sense
I don't want to be delivered
In the places that drip with your memory
there isn't enough oxygen

I held your face in a photo from high school
unable to accept it's now all I have
can't remember who I was myself then
one morning I'll look in the mirror
and I will be older
than you ever got the chance to be
I walk in your shoes
goosebumps rise when I repeat
your words, your actions
will you cease to be when there is nothing
and no one left to remember?
if energy is a constant
where has all that was you flown to?

I find pieces of you and let them cripple me
in cupboards, smiles, scribbled-on Converse
if I collect them all together
could I make you again?
he looks at me from the corner of his eye
searching for her in me
but I can't be her for him
you and I sang in your Saturn
you taught me harmony
kept each other awake
crashed through the cold waves

and fell onto sun-dried towels
with sand in our hair
I don't know how to not have you in my life
and I don't know what to say
knowing well that nothing
can make this better
the burning man inside him shines through his eyes
he's been stripped to the bone
strength is the will and the faith
to stay on one's feet
I try and hold him down
as he lives his life like a burning man
he would've made you the rest of his life
how is that reconciled?

you were there on the nights we didn't know where our lives should go

I keep him from throwing his hands up
he keeps me from falling to the floor
the plans we made still have you in them
we need your gentle hands
to lift our weight of guilt
the headlights of your car
took us farther than we ever
wanted to go
we can't get back again

the nights are so long
I can't keep it all together
sirens sound from the intersection
and cast red on the opposite wall
everything is closer now
they say time heals all things
let me know when that happens would you please

the necklace he gave you
you wore every day
he gave to me to hold around my neck
it looked better on you
irreplaceable things should never be lost
I wish I had written down
your amber beads of wisdom
so I could've kept it always
you couldn't get enough of the stage
lied less than I do
tears that will not dry
friends that grow colder every day
the world should've realized its mistake by now
not you, not you

Helen Keusch
TODAY

The overhead machine exploded in Spanish class.
The professor—she looks like a bird, I swear it—
She screamed like she'd just been shot and smoke
Began to pour from the machine, billowing toward the ceiling.
Little shards had gone flying.
It was terrifying.
There are times in life, my love, when you realize
How useless people really are. We all yelled
To unplug the thing, but no one did.
Finally some guy yanked it. Shrieking continued to resound.
Exit sorority girls, pursued by a bear. (I wish.)
I thought we would get rained on
By those fire-sensing doohickeys on the ceiling,
But we didn't.
Now I'm ignoring my Astronomy lecture
To write you love poetry,
And I'm trying to hide it from the nosy chick next to me;
I see her looking out of the corner of her eye,
The slut.

Jennifer Gustafson

OF FEAR AND GLASS

There was an intense rendition of Ave Maria sounding overhead. The fiery-haired soprano standing center stage atop the crushed velour looked heavenwards and unleashed a violent vibrato, a banshee of the spiritual hymnal. The faithful dwellers of the pews before and behind us glanced around impressed, as they executed their most mediocre attempts at replicating the elevated notes that lay miles beyond the most strained reach of their vocal chords. She began to reach the last notes of the hymn, ones that clung to the rich cedar of the church, reverberating off each of the delicate thorns of pine, encircling the heads of every man, woman and child. My brother let out a titter. The titter traveled down the pew, brother to brother, sister to sister to sister, until our barely-silent bodies shook in unison, stifling a surely explosive bout of laughter.

“What is going on?” my mother stared at me with the look a woman develops over years of taking five children to church. Not angry or disappointed, but expectant and tiredly worried.

My hesitation was only in how to put it lightly, though the vibrations emanating from my chest propelled it towards the tip of my tongue until my body could not longer hold on. I heaved in between words, “The...red...headed...lady... looks...constipated!”

I have never been angered by the church, but in the rare case that the inanimate processes emotion, the church was often angered by me. It manifested in the pitiful smile of the choir director, the insufferable back pats of disappointed Sunday school teachers, and the low, glaring eyes of the church moms, their nylons stretching and sagging at their ankles. It was truly tragic, especially for a ten year old, who wanted nothing more than to go to church in the hopes of taking elongated bathroom breaks mid sermon, awaiting the church sugar cookies. I never did anything worth punishment, at least on mine and my family's own terms. However, I quickly learned that our

religious ties were on a strict attendance basis. We were not practicing Christians as much as present ones. And it was the families that prayed before bed, said grace before dinner, and read Bible verses in their spare time that were all too aware of this. They would stare, offering the tight smile and flaccid grip that we had come to expect on such Sundays. They were God's soldiers on patrol, under the control of the heavenly father himself to destroy all who did not believe or, at least, not enough. And whether they were absent as result of illness or whatever other excuse they used to meet tee time, the faces never left. The heated stares were still there. And they lingered like so much fog over thickened waters.

Why did we care? What were we doing that made our actions any more reprehensible than the judgmental glares of the menopausal. It could be that we found better things to do as children than act like adults. Most often in the pews, our backsides bruised from too much time spent adjusting atop the wood, my brother Michael and I would draw on the collection envelopes. They were illustrated pictures, the images that we had seen on our basic cable, the swords of the b-rated television shows hero swinging across the back of the envelope. On the front, the muscle of a wrestler we once knew (or wanted to be) flexing on top of a rainbow, the mystical nonsense that still existed in imagination. The enjoyment of the entire activity was lent in part by the imminent danger that one of us might accidentally drop the soiled envelope into the collection plate, watching as it passed in the slowest of motions to the hands of my mother, my father, my grandmother, and the elderly women in the subsequent row. Only then, after the plate was pregnant with dusty nickels and half-torn dollar bills, would the priest happen upon our contribution. He would know it was us; for if he did not point, we knew those who would.

When the critical eyes of so many faithful were absent, and in the case that God, himself, lacked the time to cope with His heathen creations, the church-going

paranoid could always rely on the prying eyes of the stained glass windows. They were much older than the church itself, so it seemed, carrying the dark stigma that belies the medieval iron maiden, both ancient and painful. It was ironic, then, that they were littered with the saints, virgins, and whimsical livestock intended to instill comfort in those seeking hospice. Yes, they were dressed accordingly. The mosaics were well thought out, life springing from the rich Dijon yellows of robes and deep ceruleans of scarves. It made me wonder, then, how those eyes, void of all life and emotion, were simply forgotten about. Divine intervention or lazy glassworker? They were simply black, small, vast, and terrifying.

If you have ever looked deep into the black eyes of a sheep you would know exactly what it is like. Though their wool speaks otherwise, looking into such deep and infinite blackness is the realization of endless silence, of the pain in being left to swim alone in the tar and cloud. There appears to be a complete void in emotion, regardless of impending shearing and slaughter. Then again, what is a life devoted to following little girls to school (one day)?

I was now in church services, seated next to my siblings as we each reached for a donation envelope.

Don't mess this up.

I heard a voice overhead.

Don't mess this up.

The tone was more stern now, not the type of voice usually traveling about my head and far before the time that I would get high enough to create my own. I knew what it was, but ignored the noise to reach for the miniature gold pencils that were scattered along the pew. The promise of the raunch and inappropriate nature of the words and drawings to come was almost too exciting, and I dropped the pencil on the

ground. Retrieving it, I heard the same voice but sharper, clearer than before, as if it sat beneath the pew waiting to whisper.

We know what you are going to do, and God doesn't like it.

He doesn't?

Nope.

Well, did you ask Jesus?

One moment.

It was the eyes of the stained glass that shone down upon me with such deep disdain. They spared all but my nubile face, now red and hot. I was positive I was testing the mighty power of something I was only half-convinced existed. They would drop their jaws and spit fire at me, for they had seen me draw the oblong beer bottle on the envelope yesterday, and maybe the word "butt" the day before.

We talked to Jesus, he doesn't like it either.

As Sundays passed us by, our church attendance slowly diminished until, at last, our parents lost hope for raising pious children. The family as a whole limited churchgoing to major holidays or sporadic and desperate bouts of spirituality. This only proved to exacerbate our image to the patrons of the church. Those who knew us when we were younger were not so surprised to see we had not grown in to Christian life. We did not do much to save our image, giggling and dripping wax through "Silent Night," laughing heartily at the organist's spotty playing skills.

This, especially, did not go unnoticed to the little people living in the stained-glass windows. They shook their heads disappointingly, Did we teach you nothing? Our response was more giggling, for the redheaded soprano had returned, and had apparently neglected to relieve herself in the past year.

Church attendance, or lack thereof, functioned similarly the following years. We upheld our silent agreement to avoid the church save for major holidays, and took to insulting the older siblings who broke it when they felt the familiar Christian guilt. However, as faces began disappearing from our pew on Easters and Eves, ritual conflicted with necessary attendance at funerals. My grandmother passed away, and we all crawled and crowded into a tiny chapel. On Christmas we reminisced, and filled her void with the common laughter.

Then came May. As my family and I sat in the front pew in the church, we gazed upon my brother Michael's casket atop the familiar crushed velour. For the first time in the history of church attendance I neglected to excuse myself for the bathroom, ignored the tiny gold pencils and never heard a squeak from the banshee soprano. Instead, I listened to the words. They were his words. They were my words. And the tear-blurred church began to make slight sense to the otherwise ignorant. In the last moments of the service I glanced up to the tall stained glass window to my right. The black eyes of a becloaked woman gazed down with the softness of charcoal upon mine.

We talked to Jesus, he doesn't like it either.

Patricia White
LAKE DREAMS

I cannot quite say what I am, aside from sun burnt.
Even Michigan UV rays are too strong for my complexion,
which freckles, reddens and simmers
begging for better treatment.
Once again, it seems a stronger blend was needed.
I can smell the dead or dying skin
when I get my nose close enough to my now peeling arm;
it's funny how much this smells like my idea of summer,
especially with the wind so cold.

I can feel his presence – he is behind me.
A rush of something like water moves through me,
and I feel my eyelids shuddering.
I hear him speak, or was it a whimper?
He reaches to me – but it feels wrong,
I turn to see what has made this difference
but when I do, with my white wide feet in the ice cold sand
of a Michigan beach in September, saying, "I knew... I knew..."
I see only a seagull staring back at me.

A white wide feather must have come free and brushed against me.
The gull flies away as soon as black meet blue eyes –
she is uninterested in my words of triumph,
now defeat.
I hear the far-off sounds of traffic

so I step closer to the lake
to hear the waves only and
watch a single piece of trash
as it floats towards Old Mission.
I remember sailing there with you.
It was a white ship – blue-trimmed
and always with the captain with a beard,
and a smile.
Both captain and son had loved me.
Memories still loving me,
smiling.

Thinking still now – I let my feet continue into the water
and the hardness of the cold hits my
white wide feet first –
then bare, muscular calves, then the dress
and skin on my thighs.
The water warming on my skin, now cooling
as I try to catch a hold of the
rudder in my memory of you.

Patricia White
BERNIE

A man too old for horseback riding and driving at night
Is sunbathing, naked, on the shores of Lake Michigan.
He is careful, not lewd.
He has checked for others.
He has walked miles out of view.
So he sunbathes, shamelessly nude in July.
A man with sand in his toenails and wrinkles is smiling
At waves who bring whooshes and splashes in rhythm.
The rhythm is with him.
He warms and starts to fade.
His sleep mimics the waves of July.
He is coming in and going out at once.
A man who sleeps while burning the outer layers of his skin
Is winking to the spit of the waves warning him to cover up.
Sandy fingers starting to move.
Sandy toes begin to twitch and crack.
Sandy limbs are turning, stretching outwards.
He stops himself from rubbing his July-reddened eyes.
A man too short for today's basketball and too fat for jockey-racing
Has not noticed his hunger and only feels the heat calling him to the water.
Martha had been cold.
She was cold for Julys before.
She was to be cold all the Julys after.
He promised her never to be cold like that.
A man without the strength he had in the twenties is swimming like a boy

Again free and feeling his youth travel backwards through his veins.
He then felt the cold.
Suddenly and brilliantly cold.
"Only one cold July," he told himself.
He flapped on forward tearing through the wake.
A man thinking of wakes and waking is coming up through the white caps
Of a Lake Michigan moving like it never might again for anyone else but him.
She told him not to grow cold.
He warmed her in his living arms again.
She was cold and July was raging on in heat around them.
He was warm. She was cold. And he felt her go ahead of him in light.
A man too old for games with grandkids is too tired to swim deeper, farther
Into his Lake Michigan grave, a sudden kind of cold, "No drawn-out pain for me."
"I am not afraid of dying,
But I'll be damned if I'm cooling,
Cooling and fading for years and Julys.
I'll make it sudden, I'll be cold too, but it'll be quick."
A man floating like Lake Michigan driftwood was found today, the family called.
He left a note on the night stand. "Bundle me up before I go under. My love, Bernie."

Patricia White
ALLERGY MEDS

So, I am sitting here and doodling away
My night which should be fine but I'm
Drawing the kinds of pictures that children
Could not even be proud of. I am sitting,
Swallowing the pride injured by my un-skill
And I am thinking about where you are –
Which is in her house. In her house, with
The cats, the charm, the small town appeal.
And I'm stuck in the city, in a room of my own
Thinking as I sit and doodle about what you
Just might be thinking while you're sitting.
Because you are sitting in her house, with her
Cats and with her – all just one little block,
One tiny block away from yours – not mine.
I am hours from you in more ways than one
And could hear the distance in your voice
When you told me you were sitting with her
Cats, in her house, with her. The third wasn't
Feeling well and could not make the walk,
And so left you alone with the woman who is
Near. Near to you and your world that a call
Just cannot infiltrate. It was inconspicuous
When there were three to tango, it doesn't
Work – which made it work. But removing
That net, that third and essential entity, you in

Her house became a threat and liability. You
Are in her house, with her cats and the hair on
Your hands is like blood laced with poison. It
Is beautiful in its aptness – my allergy to her
Cats may as well be to her. You could not touch
Me now. You cannot. You will not. I can't
Pretend that your voice didn't sound happy in
That house with the hairs on your hands and in
Your throat. You told me I would like her, she
Is like me. Like me but nearer. Conveniently.
You sounded happy, like you used to here.
I wonder when she'll start to cook for you...
Foods laced with the hair of animals you adore
And that I abhor. I wonder how long it will be
Before you are no longer just sitting with her and
Her cats in that house that is only one block away?
How long before I'm swallowing a new kind of pill?

Molly Ann Blakowski

DON'T FOOL YOURSELF, ARKANSAS

His body stretched for miles beside mine as we laid on the carpet on that final morning in his room. The blinds shredded the day's first rays of sunlight onto our skin like a vegetable peeler. We hadn't gone to sleep yet. I remember my eyes: dried out puddles.

I squeezed him. He had knives for hipbones. Stilts for legs. Backscratchers for arms. It almost hurt, but it would hurt more if I didn't.

So squeeze.

Neighbors along the street greeted the yellow through their respective bedroom windows and ate toast and drank coffee at their respective kitchen tables. This didn't faze us—we continued to stare robotically, me at the white ceiling and the white walls, him at the inside of his eyelids. He slept more than I did, probably. I don't know, I never asked.

I missed the moon and its familiar, white glow. I wished it was still night. I wondered if he did, also. Once again, I never asked.

Squeeze.

The top of my head rattled and hissed like an angry teakettle as I brewed thoughts of the unforgivable airport. It was small and surrounded by fields of uninteresting cattle with dry grass rolling around unattractively in their salivating mouths, stinking up the countryside that I wished so much to avoid. Grandmothers had hot flashes as they chased disobedient grandsons up and down the only two escalators in the building like brooding mother hens, and three maintenance workers shared a cigarette while they awaited the arrival of the next hideous sky machine. There was nothing at that airport for me, and I felt the same about my home in Detroit. The bedroom, on the other hand, was warm and felt more like home than some expired, auto empire hundreds of miles away.

So I squeezed.

Finally, I closed my eyes, and his long spine became a railroad track, his pumping heart a coal-smoldering engine. I hopped aboard—didn't care where I'd end up. I shall live on nectar, I thought. I shall swing from trees.

And as long as I'm moving, I shall think fond remembrances of Arkansas.

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A globally suffered problem is one which (generally, but not exclusively) occurs when a short period of time has elapsed since a body has relocated, traveled, vacationed—what have you. The aforementioned dilemma is simply a matter of confusion, that, as I have already indicated, pursues its victims quite universally. In fact, you needn't worry about it affecting you, because frankly, it likely already has.

What?

No need to get worked up about—really, it's harmless.

Yet, this syndrome, this condition, it's something I do consider to be a phenomenon of sorts: a phenomenon of the inner workings of the human mind. I don't mean to build it up so much—allow me to emphasize once more its utter regularity.

Well, what is it then?

Relax. I'm getting to it.

Listen: it's those first few moments after rousing from a night's sleep. Or a particularly long nap. When your eyes flick themselves open like dusty camera shutters. Well, I suppose they could still be shut, though it is rather unlikely, seeing as our eyes have the propensity to open and curiously look about whilst we are awake. They are, in the words of an essay by Diane Ackerman, which I enjoy very much, "the monopolists of our senses."

You see what I mean now, don't you? Those brief, brief moments?

Before I get ahead of myself, I'll provide that I've taken only the most rudimentary of psychology courses, I don't know all too much about REM cycles and next to nothing about the various overall mechanics of the cerebral cortex and its components—but those moments, those moments that thrust the body from asleep to awake, those aggressive heave-ho's of reality: they are the most bewildering seconds of our lives.

And that's really saying something! You know, these days, a man in the United States is expected to live about seventy-five years, and a woman, about eighty. They are born, and then they die. And somewhere in between, they experience these beautifully chaotic lapses of time, which, with all due respect, are more perplexing than a child's first word, or a dying man's last for that matter. Hell, they're even better, even more encapsulating than unearthing ancient artifacts of the Pleistocene's earliest primitive men, or discovering dinosaur fossils from times far more ancient. More than considering life outside Earth and throughout the universe. More than wondering about how today, Elian Gonzalez may be occupying himself, presumably in Cuba, a good few years after his epic journey by inner tube across the Atlantic Ocean to Floridian shores (do you also wonder about the boy like I do? Does anybody?)

It's a period of probing questions from dreams left unconcluded—"Did that actually happen?" we ask ourselves. "What should I think about this?" we wonder in unison.

It's an exclamatory epoch of ultimate boggling sensation—"Where am I?" we demand. "Who are these people?" we cry out with pointed fingers.

With these wonders on my mind, when I'm tearing my brain apart node from node, I couldn't give two shits about the mystical anomaly of the Bermuda Triangle, about whether or not man actually walked the moon, or about how many fucking days it took for God to create the universe.

I've told this story over a dozen times in the past six months—to friends, to family—but I've never been this bone-chillingly nervous. When I tell it the right way, you can see the passion in my eyes. At least that's what I'm told. And surely there's no mistaking passion when in the eyes, for the eyes cannot rightly tell a lie (look into the eyes of any liar, and you'll most certainly see what I mean). Only fools fall for lies.

Those damn, monopolist eyes. They turn us all into fools at one point or another.

So much I've feared that this passion would not so tangibly pronounce itself in the words I would so decide to use and so decide to orchestrate with ink on paper. I've tirelessly scratched away at countless notebooks, God knows how many nights I've perched unstintingly under the dim lights of the art studio until four in the morning, how many pages I've cut like slabs of meat, how many pens I've broken or have run dry of ink, dry like Ancient Lake Bonneville, which we now use for table salt. Will I do this tale justice? Will I give this place, these people, the recognition they deserve? I don't know, but I'll try anything once. And with that being said:

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"Where am I?"

"Who are these people?"

With these wonders on my mind, I tore my brain apart node from node, I didn't give two shits about the mystical anomaly of the Bermuda Triangle, about whether or not man actually walked the moon, or about how many fucking days it took for God to create the universe.

My eyes flicked themselves open like dusty, old camera shutters, and immediately I was overwhelmed with giant confusion. I was back in Rochester,

Michigan, nestled in my familiar niche of sweet suburban safety—right? Wasn't I back in the same bed I'd occupied until I left for college, since the age of six when I felt as though I'd finally attained a certain level of maturity to ever so rightfully deem myself grown out of the Little Mermaid bed I'd previously made do with?

Wrong. I laid in a room that was empty and silent: it had the potential to echo like a cavern, to fill with nighttime crickets that chirp at nothing but the moon, barren with its basaltic mares, its fake seas. The pasty walls stood bare and naked, a young bride blushing as she's measured for her white gown of all gowns. White and straight and sparkling like an orthodontized tooth. Lonely, like an empty fishbowl, its deceased contents dumped and sacrificed to the toilet bowl gods. No, I did not know this room. It chilled my spine. And it reeked of Worcestershire sauce and Windex.

I continued observing from my perch upon a plaid couch with saggy cushions and—what! Who was this?

There laid a girl with a halo of auburn ringlets, asleep at my opposite end, near where I'd unconsciously buried my feet under a cushion. She appeared to be my age or around it. And upon further examination of this white-carpeted, bare-walled room, slept boys, also probably my age. One snored softly on the loveseat; his long legs dangled like elementary school crafts hanging from the ceiling and rustling above the heat vent. Two others sprawled out on the floor like broken toy soldiers. They looked so uncomfortable, I wondered if, in their dreams, they were also uncomfortable, sitting in stiff, wooden chairs or making long voyages on dusty, musty pioneer ships of old.

As it happens, at that exact moment, something I find comparable to the great Permo-Triassic Extinction occurred. Maybe a synapse in my brain clicked—I'm no scientist, I don't know, I have no proper explanation. All I know is that I suddenly remembered exactly where I was.

Fayetteville.

It's a college town in Arkansas. The plain room was Brian's new living room (I'll describe Brian for the time being as a good person who was still wavering between society's abstract definition of acquaintance and friend in my life, someone that I came to know through a mutual friend and, very capriciously, agreed to visit for a week's time, despite having but a single, real-life encounter and minimal contact with throughout the years). And the sleepers were Brian's friends. I'd met them the previous night—oh! The previous evening had been quite exotic. Exotic at the very least.

Come back to me, come back to me; it's all coming back to me: the paint we caked on our faces. The wedding we crashed by impersonating clowns. The television we watched the flamboyant young gentleman smash against the wall. Gerald, the U-Haul driver.

Anyhow, I more importantly remembered a promise made, a promise involving an adventure at noon o'clock. Noon o'clock it was, and God, was I ready for it (...God, was I ready for it? Were any of us?)

Finally the friends stirred. Brian stirred. And of course I'd also already stirred. We rubbed sleep from our eyes and ate cookies for breakfast and washed them down with plastic chalices of soda pop, which made me feel like a child king.

I can see it now: all of us sitting around in that kitchen, pecking around the countertops like chickens in a pen. Claire and I shared a chair. Claire, she looked like she could have been plucked from a tree. With her I found instant female companionship. She was my sister, and to the boys, a motherly figure. Not exactly a mother hen, but perhaps Mother Nature herself.

I was her first kiss the night she turned nineteen years old. She drank wine from a mason jar and her cheeks got rosy as she reeled me in, her breath warming my earlobes, and whispered to me the secrets, the meanings of life. She told me of her grandfather's family back in Kansas, and how they had a knack for moonshinin'. She

told me about her younger brother, Grant, and how when she left her chameleon in his care for a few days, he'd extended his hand to feed the critter, and it had suctioned its sticky tongue to his fleshy palm, which he had jerked back in surprise, thus ripping the tiny tongue from its very mouth with a painful strrrreeetttccchh. Grant locked himself in his closet and called her in a fit full of tears, hidden within a labyrinth of freshly ironed shirts.

Cereal rattled in plastic bowls, and Brian unrolled his long legs under the table like a sleeping bag. I watched him in conversation, noting the way he always said the right thing at the right time, and how he cocked his head, squinted his eyes and twisted his mouth into a little smirk whenever he joked. One day, I thought, he would be a grandfather, and he'd rock in a beautiful wooden rocking chair surrounded by a dozen lovely grandchildren, weaving tales with his voice like an autumn breeze: an Indian chief motioning towards the sky with strong and hopeful hands, painting stories in the rising smoke. They'd call him Papa, and he would become legendary through his stories.

"Hey," he said to me. "Have I ever told you about Matt's tree house?"

No, he had not. Matt, who sat next to me with one leg curled under the other waving quietly as a flag at half mast, had a kingdom for a backyard: A kingdom crafted of bark and leaves and hammers slammed upon throbbing fingers. It stood nobly like a castle, fit for a king of any sort—the branches sapped with royalty.

I pictured Matt as a young boy, with eyes wide as the great branches spanned, as he, his brother and his father constructed the tree house like whoever Geologists claim erected the Sphinx in pre-dynastic times. I imagined Mr. Martens coaxing him up the ladder for the first time, a ladder that may as well have stretched past the

wooden planked balcony and into the clouds. I'm sure Matt danced and sang and played with birds and angels all throughout his childhood up in that wonderful tree.

And before I knew it, we were there, sipping sodas and leaning against the tree trunk some thirty feet in the air. The boy version of Matt must have climbed up the ladder when I wasn't looking, and stepped into his chest, disappearing beneath his skin and inhabiting the young man, whose looks I likened to those of a fox, whose heart I likened to that of a baby bird determined to fly.

I liked Matt. When I talked to him and Hunter in the kitchen on my first evening in town, their voices seemed to rise with each spoken syllable as we argued and defended our favorite breakfast cereals—they for Marshmallow Mateys; I for Apple Jacks. The kid spoke his mind. Words knitted from his lips at ultra speed; I mean, he could have knitted an entire sweater in a matter of minutes. He was passionate. He was honest. I liked him.

"Let's go."

We piled into the car and met with Paul and Shawn. Paul, who I wanted to hug forever and whose smile should be covered in plaster, set to mold and exhibited in a museum on a velvet cushion as a lesson on how to show the world you're happy. And Shawn, who looked like an under-stuffed scarecrow or a golden Santa Claus stretched through a Laffy Taffy machine, whose long legs bent like two fishing poles and seemed to spring with each step, but delicately, like the soles of his shoes were lined with clouds.

Shawn, Claire and I shared for a few nights the big, brown leather couch in the basement of Brian's parents, thus dubbing ourselves the Big, Brown, Leather Couch Gang. Shawn's creaking rocking chair voice lulled me to sleep like when my mother

and my grandmother rocked me as an infant. "Goodnight, Claire," he squeaked.

"Goodnight, Molly," he creaked.

Goodnight, Shawn.

One morning, we woke up and dove into the pool in the backyard and our t-shirts and shorts slicked to our scaly gills like glue. The cool water soothed our aching joints and, for a moment, we forgot that we were human.

The place we drove to, the place I'm fixin' to tell you about is called Devil's Den (I am in the South, after all. Might as well talk the talk). Pioneers once thought it fitting to name places this sort of way because they were frightened or apprehensive of the wilderness. It failed to offer them pleasurable amenities, unlike civilized society. It was rugged and unacceptable. It pained 'em real good.

My friends from Arkansas and I, well, we have different reasons.

Indeed, six young pioneers we were that day, though pioneers of a different kind, vesting our religions not in the churches, not in the temples but in the saints of our own discoveries, finding prayer in the rocks, the dusty pebble paths and the crumbling, crusty layers of brick red soil and the natural and vivid greens of Mother Nature's tangling weeds and vines, the tangling seeds of adolescent minds. I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was really awake.

It was a tour, and they were my guides, guiding me through the wildwood woodlot of their native state. Together we shook the hands of our brother trees and danced across Mother Waterfall.

Did you know that behind every great waterfall, there is a great glacier? The memory of one at least. Long ago, glaciers eroded much of the land, leaving behind perfect grooves where beautiful things like waterfalls formed. Grooves like the grooves of time on elderly hands, the hands of my grandma. Grooves like the controversial

grooves of erosion within the walls of the great Sphinx enclosure, that limestone-loving, mineral-mongering geologists and Pharaoh-fantasizing, Hieroglyphic-hoarding archeologists and Egyptologists bicker over. Grooves like the grooves in your cheeks after a good cry.

I think the grooves in my cheeks are permanent—they might as well be tattoos. Just another gift of humanity, I suppose. A law of the land, or something in a geology textbook. At least they're ensuring I'll never forget the tears I've cried while reminiscing on that day at Devil's Den.

It all started with a

Roaring sound
Water trickled down
To greet us

We shook off our shoes and socks and tiptoed across the tranquil Zen garden that sits on my friend's coffee table.

See, I've got this friend—Randy—well, can we appropriately address one another as "friend" after only two encounters? I, for one, hope so, and will—even though I'm fairly certain he doesn't remember my name. Anyhow, Randy, Randy, friend-o-mine, he said this thing once, and it was something everybody really liked. I mean, we thought Randy was the bee's knees when he said this.

"Look at us," he said as he halted the game and juggled our hacky-sack around in his hand as if it wasn't just a hacky-sack, but the entire world shrunken down to the

size of a human palm. Apparently, he saw something we did not, for he began to burst with hearty laughter.

"You know," he said. "When I look at people that are, I guess, having a good time, having fun, I can't help but be reminded of monkeys."

Monkeys? Randy? Monkeys?

"You know, evolution. It takes me back, I guess, to our primitive roots."

Monkeys? Randy? Monkeys?

"C'mon, you've seen monkeys. In the zoo. You've watched 'em."

I don't know why we laughed at his suggestion. We all knew he was right.

"Guys, we're monkeys," he offered. "Monkeys having fun. Playing games with our hands; we could pick flies off of each other for hours."

We ran along the beach collecting rocks and constructing a giant, sandy volcano. We tossed a Frisbee back and forth, stuck our toes in the water and returned to the shore when the waves splashed high enough to dampen our rolled-up jeans. Two of our friends remained in the lake, gathering wet sand in their fists. They let the gunk drip and ooze between their fingers, smirked with delight, and launched the bombs into the watery abyss. The clumps cannonballed into the water, splashes like the eruptions we imagined our sandy volcano would one day harbor, nuée ardente: the deadliest of volcanic eruptions.

I looked at Randy. Monkeys having fun?

"Yes," he replied.

Back in Arkansas, the story began. Shoelaces crisscrossed themselves like hand-motioning Christians, Signum Crucis, and sure enough we'd need a little Signum Crucis later on. But not just yet.

First, we were monkeys.

ME: I'm not sure how to put this, still.

YOU: Well, go on.

ME: Okay.

YOU: Okay.

NERVOUS ME: You're sure about this?

IMPATIENT YOU: Yes. Please, just spit it out.

ME: Right on, very well then, sure, sure. So, um, we're walking, the six of us are walking, though some faster than others. Three of the boys are very tall and I usually lagged behind, and sometimes, my shoelaces came untied and I'd have to stop and get even farther behind and Matt would stop with me because he told me had had my back, and I told him that I'd have his back as well.

Anyhow, it's all very gorgeous of course, the scenery—the crackling leaves, the trickling waters, the ghosts of the fathers of our grandfathers whistling through the treetops and echoing from within the caves. And we've just gone and bathed ourselves, cleansed ourselves, refreshed ourselves in the humblest of waterfalls (if such a beauty could be properly considered, you know, humble at all). We feel amazing, yeah? Amazing and pure, or at least I do, I suppose I should speak for myself sometimes, yeah? Anyhow, after such a spirit shower we're approaching this really beautiful rock formation. And there's this man, just standing at its base, way out here, in Mother

Nature's belly, and we say, "Hello, sir, how are you?" And he just stands there with this way about him, this sense of calm, of knowing, of advantage almost, and replies to us six kids, "All things are good." All things are good? We think. Yeah, yeah, they are, aren't they? We continue walking, well, only a few steps, because Paul and Matt feel a bit daring and want to climb up these rocks. So, they begin to scale the face (later on, I refer to them as "scaling the face of the Earth," which makes me smile). They climb with ease, like monkeys (monkeys having fun, of course). They climb about fifteen or twenty feet in the air, I think. And well, we all happen to be looking at the same time, that same instant that Paul screams "MATT!" and he's falling, falling, falling! Lost his grip, and BAM! Lands on the ground with a CRACK, but we didn't have to hear the CRACK—we see that bone popping through the skin in his leg. But he continues to fall. He wraps about a tree. But he continues to fall. Continues rolling, then SMACK (I usually clap my hands here) against another tree, but this time his tumble is over and he's screaming "Oh, no. Oh, no. FUCK. I'm such a FUCKING idiot!"

YOU: (You've got some wide eyes, leastways if you're still paying attention to me. It's a long story, not everybody listens the entire time. I understand.)

WORKED-UP ME: So! The first one on the scene is Greg—he's the guy from before, you know, the "All things are good," guy. He practically fucking beams himself down there—I don't even recall him making his way. I mean, next thing I know he's got Matt cradled in his arms and he's chanting, chanting in Latin. I have no idea what the fuck is going on. Neither does anyone else, I mean, we're all in shock, no idea what to do. But Claire is calling me, she calls me over and we decide to go get help. So we run. We take a shortcut; she knows the trails pretty well, though the terrain is rugged and

hard to maneuver. Still, we're traveling as fast as we can, sprinting when we can, even though I'm having an asthma attack. But the adrenaline is my friend, and finally, with red faces, dripping with sweat and empty-lunged, we reach the visitor's center, about fifteen minutes past the time of the initial accident. And you'll never guess who opens the door for us, you'll never guess who opens the fucking door!

Greg! It's Greg! And he's not even sweaty, though he's got Matt's blood caked on his legs, arms and hands—not a lot, but a good amount. "Don't worry, I filed a police report and the ambulance is on its way," he offers (in a cool, southern drawl). "I prayed with the boy and he's going to be just fine." Just fine! Our hearts race about a mile a minute. "Well, told my wife I'd be back at six-thirty for dinner, and it's about six-thirty now. Bye, now." And he disappears from our lives—just like that. Claire takes this opportunity to get down to business. She makes phone call after phone call, while I sit in the cold, linoleum bathroom with my face buried in my hands and shaking legs. After a half an hour or so, a walkie-talkie voice informs us that the EMS crew had located Matt. Claire and I wander over to the river, near the parked ambulance, and try to be patient, which is a joke.

Then, I mean, just when I'm starting to calm down—God, I remember exactly the pit in my stomach—we look to the sky: a helicopter roars above our heads. Oh shit. This is serious, we think. This is really, fucking serious. Luckily, I'm so sweaty I've no water left to cry. We relocate to a bridge over the tranquil river to collect ourselves once again, only to see something somewhat extraordinary once again—them! The boys, crossing the river, presumably carrying Matt overhead. What a scene! I take a picture. If you zoom in, you can see them—little white freckles above the cold, gray water.

The ambulance zooms over to the other side of the river, and we follow on foot, finally reuniting with the boys as the crew carts Matt onto the truck. They tell us of their journey, and ask us about Greg—the man who said, “All things are good.” Yeah, sure, we say. He opened the door for us at the visitor center. What? Says the boys. He left five minutes after you girls. He sauntered away. We talk more of this Greg fellow, and conclude that he must not have been real. Matt’s guardian angel, maybe. Just then, as we walk towards the field in which the helicopter had landed, a white car slowly drives by us. And the window rolls down. And it’s Greg! Greg!—we can’t believe it. “Just came back to make sure everything was alright,” he says. “God bless you kids.” Then, he drives off. That was it. That was Greg. Well, the crew loads Matt into the helicopter and we drive to the hospital like good friends should. Claire’s in a different car than Brian and me, and she sends us a text message as we near the hospital, telling us what street it is on. Weird, we think. She’s following us, we know where it is. We wait for her outside the hospital doors, and when she approaches, she does so with great excitement. “Did you get my text?” “Yeah, what was that all about?” we ask. Do you know what she said?

YOU: No. What did she say?

ME: The hospital is on Greg Street.

Good southern company: I want to sit with them telling stories, wildly gesticulating our hands in the air, drinking black coffee and shitting into the night.

Perhaps Brian would once again tell his Frank Zappa story, the one where, as a young child in church, he began to serenade his fellow parishioners to “Broken Hearts are for Assholes,” a rather unorthodox hymn, eulogizing don’t fool yourself, girl, I’m gonna ram it up your poop shoot. In Arkansas, they beat drums archaically in a booming circle in Brian’s bedroom one night. Once, we sang along to Shelton’s record player, popped in some Cat Stevens and exercised our vocal chords. And we baked cookies, Claire and I, substituting the eggs with bananas. We forgot to mix in the butter. We also forgot the cookies in the oven during the Cat Stevens sing-along. They chewed peculiarly, these cookies; our mouths recognized them as stale bread. I swear it wasn’t the bananas, though—bananas are an excellent alternative to eggs in baking. No, they were just classically burnt cookies.

And recipes are more or less guidelines, anyways.

Yes, coffee would be nice, preferably to be drunk around an appropriately designated coffee table, which reminds me of the old treasure chest coffee table back in Detroit.

Big old house
Lovely neighborhood
To live in,
Good day to be born.

I remember my last birthday there. I wore some little gold shorts, black nylons, a green turtleneck and boots that went click, click, click and I felt like Madonna, or maybe like one of Edie Sedgwick’s girlfriends, or something. Bought cigarettes just

because I could, and smoked every last one of them around that treasure chest coffee table in the dimly lit room with that little bar surrounded by my friends on Avery Street.

Back to Arkansas—there are moments from that trip that I'd like to remember forever.

Like riding in the back of Paul's jeep to Beaver Dam, arms flapping in the wind like a gull. We screamed the words to our favorite songs until my vocal chords felt it (oh boy, did they feel it), and my arms certainly felt it as well.

I'm no bird, wasn't meant to fly.

Of course, Matt wasn't able to partake in these adventures. Poor kid laid in bed with a metal rod in his leg, reduced to weeks of bed rest. Not to say we didn't think of him often.

One evening, we climbed the rooftop of some academic building. It reminded me of the chimney sweep scene in *Mary Poppins*; we became Bert and his ragtag crew of sooty sweepers and dashed across the rooftops, our feet pitter-pattering in harmonious singsong: Step in time, step in time... Then the moon settled in its sky bed and pulled up its blanket of stars—stars so close I could extend my hand and grab one. Alley cats atop a fence, we sat at the building's edge and dangled our legs above the city street like fishing poles.

"I don't want to go home," I blurted out at once. "Suddenly, I don't like anything there."

We lowered ourselves down to the cement ground, and Brian led us to the next destination. It was like this every night: we shed our ordinary skins and became conquistadors. We chartered new territories and pressed our feet firmly into their soils. It made my bones rattle, my heart sink into my stomach. It was Brian's plan all along, a new place every day, and hell, even after he hurt his knee, he stuck to his word. I never stepped on the same patch of ground twice.

Anyhow, our next destination turned out to be the U of A football stadium. Odd, I thought, as we squeezed through its protective fence, though you'd be amazed at the utter tranquility of a stadium free of beefy, pig-skinning, chest-bumping fans; a sea of spilled beer, hoots and hollers and poly-mesh jerseys. No, no longer was it a football stadium—it was the Roman Coliseum, with its riveting executions, gladiatorial competitions, and mythological dramas: damsels in distress, valiant warriors slaying sinful serpents, Greek gods and golden times—bellissima!

But this astounding amphitheater served dual purposes, for just as soon as it filled with the laughter and cheers of crowds of ancient Romans, it emptied to resemble outer spatial territories. I kneeled in the field's center, surrounded by nothingness—just cold, dewy AstroTurf. I was an asteroid—carbon, silicon and iron, welded into a plump potato shape, so small and so far away from everything else. I bobbed and floated in the vacuum: a sailor of the unknown. I sailed the belt, happy to be in resonance with Jupiter—jovial, I might say, to be associated with such a fine, Jovian planet.

For the time being, everything felt right. I watched the stars, my distant neighbors, as they sparkled and winked like traffic lights governing the intersections, warning vehicular intruders of proper street etiquette. I wish they'd have warned me as well, though, warned me that I'd never want to leave.

As if anything could have prepared me for that horrible plane ride home. The man in the seat next to me, stuffed in seat 16C, didn't understand. And neither did the pilot.

He looked at me with utter disgust, this man: me with my face a mass of streaky tears, my eyes swollen and nose leaking like an old faucet. Couldn't he tell I needed him? Didn't he know that I needed somebody to tell me everything would be alright, just so that I could snap back, "No, no it won't! Things will never be alright again!"

I hoped to God that I was not really on the plane, that I was really just experiencing one of those time lapses, and that soon, a synapse would click and my eyes would zoom into focus and I'd be waking up in Brian's room and all things would be good, though it was a fool's hope at best.

Damn, monopolistic eyes.

In reality, I lacked tissues, like a hungry child on the streets of Bangladesh lacks food, this child in search of bread—famished and dripping an incalculable sum of snot.

Add it up: The man next to me ignored my cries, that man with his bald head and sharp, geometric glasses. He probably traveled for business and spent each week in some nameless city in some industrial wedge of the country, while back at home, his wife fucked the exterminator or something, held affairs full of passion, and when he waddled through the front door on Friday evenings for a weekend at home, she fixed him pot roast—it simmered on the table with delectable, juicy consistency. Yeah, he always planned to move from that house, that “dump,” as soon as he got “that raise, damnnit.” Once he got that bonus, he’d “buy a new house without the fucking cockroaches. Goddamn, fucking cockroaches—call the exterminator, Wendy! Make sure he stops by this week, and make sure he actually does his fucking job this time.”

I’ll tell you, a guy like that should never, ever, get a bonus. I thought him heartless and cruel as the wings on this godforsaken flying machine and the godforsaken city I’d soon return to.

He had his back to me the entire time, instead poking his head forwards to chat with two members of a traveling soccer team. He tried to give them his two cents about the game, as if he wasn’t just some guy spending each week in some nameless city in some industrial wedge of the country, while back at home, his wife fucked the mailman or the exterminator or something, held affairs full of passion, and when he waddled through the front door on Friday evening for a weekend at home, she fixed him pot roast that simmered on the table with delectable, juicy consistency.

As for the pilot: he didn’t stop when I called for him to turn around. Didn’t turn off the engine. Wouldn’t go back.

I leaned back in my seat, squeezed tears through my eyelids and crawled into caverns I remembered more fondly. In Wonderland Cave, bats slept, tucked away in

shadowy beds hid among the drip, drip, dripping stalactites. Wonderland Cave is located in quiet Bella Vista, Arkansas, and was referred to in the 1920's as "The Largest Natural Place of Amusement in America." Today, it's a barren disco wasteland, littered with metal scraps, broken bulbs and artwork soiled by the dripping, limestone ceilings. We walked single-file with a ration of three flashlights, divided among us like supper with *Oliver Twist*, seemingly reenacting the Ave Maria scene at the end of Disney's *Fantasia*: somber monks traveling slowly across a lighted bridge.

"Puddle!" the first person in line would shout, and the followers would echo it, and the cave would echo it—a grandiose game of telephone. I didn't much stray from the path, unlike Paul, who I watched with a careful eye, worried he'd slip and fall and be devoured by cave creatures, though it was Brian who got hurt that day, and Paul's time would come later, after our ascent up the awful, rocky steps. I watched him sucked up in the cave's karst crevices, so deep I worried he'd fossilize right into the limestone.

I don't think I'd ever been so scared as when Brian lost his balance and fell onto those rocks, when his blood soaked through his khakis, and we had to rip them above his knee and pour water on his wound and remove his shoes, and I held his wrist as he seized, as he kicked and quivered like a fish on a hook, smacking his fins against the dock: him on the back of Matt's car—God! His skin turned green and I realized that he wasn't invincible. None of us were.

Two days. Two emergency rooms. Who'd have thought?

“What do you think?” Brian finally asked me, just minutes before he fell down the callous slope and landed on a rock that gashed through his knee (though we told everyone back in Michigan that the real reason for his brief hospitalization was a bear fight—and nobody even questioned it! Brian, he’s built for adventure, and everyone knows it). “Do you like it?”

“Do I like it?” I smiled. My eyes glowed brighter than his flashlight.

Brighter than the moon we stalked five nights later in the little town of Rogers. Brian and I, we flew away together like moths and beat our little, crippled wings towards the glowing, basaltic satellite, which lit our way along the railroad tracks like the little bulbs along the aisles of the movie theater he works at. Of course, we didn’t reach such heights, couldn’t press our palms against silicates, couldn’t chat face to face with the man in the moon, though we walked and talked ourselves all the way downtown without intending to or knowing we’d go so far. I was eager to hear his plans as we crossed over cracked sidewalks and past dusty, old shop windows—plans of his budding music career, the album he’s recording in New York, the children’s book—all these vast, new worlds he intended to travel and claim. I closed my eyes and pictured myself as Lewis, and he as Clark, but blushed at the thought.

More magic occurred.

Frequently, I think back to my first spree at Wal-Mart, with Claire and Brian after we’d crashed the wedding, nearly crashed the honeymoon, and finally returned to the home of an awfully inebriated homosexual wedding guest with electric blue nail polish and an aggressive hand that threatened us with little glasses filled to the brim with awful, cheap wine. We politely rejected the wine and instead drove to Wal-Mart

(which exists throughout Arkansas like freckles on a red head) and in the car Brian played that song that filled my head with images of an afterlife—both beautiful and heinous. The thoughtful silence wrapped around us like ribbons. I still remember today what I imagined as the ribbons quieted my soul.

Uncle Dukar (pre-heart attack, that is) sailing the white-capped gulf with a pint o' whiskey in his fist. Thought he was an Irishman, though the man was absolutely a Polish individual. For chrissake, a fucking purebred Pollack!

Then, 15-year-old Gordie. He was there, at the high school soccer match with his friends, my peers. Did anybody expect he'd be discovered hanging in the closet the next morning, instead of sitting behind me in the physical science lab? Didn't anybody? No, not a fucking soul. Angels carried his closed casket past the mahogany pews and his mother, a fern, wilted in front of the altar. I looked on from the balcony with a sweater of snot. I was the only of several hundred still on my feet, but I couldn't persuade my legs to ease into their seat.

Aunt Gin was there as well, not in the church but a nursing home, with her sticky, rotten-smelling gums and the curling yellow fingernails and the shaking limbs, holding an old photograph—"See how beautiful I used to be!" And she was beautiful—and everyone agreed, and somebody wiped the yellow mucus oozing from the corner of her cracked lips and patted her on the back, gently now.

I even saw the old pets—the hamsters, scampering about with little claws tickling my legs and nuzzling into my lap as I offered Honey Nut Cheerios into their little hands, like little humans, my brothers and sisters. Nibble, nibble, nibble; Hello

Herbert! Camille! Rita! Bert! Eddie! Even Dr. Strangeluv made an appearance, bravo, bravo! The fish swam in toilet bowl graveyards, fish of all different colors—the gold ones, some more orange, one black almost and another was white (that one was Angel. I named her myself). I then believe that, somehow, I began to cry inside my head. My brain drowned, and then the car parked and it came time to peel my waterlogged legs from their seat. Still, I couldn't persuade them.

We entered Wal-Mart just minutes later and those thoughts of mine evaporated into thin air. Besides, who could think of such things in the colorful cereal aisle?

And of course, "The Spot," a place of magical feelings that I witnessed only through nighttimes eyes (but perhaps all for the better). The journey was Matt's idea, even though he couldn't himself join. I'll never forget the look in his eyes when he asked, "Have you taken her yet?" I thought he might cry.

The waterfall trickled in sync with the humming fireflies—more fireflies than you've ever seen, even more than you've ever dreamt of. Oh, if we could only dance through firefly city once again. I'd give anything to see the trees twinkling, like the lights do in the city streets of sweet Chicago, only so much sweeter because I do believe there were fairies in this place, sitting in the trees and drinking sweet nectar drinks and buzzing about with neighbors, fellow tree dwellers, all kind little fellers. I swung my legs above the lake and whispered to the fairies, or to the stars, I no longer recall exactly.

So I was swinging my feet (wish I could say, "I was swinging my little feet," but

I've always had larger feet, a bit too wide and barely any toenails) over the water, which was oh, twenty, twenty-five feet below, and watched the world and thought the good thoughts. Just then, Barrett approached, Barrett whom I'd really taken a liking to because he's got the sass, and because on New Year's Eve I'm told he stumbled about a certain house party in a drunken stupor, proclaiming loudly, "I am the Steppenwolf!"—And he is! We held a pleasant conversation, not entirely significant yet I shall certainly remember it for the rest of my life nonetheless.

And when we finally rejoined the group another pleasant surprise awaited me (that magical oasis was one surprise after another). I was thinking I'd really like to give Brian a hug. I don't know, I just couldn't stop thinking about it, wasn't sure why. Goddamnit, though! Brian, he just stepped right up and wrapped his arms around me—right that moment, like he knew! And oh, we stood there, bear-hugging under the Big Dipper and all things were good.

And that's what I remember best, believe it or not. That hug. The way he smelled. The faint taste of his tee shirt as I pressed my face, my mouth against the cotton hanging from his chest.

After a while, we all walked back to the cars, a large group so pure and so into the living of life, that it causes me still sometimes to momentarily need to step outside of myself, just as the soul, and sigh and, just maybe, these dreadfully nostalgic eyes of mine might start to drip with salty water, these eyes that, after all, are attached to my dreadfully nostalgic head (I quit smoking but I'm still fucking addicted to the past).

We hopped into our cars. They turned on some music. They had social intercourse. I, however, was still deep in metacognition: decisions, progression, choices.

Progressive choices = change.

It was so dark outside but I swear everything was clear as daylight after that week in Northwest Arkansas. Clearer than ever before, really.

Then one morning, I woke up and finally remembered where I was. No bogging confusion. No need to tear my brain node from node. No demanding questions (though today I sometimes ask myself, "Did that actually happen?") The vacation was over. My body knew it.

That morning, I left, and in doing so, I realized something. I realized that the white room, Brian's living room, was not bare at all—it was absolutely full. Full of memories. Of love. Of joy. The boys, they may paint it, cover it with posters, or tear it down and move away—that living room with always be filled to the brim, an all-you-can-eat buffet, an artist's canvas satiated with acrylic inspiration. And as I sit here in rainy October, Ann Arbor, Michigan, I think of that room, my friends, and our many adventures.

And I call it home.

For the time being, I am a student, weighted with scholarly obligations. When I will next return to Arkansas, I do not know. All I do know is that the railroad station sits less than a mile away from my room, and one day, without thinking twice, I will run to those tracks, and they will take me wherever we please.

Sabrina Riera

WHITE-SPOTTED NAILS

A chill runs through my fingertips
and rushes underneath the cuticle
it remains there, static,
a spot of ice that doesn't melt.
Where do they come from?
I've always wondered
how water seeps between the cracks
and freezes in a sauna
of frictional curiosity.
They watch closely, observing
the calluses on my fingers
and the ink spotted pages
and the dirt that threatens to
make an entrance,
but can never find the way.

Sabrina Riera

THE CLINICAL YEARS

Stressed and overwhelmed define
what was once an idealistic,
cheery girl with a smile that glistened
when others spoke of their tightening pockets
and relentless schedules, not burdening my mind
with such troubles, but always showing empathy.
I stare blankly at these damp walls
they are a sickening mint green that makes me
feel ill, I don't know why.

The floors are clean, at least mostly,
the old linoleum tiles are chipped at the corners,
likely due to the frantic footsteps that
carelessly rush through this corridor
never stopping to take a rest.

The faint scent of alcohol lingers under my nose
my hands dry and cracked from washing them so often.
I used to like that smell, somewhat, back when
the emergency room made me feel empowered,
like someone who was important, who had a purpose.
But now, now I'm just tired.

Sabrina Riera
HOW I HATE PRESENTING

I fidget and fidget and widget with my sweater,
Twirling through pieces of thread that have unwound,
Twisting and twasting and fumbling and wumbling my words around
Until—what am I saying?
I try to ignore the audience, the looks of confusion
Their inflated cheeks, those chipmunk cheeks,
Hoarding their snarky laughs and jeering criticisms.
My hands and toes and face feel sweaty,
I'm lightheaded and dizzy and nauseous and—am I dying?
Is this coronary blockage?
Is it a valid excuse to leave the room?
And while these questions bounce around in my head
And the words "I'm dying" replay over and over
And over and over and over in my mind,
While a jimber jamber of words come out of my mouth,
I contemplate which would be worse—presenting or death?
I can't be sure. Perhaps death would be less humiliating.
And once I realize that I need to reevaluate my priorities in life,
And I've officially made a hole in my sweater large enough to fit my head,
And I've sweated enough to fill up a fish bowl,
The words stop.
I look down at my feet and briskly walk away.

Alexis Delaney
YES

Inspired by Jason Robert Brown's Stars and the Moon and James Joyce's Ulysses

My God, I'll never have the moon,
She said,
As she saw her forehead in the light of
What she had hoped for
In the mirror and
Turned down the sheets
Except not getting in
She tugged at her hair
And wiped her face clean with it
Because she saw her forehead and
Stared at it—
blue because of the moon.
And it's never going to change.
And it was never about to.
Because she said no
to her lover at the train station
And no she said no
to the man who took her ice skating
And wanted to take her everywhere he knew
She would love.
She said no
to the boy who wouldn't say anything but what he said with his eyes
and his lingering, to whom she said
no, I said no

and looked down
into her hands and thought she ought to cry
Because each time she was half asleep,
half in love,
half her hair in her hand wrapped around her thumb and singing songs
until she realized the answer was
No.

So she froze her eyes on the mirror's.
And moved her shoulders down like they were sinking.
And breathed out air she thought she would never get back.
Because the moon is too high,
And without hills to climb, you can't properly say
Yes I said Yes I would Yes on top of them
as you run through flowers
and lay under the moon and breathe in the warm air of the
answer you want to give.

Kendra Furry
MEDITATION ON MYSELF

I sit.
I dig the spoon into the box
of Honey Nut Cheerios.
I spill them into my mouth.
I let the spoon fall back into the box.
I look for something useful
and find only crumbs on my sweater.

I should throw that Coke cup away.

I search for the spoon inside the box,
half-buried by circular cereal.
I rub my eyes and scratch my temple.

Something just isn't right.

I take a few deep breaths,
in through the nose,
out through the mouth.
I almost sneeze but at the last second,
the urge vanishes like icicles in early May.
And at that moment I think,

I may be sloppy,
but at least I'm lowering my cholesterol.

Kendra Furry
FOREVER A DECADE AGO

I am eight,
rising like a balloon higher and higher,
my legs supplying the helium
thrusting my rubbery body
toward the sky on the swingset.
It smells like rain, but the clouds
have mostly cleared by now.
I look to my left and there's
Christian.
He says he's going to race me to the moon.
My schoolgirl crush makes me giggle and turn red.
I say he'll never make it there before me.

For a while we move together
like two pendulums in an
awkward, skinny grandfather clock.
A bird flies over us,
landing on the top of the playground structure.
It begins to sing,
and the world awards us perfect harmony,
the bird's voice
and Christian and I in sync,
so close we could've held hands.
Matthew, two seats over, brings up
the elementary school rule

governing 3rd grade marriages,
citing the law that clearly states
when two students are swinging side by side,
are therefore bound to do so
for as long as they both shall live.
I remember my crooked teeth
and unflattering haircut
and wonder how much longer it will stay like this.
And then, sure enough,
Christian jumps off,
hits me on the foot,
and runs away.

Kendra Furry
FULL

I was hungry when I met you,
starving by the time I finally saw you.
Wasting no time, already
I have swallowed you whole.
You're sitting inside me, making me squirm.
I can feel your smile in the pit of my stomach
every so often, like when you remember
something funny from the day before
and start laughing in a secret way
that no one can know but you and your memory.
You're tickling me from the inside out
so I begin to grin,
digesting your charm and
allowing it to nourish me.
The vitamins in you make my eyesight sharper
and more rosy,
bringing everything into focus
but with a little more hope than before.
My teeth have grown stronger,
so I'm more likely to show them off,
my hair shinier and feeling
like a cloud on my head.
Your nutrients have brought me back to health.
All I'm asking is for you
to let me return the favor.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When Mapping Home came up as a possible title for this edition of View from the Hill, I liked it immediately and began thinking of what those words meant to me. Having been a part of the LHSP community for two years, I can certainly say I mapped a home for myself here. Being in college requires us to map our homes in the past, present, and future tenses alike. We think of where we came from, whether we're feeling homesick in our first weeks at school or telling a classmate about our hometown. We consider where we'll be down the road, where we want to go with our lives, where we might end up. But perhaps most importantly, we figure out where we are right now, at this crucial, scary, and exciting time in our lives. Our community plays a large part in this process. This is where students live, work, socialize, and hopefully thrive. They express their creativity here, and through that creative process they further create their map of their home, whether directly through a piece of art like the journal's cover, or indirectly and maybe even subconsciously. Living here forces them to make it their home in one sense; creating here allows them to make it their home in any other way they can imagine.

The work we've selected was born from this experience and has a home in this publication. I am honored to have served as the journal's editor-in-chief, and I'm thrilled to be passing the torch to Morgan Beckett and Michael Williams, two spectacular individuals who will serve as next year's leaders of the publication. I'm inexpressibly proud of this year's editorial staff; they've been a joy to work with. I am also incredibly proud of the 2009-2010 LHSP students for submitting such marvelous work and making the job of selecting which pieces to publish so difficult—because believe me, with all the talent we have here, it wasn't easy.

I hope everyone in the program this year was able to map a home of some kind in this community. That's why we're here. And while I may be moving on from LHSP this coming year, in a way, it will always feel like home to me.

KENDRA FURRY

The typeface is Cochin.

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