

Modern Tribalism

THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

2010 - 2011



MODERN TRIBALISM LHSP 2010 - 2011



LLOYD HALL SCHOLARS PROGRAM



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Modern Tribalism

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MODERN TRIBALISM

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Sylvia Gindick
MODERN TRIBALISM

The world is more connected than ever before
we have a global economy, transportation networks that defy time and distance and
the technology to communicate across thousands of miles in a millisecond.

Yet from classical music to hip-hop, novels to magazines, michelangelo to duchamp,
one sexuality to several, three religions to infinite, hierarchy to equality,
“till death do us part” to
divorce
every social construct is splintering.

Here emerges a new vision of America—
a face of myriad masks,
warring factions, fast beats, multiple gods.

Katherine Goffeney
EXCERPT FROM “HEARTBEAT OF THE
TOWNHAWKS”

It was the Fundikon that began all of this hound-bwohk; pishfish and lodgemaukers the mauk-mauk lot of them. They made us all blig-krah, all of us. Mauk-mauk lodgemaukers were all playnyahs, and it is my humble opinion that it was their mauk-mauk Lingban that really did us in.

Sorry, I just realized that whole thing was chocked full of Hawkish. You probably don't even know what I just said! Here, I'll repeat it in Soc:

It was the Fundikon that began all this shit; bastards and bullshitters the fucking lot of them. They made us all fucked-crazy, all of us. Fucking bullshitters were all liars, and it is my humble opinion that it was their fucking Lingban that did us in.

It was a mauk-mauk blessing the day Sain-Dokka was born. If you don't know who Sain-Dokka is, then you definitely are not Townhawk. Sain-Dokka is a hero to the Townhawks, coz it was Sain-Dokka who came in and found a way passed the Lingban, some thirty-five years ago. Without Sain-Dokka, I wouldn't be able to say this: Fuck, shit, damn, bitch, bastard, motherfucker, sex. All of those words were banned. They were worse than banned, friend, they were censored.

See, in Hawkish, censored is death. But not just death, it's worse than death. Censored is the worst possible death. To censor someone isn't just to kill them; no, to censor someone is to completely eradicate them from existence. To censor someone is to utterly and totally erase them, as if they never existed in the first place.

That's what the Lingban did to words. It was psychological conditioning, you see – from the womb. No kidding, that's when that hound-bwohk¹ began. Pregnant women would go for these sessions, and they'd start the conditioning. Then when a kid was born they were conditioned more in the first two weeks. All of this set up the

1 hound-bwohk: shit (noun)

Lingban, but it wasn't until the little tykes were five when it was finalized and actually activated. After that, well, then the weedaown². That was it after that, those words they banned were gone, and they were gone for good.

At least, that's what everyone thought. Everyone, that is, except for Sain-Dokka. Sain-Dokka knew that the mind was powerful, and Sain-Dokka knew that the mind's powers of healing were awesome. It took Sain-Dokka many years to develop the cure, but it happened. She did it.

Yeah, that's right: Sain-Dokka is a woman. Perhaps the only woman the townhawks all respected unreservedly. You didn't make any jokes about Sain-Dokka; she wasn't a woman like that. In fact, if anyone ever did make a joke about Sain-Dokka that was in anyway flobrin³, then any true townhawk who heard is obligated to beat the mauk-mauk hound-bwohk out of him! I say true townhawk because it's understood: Anyone who'd joke about Sain-Dokka like that ain't townhawk, no matter what they may say. They could be the best mauk-mauk fliter⁴ in the mauk-mauk world, but they ain't townhawk, not if they don't have proper respect for the woman who freed us all.

See, without Sain-Dokka, there wouldn't be no townhawks. We were her people, the first people she freed. We were the youth, we are the youth. The counter-culture, if you wish. In the days of the Lingban, we were the least, the kids in the cities who had their boarding and their shenanigans: all in all hooligans, that's what the markeys⁵ called us. Maybe it's weird then that Sain-Dokka chose us. See, Sain-Dok-

² weedaown: shit went down, or the shit hit (phrasal word)

³ flobrin: sexual in nature or manner (adjective)

⁴ fliter: one who engages in the townhawk activity of flite (noun)

⁵ markeys: people who are not townhawks (noun); things related to the ways and culture of such people (adjective)

ka was not a hooligan. She pretty much made the townhawks, but she weren't ever a townhawk herself. No, Sain-Dokka was as markey as they come, a smoogilee⁶, only she is a smoogilee in the intellectual areas, not in the areas of the rithsith⁷.

But if you really think about it, it's not all that weird that Sain-Dokka chose the hooligans. See, hooligans are young people, and young people are rebellious (most of us anyway). Growing up without the "lewd words" that the Lingban supposedly destroyed didn't make us any less lewd. No, all it really meant was that we had to be creative. I mean, I know it's been like thirty-five years since she toppled that hound-bwohk, but just pause for a moment, okay? See, I didn't ever have the Lingban, I was born after it was taken out, but I've still imagined it before, so I want you to try that now too. So just imagine it. Imagine growing up without any intensely vulgar expletives to shout out when you cut your finger. Imagine growing up without any rudely offensive names you can call that person you really, really dislike. Imagine a world where you can't even say the name of the process of procreation. I mean, what would you do with yourself, if you couldn't express yourself like that? The answer, of course, is simple.

You make shit up.

And that's what the young people of the Lingban did. Well, that's what the hooligans did, but I don't actually care about the other kids. We – they – made up words. That's how you get the word "mauk." It's really kind of a neat little process actually. Back during the Lingban, some people wanted to say the word "motherfucker," but that had of course been banned. So some smoogilee came up with a different term, "father-mauker"; and since the term 'father' had not been banned and "mauker" didn't

⁶ smoogilee: an exceptionally smart or clever person; a smarty pants, (noun); clever, smart (adjective)

⁷ rithsith: literally, "heartbeat of the city"; street smarts (noun)

mean anything to begin with, it got through. The guy who made it used it, probably in the same situation where he'd have used "motherfucker", and it caught on. His friends picked it up, and then their friends did too, until soon it was a full-fledged curse word... one that the Fundikon knew absolutely nothing about.

Sain-Dokka is a clever lady, as I have said, so she recognized that if there was anybody who'd be willing to defy the Fundikon and help her with her cure, it would be the very same folks who were already defying the Fundikon in every way they could. Her first subjects were hooligans. And then, once the weedaowny'ng⁸, that is to say, once Sain-Dokka's cure actually started to take full effect, Sain-Dokka found herself in a lot of trouble. The Fundikon didn't run the government back then; no, in those days, the Fundikon was the government, and they wanted Sain-Dokka censored. We townhawks tell epic stories about this moment in our history, when Sain-Dokka was discovered and hunted, because really, it wasn't until this point that the hooligans became the townhawks.

See, these days, when you're a townhawk, you're a part of something. But back then, when you were a hooligan, you were a part of nothing. They had their little gangs and stuff, but not much after that. It was everyone for himself. But Sain-Dokka changed that. She freed everyone, and when she was suddenly hunted, the hooligans all got to work. They all had that "gang mentality" see, the whole "you do me a favor, I do you a favor" deal, mixed in with the whole "no one fucks with one of our own." When those two combined, Sain-Dokka suddenly had not just a few champions; no man, she had an entire mauk-mauk city of them! All the hooligans all across the town united. They hid and harbored Sain-Dokka, even fighting off the prawlie⁹ for her! Those maukers has got guns! This was some pretty heavy hound-bwohkh here!

8 weedaowny'ng: shit started going down (verb, modified by progressive tense marker)

9 prawlie: the law enforcement; derived from "police", extinct term (noun)

These were teenagers and twenty-somes – kids – but they weren't playing around! Every single one of them understood that they were involved in something that would change the whole world, and maybe even fix the all fwumph¹⁰ the adults had put them through. They were all prepared to give their lives for this, and many of them did.

Sorry, you'll have to excuse me a moment. I know it might seem silly to you if you ain't townhawk, but for us townhawks... We tend to get all kwopn'n¹¹ at this story. See, we act all tough and we're all a bunch of crass kids, but we got a sentimental side that we don't really talk about. I mean, I'm talking about it now, but that's because I'm telling a story to markeys. It's okay when you're telling stories. Stories are important to townhawks. We're kids, we crazy about telling stories. And seeing as our entire culture formed in response to the worst blig¹² censor in the history of blig censors, we believe that no story should ever be edited to save face. In this very story that I'm telling you, you're seeing townhawks dying just so that we can one day be free to say what we want to say; so as you can see, this fwumph is important to us, really important!

Okay, I'm all right, I took my moment. It's hard not to tell this story and stay dry-eyed, you know? I mean, not even considering the amount of bravery involved, just the fact that a group of confrontational and antagonistic hotheads would all believe in something so strongly that they'd be willing to join together, work together, and rise up against their parents and the other adults who'd maukn'id¹³ them. I mean, nothing against teenagers (I am one), but since when do you normally see urban teenagers

10 fwumph: shit, stuff, things, but in a vulgar way (noun)

11 kwopn'n: teary-eyed, weepy, emotional (adjective); to be moved by emotion (verb)

12 blig in this context is used to mean "damned" or "fucking"

13 maukn'id: the past tense form of "fuck", in this context, it means "fucked over", so that the sentence reads, "other adults who'd fucked them over"

rising up for such a selfless action? You don't, not normally anyhow, especially not now and certainly not then. But they rose up, and in rising up, in protecting the lady who was helping them all, they became something more than just hooligans; no, they became something, and a very specific something at that – they became townhawks.

And that's just mauk-mauk beautiful.

So anyways, Sain-Dokka was on the run for a while. See, the city where the weedaown was the city of Newton-Quain. I don't know if you've ever been to Newton-Quain, but I'm sure you've at least heard of it, if not even a little bit about it. Newton-Quain is a huge blig city! I grew up in Newton-Quain, and let me tell you this: That ain't the city you want to escape from! No, if you ever have to escape from a major city, any major city, you best make it a town like Newton-Yohrn or Newton-Primu, but you'd be krah-krah to try to make it Newton-Quain! For one thing, Newton-Quain wasn't one of the converted cities. Newton-Yohrn was converted: It used to be a whole different city once, different name, different look, different everything, but when it was converted, it wasn't like they could tear the whole thing down. No, they had to work with what they had, so some of it is actually fairly open and all. But Newton-Quain... It weren't anything like that.

They built Newton-Quain up from the ground, about a hundred years back. The legend goes that they did it in a year. And given the nasty brutal efficiency that the Fundikon were known for, I'm not too sure there ain't some truth in that. It was built by them, from a plan of their making. If someone is in the city, anywhere in the city, and the government is after them, all it takes is a single call, just one little ping, and the entire city totally closes up in precisely two minutes. Walls and doors come up where you'd never expect them to, and the only way around them is to go either through the buildings or over them. But the thing was, when the city closed up, the prawlies dispatched, and they covered every building that touched the walls that had a

front and back entrance. Put simply: No way through, no mauk-mauk way!

So when the first townhawks needed to get Sain-Dokka out of the city, there was no way they could get her through the buildings. Luckily, the hooligans back then were just like the townhawks today (well almost, as they didn't know how to flite yet, coz it wasn't discovered just yet), meaning they were pretty much all boarders, vandals, and acrobats. They knew all the rooftops and all the back alleys, and seeing a cluster of them moving about or hanging around wasn't all that strange a sight to see. In fact, it was totally ordinary, and it was ordinary to the point where no one even noticed anymore. Markeys have never given fwumph for what townhawks do, unless it's to heckle us of course, but that's lykn'eh¹⁴.

So here's the challenge (and this, by the way, is the part where I'm gonna start giving you some names of some people who are considered really significant townhawks). In the central part of the city there were these two guys: Benjamin Tyke and Hugh Thompson. Benjamin Tyke was called Badger. I don't know why he was called Badger, but he just was. Hugh Thompson was just called Hugh, but after the Mauk-Soba¹⁵ Flight, he became known as something else. On a clarity note, it's actually the Mauk-Soba Flite, but it wasn't a flite like what townhawks do today. No, the flite we do today is called that because it's in honor of that flite. I changed it a little though so you wouldn't get too confused. But for sake of clarity, if you hear this again from someone else, that's actually what it is.

But back to Hugh Thompson. He was just called Hugh back then, but after the Mauk-Soba, he became known as Drag, which is like the biggest honor in Hawk-

¹⁴ lykn'eh: of little or no consequence, a contraction of "like eh" (adjective); as an interjection it means "whatever"

¹⁵ soba: huge, vast; also, awesome (adjective); "mauk-soba" means either/both "fucking huge" or/and "fucking awesome"

ish titles and all. “Drag,” see, stands for dragon, and for townhawks to say someone is a dragon at something is to say that they have mastered it totally. They are the foremost awesome person at that particular skill or in that particular area. It’s a big deal with us, and it started with Hugh Thompson.

Hugh and Badger both grew up in the central city, near the academic district, where all the universities are. That’s where Sain-Dokka worked (she was an academic smooglee, remember?), and this was how they met Sain-Dokka. Hugh and Badger weren’t friends, though; no, far from it. In the central city, there were two gangs of hooligans: There were Badger’s Town Kings and Hugh’s Hawks. They had a bitter rivalry, but both Badger and Hugh, for all that they hated each other, were reasonable guys. They realized that rivalries can be good things – sharing an enemy keeps a group together, after all – but they also knew that a rivalry that gets out of hand can end up exploding like a father-mauker. So they kept a tight reign on their people, and so they had a very successful go of it. Well, they each met Sain-Dokka independently, and so them and their respective crews were the first to receive Sain-Dokka’s cure, coz they were her test subjects. She had a general idea of how to reverse the Lingban, see, but she had to try some different things out to perfect it; and even once she had it, it didn’t work the same for everybody. Working with the different Townies and Hawks was how she figured it all out.

Well, when the Fundikon sent out the ping condemning Sain-Dokka, the first to show up at her door were Badger and Hugh. They were both of them boarders and both of them urban acrobats, so they got their before the prawlie could arrive to take her. They took her out through the window, and that night they assembled their two gangs with a very simple directive to perform a very unsimple task: They had to unite that night in order to smuggle Sain-Dokka out of the city. And they did it too.

Word spread quicker than a shorda¹⁶ social disease, and that’s when the hooligans united, and they did so under the leadership of Badger of the Townies and Hugh of the Hawks. Yeah, I see you: You got where this is going!

They couldn’t get Sain-Dokka through the buildings, coz the prawlie were mauk-mauk everywhere, but the rooftops were the last place the Fundikon believed an educated academic smooglee would go. See, the Fundikon and all the people who still believe in the Fundikon ideals (yeah, they still exist), well they all seem to think that respectable people (and Sain-Dokka, despite being totally against them and despite consorting with hooligans, was a very respectable person) all think and act like the Fundikon thinks they should think and act. This, of course, means that they think and act like how the Fundikon thinks and acts. This ain’t true though. I mean pish, man! Nobody thinks and acts like the Fundikon except the Fundikon! Well... that isn’t strictly true. But still, it’s far from everyone, I’ll tell you that!

So in the Mauk-Soba, the Fundikon would have never in a million fwumph-wumph¹⁷ years have thought of going on the rooftops. That just wasn’t what respectable people did. Therefore, they didn’t expect that Sain-Dokka ever would, and so they left the rooftops unchecked. I know right? Ignorant pish¹⁸, the lot of them! Not that I’m complaining of course; no, I’m definitely not complaining.

To give you a picture of how mauk-mauk soba¹⁹ Newton-Quain is (in case you ain’t never heard), going from rooftop to rooftop on foot, from center to outer wall,

16 shorda: bitch; derogatory term for a woman (noun)

17 fwumph-wumph: motherfucking (adjective)

18 pish: while it means “shit!” as interjection, in this context, it is being used as the noun, where it means “shithead”

19 mauk-mauk soba: fucking huge (adjectival phrase); use of “mauk-mauk” here instead of “mauk” is no doubt to distinguish this ordinary term from the proper name of the Mauk-Soba, the term for the Exodus of “Sain-Dokka”

took Badger, Hugh, and Sain-Dokka five and a half days.

It's a sith-mauk-sith²⁰!

Once they got Sain-Dokka out, it isn't really clear where they took her, but they kept her safe. Hugh didn't return to the city when Badger did, for it'd been decided that he would stay with Sain-Dokka, accompanied by a small detachment of the very best members of all the gangs. They would protect Sain-Dokka, and I don't think there was ever any doubt that any of them would have given their lives for Sain-Dokka if it came to that. For some of them, it did come to that, and they gave their lives readily.

The gangs had already started to defer to Hugh and Badger (and, of course, to Sain-Dokka herself), and once they'd gotten Sain-Dokka to safety, the gangs gathered all of them together for the first time in one of the old ruined out small-towns that used to make up the old world²¹. There were thousands of teenagers there, and hundreds and hundreds of gangs. In the most miraculously united vote of like ever, all the gangs agreed that they would rally under Hugh and Badger. It was then that Hugh was given his moniker, and they became Drag and Badger, the two former enemies that became co-rulers. The two gangs of Drag and Badger were, if you remember, the Hawks and the Town Kings. The other gangs, in joining under the two, became both Townies and Hawks, although many also kept their original names as well. But together, those two names made them Townhawks. Made us Townhawks.

Badger died after returning to the city. The Fundikon found him and killed him. They couldn't find Hugh or Sain-Dokka, and kept on not being able to find

20 sith-mauk-sith: "huge fucking city" (noun phrase); for the distinction between the different terms for large cities, please see the nota bene under "sithsith" in the Glossary

21 small-towns that used to make up the old world: as narrator was born after Upheaval of Urbanization, this is presumably how narrator's generation sees the suburbs of the old world

them until it was too late. Sain-Dokka and Hugh and their band of protectors traveled far and wide, and everywhere they arrived they left having freed a sobamao'ent²² of people. By the time the Fundikon found Sain-Dokka and Hugh it was far too late. The Fundikon was gone within five or so years, and the government was back to the way it always been: Corrupt enough on its own, not needing help from nobody.

And the townhawks? Well, we're still around too, of course! We're no longer one nation, now that there's no need for us to be. I suppose we could be again. We certainly would be if it were Sain-Dokka who called us. But Hugh? I don't even know if he's still alive. If he is, he's old now, all that being over and done thirty-five years ago. He's well over twenty-eight, so to townhawks, that makes him a full adult. He may even be bonded! No, townhawks don't rally for full adults. Well, except for Sain-Dokka. See, she's an adult, but she's also Sain-Dokka.

I mean, like I said, it's totally possible that the townhawks could unite again, but we're teenagers, lazy, irreverent teenagers. There's no way we'd unite just to do it, coz uniting takes a sobafwumph²³ of time and effort, a sobafwumph we aren't readily inclined to give, most days. Given that, the person to call us together would have to be a very specific sort of person. If not Sain-Dokka, then they'd have to be kit²⁴ beyond belief.

The only person I know of who maybe could have come close to the sort of acclaim needed would probably be a man called Treius Piquescent, but whose name – whose townhawk-granted moniker – was Drag-Hawk.

22 sobamao'ent: a huge number, a huge amount, usually of people (adjective); a large crowd

23 sobafwumph: literally, "huge things"; a huge amount of things, usually of non-people (adjective); a large bundle of things (noun)

24 kit: cat (noun); also, excellent, cool, admirable (adjective). In the current context, the adjective is more applicable

Degora Anderson
A LETTER TO MY MOTHER

As his name suggests (given what I've already told you about the townhawk "culture" heroes), Treius Piquescent was a master, a man truly skilled and excellent in one area, for in his moniker he bore the title of Drag, or "dragon."

The area of his mastery? Flite.

I been dying to write my mother a letter forged with a signature of approval from God just to be accepted..

Dear Mommy,

I was accepted to 17 colleges and fixed with four different scholarships and I never heard a congratulations. Suffered four years of bipolarity and question mark years of an undiagnosed sleep apnea. Becoming a child who enjoys breaking teeth more than building them and still... I stand here.

Bloodied knuckles here, damaging an irritated cavity of innocent victims I am still begging to be friends with. Still moisturizing the fact that I cannot keep a friend even if they were to be my guardian angel.

I can never be this child from God, just God's child. Just a child of God. I was trying to drill each lyric of the bible in this journeyed mind of mine but it has been impossible to adapt to a title that has nothing to do with what I hear..

I was your child... your baby. But I am too slick to be the daughter of an angel. I can only smell the blood of your womb that I left damaged May 29th, 1992. I am the cause of an irritating echo that is heard every time I make you go hungry.

You can mistake this letter as an apology but I swear that this is my own confession standing here with hand to heart since I do not believe bibles are fully covering an agnostic like me.

I was your child who was taught that separating after 9 months and 11 days of sweating in a womb that compares to the fire of 9.11 made me the metal that tore down your spine to envelop what is left of its melting ashes.

Mommy, I have been dying quicker than you think. The further from you I get the worse I twitch with an unfriendly heart burn and it feels like when I was your fetus again. Your antidotes could not calm a fire of me actually missing you. I been missing the home my soul rested in before I became who I am today.

I was never given the chance to endure crystallization to be tougher than any slave traded diamond that JayZ supports and sports on his breaking wrists and cranking necks.

I am heavier than that.

So I salute you, greater than I did America in 6th grade, and I stand before you as a girl who did nothing but try her best to please you. An 18 year old, standing as a cylinder on this stage to make you proud as your daughter, another child's mentor, teacher and friend.

Mesmerized by families and their taunts and stares to ruin me. I am proving that I am able to articulate a flow without having to swear or excuse a French that was never even spoken. I am a daughter, one who couldn't live up to her name's definition but for once... I can say I am proud of myself and mean it. I know you are proud of me... So congratulations to your mothering natures.

Love Degora...

Signed your Father, (dont forget to capitalize the F)

P.S. - This is for any mother who swore their children hated them, for any mother who thinks they are unappreciated. Do not weigh your head down...

Degora Anderson

RIFF

I often repeat myself
and the second time it's
a lie.
I love you.
I love you.
see what I mean I don't
...and I do.
You see I'm not just a girl who
likes to lie to people that seem to
love her back. It's just me breaking
the rhythms of truth versus lie.
Letting a contradiction form in my
mouth like a dead beat form fitting
father who tends to repeat himself
all the time. Where every time some
one is stabbed the first time each
suspect realizes what they are doing and
cries when the first wound wasn't their
perfect kill. Continuing to stab sharp points
to violate the toxins in that victim's blood
just to hide their testimonies, just so they wouldn't
live through the pain. Left thinking they were helping
them and grow the thoughts of a serial killer.
There is always repetition in a life-altering speech,
action or melody. And the second time it's a lie.
I would always pray myself to sleep having to

repeat myself. I feel like I have lied to God all
my life. There is no rhyming rhythm in my oratory
life just doesn't rhyme sometimes it's not that
easy. Don't let children's books fool you.
Your vocals are just contradictory fairytales
two story versions of the same thing but
number two is just you throwing your truths away.
Where calling someone's name leaves them walking
after your scream reverberates twice
as hard leaving you to taste the rapist's breath
as he continues to dehumanize your voice box's
ability to vibrate words that actually mean
something to people who stress to listen. Instead
I am forced to regurgitate a lie whenever I
swallow my own truths. If you know me... I never
say I am brokenhearted more than once because
when your heart is broken you plant seeds in the cracks
and you pray for rain and that can only happen once.
And the 2nd time I would add that on to this
Christmas list of lies that are scrolled in the buds of
my tongue just engraved there, to be the tombstone
of my first words, phrases and song. Poem if
I repeat the words in the same order. And I
never rhyme life doesn't rhyme. Because that
is me being greedy of rhythm and life. I can't even
repeat a chorus. That means I will be singing free verse.

I never was given the same bridge to cross my raging rivers
although the structure was the same the bricks were in
reverse. I just rhymed my two most sacred secrets.
Life is not supposed to rhyme
Life is not supposed to rhyme
this music score won't even let the same be
played in the same bar.
I am screaming like caged birds. Birds that are mocking
the breaking of my voice box, who love to be trapped,
who love to let us hear what we sound like.
They sound just like us.
The second time it's a lie.
They said 2 was where I began to lie.
It's reverse psychology in reverse/
It becomes perfect when they tell you that.
I imagine Hitler at 7 years old praying to be an artist he
always wanted to be at 7 years old...
more than once.
The second time is a lie. I just want every little girl
to scream without the first being a lie.
Third time is not a charm it's an exaggeration.
We are living in moral stories or Little Boy Cried Wolf.
Maybe Shannon wouldn't have died if she only
screamed once, those neighbors would have
listened and wouldn't have thought those yells
were adolescent acts of foreplay. We need to

hear stories more than once to gain a full perspective.
The second time is fiction, we can never hear a real story
now-a-days. The second time's a lie.
Life was never made to rhyme.
Life was never made to rhyme.
The second time is a lie.
I learned that your second is a lie and this life
is your first so don't repeat your actions too
much. And you should learn this too.
Because September 30th, 2008 was when clear screams
for help became a lie. React on the first call...
You just might save a life...

Helen Keusch
MORE OXYGEN

In the evening, cigarette smoke softens the light
of the lamppost.
Bare branches ripple in the reflection
on the cement, more beautiful than reality, because life
is easier in fragment. I make insecurity into a fulltime job,
outthinking my own emotions, and sometimes
I can't tell where the world stops and I begin.
The edges of the negative are undefined,
and I find pieces of myself sometimes hiding
in the pockets of old jeans or my mother's purse.
One was in the pantry next to the raspberry jam,
and another in his teeth.

There is something instinctive
in the way one needs another, and something old in the search.
That night we lay in the tall grass beneath the black sky
seemed like a good night to me. Like kids,
we made believe that we were free, and you left my arms
around your neck.
You always look back at me as you're walking away,
and I want to know: are you and I
something—something I can hold
tight against my palm like a warm stone,
and open to look and know that it is mine?

Laurie told me I was something, worth something.
Not to be sold to the lowest bidder,
but I could never take in and feel those words of hers inside of me
and so because they had no weight I couldn't listen
and was given
away to the bidders and sinners and winners
or losers—but, each coming away with more of them
and less of me.
And the right thing is hard to find
when you not only don't know where to look
but how to look.
How to even know yourself well enough
to know what would be good for you.

Because when I was small I would lift my feet
up in my mother's car when we drove over
train tracks and she would say "make a wish."
And I think I wished for this.
And I wish there was a better word in this language
for exactly what this is.
You see, I wanted to finally be worthy of the secret,
like I would hear it whispering in my ear you may now conquer me, but
my ears and mouth remained full of only questions.

But maybe now I know a little more than I did,
because I know even a day

is too long to go without you, and I know
that shiver that ripples through me
when that fingertip brushes behind my ear,
I know all four of your different laughs,
that when your breath lays heavy on my neck,
the rest of the world shifts so that it is beneath me.
I know that you bring everything
from perfect stillness to roaring blaze, and that
you must photosynthesize
because when I am with you there is more oxygen in the world.
When I am with you I am naked, mask-less,
in my most unadulterated form,
and sometimes it scares me,
but it never scares you.

Some nights I burn at both ends,
and some nights I make sure I am alone
so that I can cry in peace for the loss of her.
I know that we both have changing to do
and might very well grow away,
but until the moment when we recognize that has happened,
let's know one another.
Like the old light from the stars that has a cut-off point
sometime in the future, but until then is as bright as ever,
let me have something
to hold against my palm and trust its shape and color,

and continue being able to feel
that lift in my chest
I hadn't even realized had been weighed down
until you're here with me again.

Julia Mogerma
FROZEN WATERFALLS

The dams were frozen waterfalls when you arrived,
eleven avalanches of ice waiting to crash back into the river.

You said the sun shines the brightest on the coldest days of winter,
and that's when you lit my monochromatic December on fire.

My mind dripped with color.
Too much color.
Too much paint for my palette, too much oil on my canvas.
Yet I was fascinated,
captivated,
high on the madness and the downpour that left my mind buzzing into the early hours
of the following day.

No matter how much color I had, I simply desired more.

I woke up and craved tangible tints and values,
wishing for the ability to hold color in my hands, to feel the weight of the acrylics
before I smeared them across a giant blank page as the excess built up between my
fingers.

I wanted to paint with the hues of everything I had ever touched,
for the canvas to play the music in my head out loud,
and I blame it all on you.

Eventually the sun regained its authority,
but you weren't there when I went to watch the rapids melt.

So I sat there alone,
My thoughts beautiful pieces of broken glass,
glittering like the edges of the northern lights,
as I waited for the sun to set.

Sylvia Gindick

DOLORES MOFFAT, RICHARD CARELESS & THE END OF THE WORLD

My grandmother, Dolores Moffat, is seventy-nine years old and convinced that the world is going to end in one year. That she managed to survive for all these years despite the relentless threats of everyday life, like Salmonella poisoning or slipping on an overly polished floor, is an astonishing feat in itself. Dolores has always felt a certain foreboding, a sense that her time is drawing near, so when she shuffled out of her local grocery store a few years ago and saw the flyer on her windshield reading, “The world, as we know it, will end cataclysmically on December 21, 2012. How will you prepare?” she was comforted by the fact that everyone was doomed to go with her.

One might gather from her stark white bowl-cut underscored by startlingly black and bushy eyebrows that my grandmother tends to hold divergent views from those around her. As an elder, she feels responsible to impart the particular wisdom of her years to her grandchildren and our parents. So, once a month, Dolores will check in to make sure we’re well earned of whatever she feels to be critical information at any given moment.

“Sylvia? Is that you? What a horrible connection.”

“Hi, Gammie. How are you?”

“I don’t know...” she sighs. “The end of the world is nearing.”

“What?”

“The end of the world is nearing, Sylvia.”

“Oh, um.”

“It’s happening. The earth shifts every 2600 years. Haven’t you learned about the Ice Age? How have you not learned about the Ice Age? I hope you at least know something about the Mayans, the most advanced ancient civilization. Their calendar ends in 2012. And then you have to think about Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami,

earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, nine-eleven...”

“Nine-eleven wasn’t a natural disaster.”

“It’s the disintegration of man and nature all building up to the end!”

“Oh.”

“When you go to college, focus on agriculture. Take survival classes. Do your friends know about this? Make sure they know. Tell your mother to buy a cow and chickens so you can produce your own food.”

Phone calls like this make my grandmother feel she is doing her part.

Dolores’ second husband is Richard Careless. Richard, a frail British man with a long face and boyish, bunny-toothed grin, is fifteen years younger than my grandmother. Being of an awfully mild temperament himself, Richard generally seems to respond to his wife’s unabashed nature with guilty delight. He will blush and chuckle at an unexpected, “My God, Richard, your nipples are showing!” But if Dolores yells from her pink armchair that “television stations should stop broadcasting fat people” because no one wants to see that—so that the neighbors taking a walk outside can hear her—Richard is silent, and the skin drooped over his jaw quivers slightly. Though purely speculation, I have often imagined that if one were to glance sideways through the slit of an open door and find Richard alone sitting in a chair, one might catch him in the most intimate of moments. The flesh of his fingers might stretch thin over his sharp white knuckles as he grips the arms of his chair; his mouth might twitch and his sagging flesh might tremble around his thin white lips; his eyes might glint, wild and unfamiliar, as they stare straight ahead at the white wall; but then, Richard might snap his neck to the right, and whatever flame had surged through him might be quietly tucked away behind his soft disposition.

While the holiday season is often the most frenzied and stimulating time of year for grandparents, it is the most peaceful and blissful time in the little blue house at

the end of Lilac Street. At Christmastime the basement becomes Richard's sanctuary. He glues green paper to the floor and sets up an intricate world of train tracks and tunnels, then sits contentedly on a stool in the corner and watches his train chug, chug, chug in figure eights, over Styrofoam hills, through plastic tubes, around, around, and around. While Richard is in the basement, Dolores is upstairs arranging a holiday village on the fireplace mantel, trimming the cotton ball snow if it extends beyond the marble, and arranging the tiny, happy people in some particular manner, perhaps by height, perhaps by hair color.

Richard and Dolores share an intense desire to keep their home meticulously clean. In fact, every time I visit I cannot help but wonder where all their trash goes. Dolores becomes so anxious at the thought of germs that when my mother was a child my grandmother once held the cat to the floor and vacuumed its belly to keep it from shedding on the furniture. The cat may or may not have developed PTSD. More recently, my younger sister leaned against the living room wall in my grandmother's house and, though Dolores had been very absorbed in her morning crossword puzzle just seconds before, her beady eyes darted up with reptilian-like speed beneath her menacing black brows, and she barked at my sister to move, she was getting the wall dirty. My sister moved, but she began to cry, for in Dolores' voice there had been an alarming brusqueness, a near savagery, that one would never expect to reside in the cavernous depths beyond a grandmother's pastel purple sweater.

Richard shares his wife's anxieties about hygiene and order, but his particular obsession is the garden. Richard and Dolores visit the nursery regularly and have the most abundant and colorful garden on the street. The last time I visited, I walked into the kitchen one afternoon to find Richard standing silently by the window overlooking this garden. I could see his face, but his fists were clenched and the back of his neck was deep crimson. The color burned slowly up his flesh, enflaming his ears and finally

his entire head. Leaning forward slightly, I glimpsed the object of Richard's rage. It was a rabbit. A rabbit, nibbling on Richard's hydrangeas.

While emotions run high in the little blue house at the end of Lilac Street, I try to imagine the scrupulous routines of Dolores and Richard as they hide the trash and kill the germs lurking in their home. I try to imagine Dolores hunched over the kitchen sink, sponging the grime off each plate and polishing each to its purest state, only moving onto the next once she can see her own reflection in its shining surface. I try to imagine Richard on his hands and knees in earth, frantically digging hole after hole of varied depth and width fit to each respective plant, only resting once he is sure that the roots can stretch as deeply as necessary for the plant to receive the nourishment it will need. I have found that after such considerations have been made, it becomes easier to sympathize with the rage bound to bubble up through the fissures of these existences, now and again.

Sam Walker
HOUSE OF GOD

“Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise?” –Wallace Stevens “Sunday Morning”

The House of God was born of destruction. As close as I was to my grandfather as a child, I always knew that he wore many faces, and changed who he was based on his elusive and unpredictable moods. My mother remembers not getting to open gifts on Christmas because my grandpa wasn't in the right mind and getting left at Sunday School and never getting picked up. When my grandfather got angry, and when one of his kids went against his often ridiculous orders (tedious chores that could last many hours), he would react physically and emotionally. My mother once said that when she was a kid she wished that her dad would go away forever. My grandpa was a cold, horrifying power in the lives of his children. He would beat his kids just 'cause he didn't feel too good on a particular day. I'm not completely sure (because my mom refuses to tell even my father), but I think he beat his kids pretty bad. I've got an uncle who doesn't talk to my family anymore because, as my mother tells me, my grandpa messed him up way too bad. There was little love or compassion in my grandpa's interaction with his children. I venture to guess that simple fears and frustrations were not met with comfort by my grandfather, but that he himself was the source of the greatest and deepest fears and frustrations my mother and her siblings could have.

I was born into the House of God. When we attended church with my grandfather, it was usually in an old cathedral in Saginaw, and it was usually because he had contributed to the mass in memory of my grandmother. Driving to Saginaw was never a pleasant activity. The skies are always grey in Saginaw, Michigan, and the brown and tan buildings and strip malls erected in the 1970s never do anything to improve

my spirits. The church, however, is a very old and beautiful bastion of Catholic faith. Beneath high vaulted ceilings are rows of old oak pews and kneelers, and on the walls, shown in stained glass, are the Stations of the Cross. The beautiful, thin, divine figure of Jesus Christ carries his cross across the walls of the church until he reaches the point of his crucifixion. But when my family attended the shortened mass dedicated to my grandmother we made our way up to a small white room in the back of the church.

My grandfather's funeral was held in the same Saginaw Church where we had attended occasional daytime mass. His casket took the same place on the altar as had my grandmother's before him. The snow that day came down constant and unapologetic, and made the roads indiscernible from the rest of the white landscape. Very few attended my grandfather's funeral because of the snowfall. His only son turned his car around halfway to Saginaw from Lansing. The attendees were mostly my close family and relations. It was a disparate small collection of people from my grandfather's past. I was introduced to a Korean laundrywoman who had run a business next to my grandfather's office in Saginaw, childhood friends of my mother and aunts, and any companions he still had left in the area. It must be lonely to get old. The few of us who made it to the service huddled together in the giant church, leaving most of the pews empty, a strange family of humanity drawn in from the winter cold. My grandfather's casket was left closed because my mom always said that your last image of a person shouldn't be their dead pale face. I'm not sure what final image of him I keep inside of my mind. As the snow fell outside on the House of God, we eulogized a man whose life failed to fit into the traditional funereal statements. Sometimes they forget to heat the House of God.

Heaven and beauty somehow live beside abusive fathers, wasted days, and stock portfolios. Everyday life finds us stuck in sterile and boring routines, not on

some mountaintop finding the light of truth. Those of us who have had to undergo no true torture or trouble, stand beneath images of the torn, gaunt, and holy face of Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns. These images of beauty seem in such discordance with the actions of we human beings, and this gap between the ideal and the actual is great and visible. This ideal of morality and purity was introduced to me by a man who fractured his family and couldn't cope with the turmoil of his own mind. Proclamations of deliverance entered my ears because of this man who dealt in self-destruction and the abject abuse to those who loved him. It is a strange and unsure house of God we now live in.

Sam Walker
TEMPERANCE
(HIGH WINDS IN LOW PLACES)

Poor Boy John
They told him he could ride into the sun
Sang him songs of wild horses
And surrounded him with dog faced officers
Of the steel jaw marketplace
Where, my pale faced friend, is the meat of the matter?

Ah Poor Boy John, the war ended right when you arrived
We had just shook hands and called it an afternoon
When came you riding down from the pockmarked hills
I leave you now to arm chair battles
To crafted enemies disguised
In the backrooms of your days

You were born with a heart of broken traps, John
A dull blade, and eyes that set the stars ablaze
There were those times, I know
When the days of autumn fire
Lit up your eyes to climb the highest places under heaven
Those days are flown away

And you know, Poor Boy John, I am sorry
You deserved a different world
Cause the fires don't burn on them calendar days

The people kinda smolder, don't they John?
The wind doesn't feel so cold now, the dark doesn't seem so dark
And I don't blame you John, for taking these half phantoms
And galloping at 'em with the strength
Of a sad tiger in a zoo-cage

John Bohn

I'LL PROVE YOU WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG

I have heard of heavenly eddies,
seen them slapped on
10 cent postcards – please
forgive me. I still must go
and see them for myself.

I know this talk in the living room,
with you all dressed up, candles burning
the scent of lavender oceans,
our last night, is your last effort.
You look beautiful, but I need to go.

And after tin can hysteria, bright lights,
and heights unknown, I'll return –
these days I usually do –
to see your pretty face smile at the world,
and I'll smile too, for I'll know it's there.

Visbruta Kulkarni

PENDULUM

India was a country where diversity and unity lived in harmony. The emphasis on work culture as well as roots kept the society together. Parents inculcated children with traditional values, but each generation was expected to carry out leaps of progress. Competition was the bane of existence, and Indians thrived on it. The frenzy of making a child work for school, as well as finding the time to compare him or her to a friend's kids took up a majority of energy and ingenuity. As children, we had to live up to our glorified names. As friends, well there were no friends, only competitors. Even as kids, we were shrewd about studying. Groups and dependency were not even considered, an independent struggle to the top was all that counted. It was the only way colleges would accept us, with a 97% on our report cards and every sign of having no soul. Depth and breadth of character were disregarded, because good grades really showed personality. Or that was what I believed. Until seventh grade, I focused on academics so much that I found me losing myself to it. My friends had already turned out to be traitors, when it came to the time when the rivalry really built up, and board exams were on the horizon. They can make or break a child's life in India; they broke my trust in relationships. My parents were proud owners of successful report cards, and I was a well-functioning robot of efficiency. Ask me to touch a football instead of a textbook, however, and fear would be slashed across my face.

I call India home, and lived there until 2005 swept over with a boom in the economy. India was advertised, people were outsourced, and lives were changed. My family was one of these, in a nation of millions of families. Immersed in the material life of the South Bombay socialites at school, change was welcomed in the form of Switzerland.

In India, I could speak in Hindi and oil my hair like everyone else in India did. But in our new home in Switzerland, I couldn't go to school with my hair anything

short of perfect. I could eat with my hands in India. In Switzerland I used a fork to eat fries. I couldn't go out with my friends because I was vegetarian. I couldn't be seen out with my parents in front of friends, and I had to be too cool to care. But my parents were sending me to a good school to learn, achieve an education and be successful. So secretly, I did care. I listened and wrote and read and got good grades. This seemed to baffle the Swiss. My quietness emerged with certificates, and I was finally seen. My friendships were still based on what I brought to the table, and nobody was to be trusted. My friend broke her back, and I went to the hospital and sat with her for two hours, but when I stopped helping her with math, earlier favors were forgotten.

My home-self and my school-self, Indian me and Swiss me, further divided into another aspect of a "me". The broken transition Europe had put me through had to go through another one, back in Asia. After three years of remodeling, restyling, and constant analyzing, I had to leave behind a huge lexicon of my different phases in Switzerland and head back to Asia. I would no longer take the Forchbahn at Stadelhofen Train Station to go to Zumikon, where my school was. Bellevue and Burkliplatz would have one less teenager sitting on the grassy fields in front of the lake every weekend. Bahnhofstrasse, adjacent to Burkliplatz, would not be my shopping central anymore. Instead, I would actually see malls at Orchard Road in Singapore. I would take the MRT to school and SBS Transit would provide me with a constant stream of buses.

Snow was replaced by rain, and winter jackets with shorts. Singapore was the hub of activity, being a trade centre in the world. Immigrants from all over the world called it home, and in a place as small as Singapore everyone crossed paths. On the first day of school a rumor went around that I was Swedish-Indian, and everyone ran to me to see what I would look like. Disappointment was written all across their faces when I said "100% Indian". Wrong impression, first day. But Singapore is not rigid, it

Vishruta Kulkarni
PAINT ME PURPLE

is not surrounded by a barrier of ice-cold mountains mirrored in the people of Switzerland. Everyone is warm and tropical, an island of independence yet functionality. Gone were the elitist cliques and high school bickering. Groups were now formed by ethnicity, the Asians with the Asians and the Europeans with their own kind. Stuck in between, I rallied between the two.

Rocky shores of expectations and mile high currents of high school relationships made achievement a challenge. I had to find the balance between giving my friends time and myself, too. My parents' demands escalated with the importance of grades in high school. I had to "hold up to the Kulkarni name," and "show the world where I came from," my father said. He was proud of his legacy, and my mom of her upbringing. My success somehow solidified their life achievements. I failed and they failed; it was a chain reaction that could either destroy or create a new sense of confidence. Every test put the character of my entire family on the line, and I had just a pen to channel my thoughts in black and white. No pressure.

Vish, Vishruta, Vishy, they all lived in one body, with separate minds and behaviors. The imminent need to go through these transformations is rooted in the fact that I simply had to. There was no better way to get involved with the world around me, especially when I was alien to it. I had to find the degree to which I could go back to my Indian-self and immediately step into my immigrant shoes. Every situation called for oscillation into and out of this three-way positioning. The pendulum swings, and the clock is reset, but I don't forget how my nuts and bolts work. I remember that the screws that join my parts show where I was born.

Black is dominant, as much as white is pure. Red is extreme, blue is turbulent. Green is fertile, and brown is grounded. Yellow is optimistic, purple is powerful. Sometimes a yellow person ignites red, and a purple dissolves into brown. Transitions occur and colors change with people, with moods, with situations. The sky could be blue for a moment and then, suddenly, thunders grey shrieks onto Earth. It is the balance of color that creates the illusion of life.

If I were a color I would be purple. Or maybe a little bit of orange. But nobody gets to choose. The cat that chose to stalk me on my way to school every day was black as soot, and the dogs I played with shine yellow. Brown is layered; many people say it is the color of the perfect boyfriend: sensitive, grounded, reliable. Boring. I want someone red, a bit blue too.

I live in a world where colors tell stories, and a black and white one just doesn't seem to describe things well enough. Apparently I eat in colors too. My broccoli was yellow and, oh god, my pizza was blue. Hunger escaped from my grip of reality, I couldn't be eating this food.

I walked back to my dorm, waiting for the blue of my room, the yellow of my roommate, and the black cloaks adorned by the stack of books on my desk. Tiredness was creeping deviously onto me, muting my colors and silencing my purple. In one moment everything was dull. My sepia-tinted glasses were off and all the vitality, vividness of my surroundings was gone. All colors almost out of sight now; everyone is dull and hazy.

I used to be a red, maybe a green. Now I glow purple. Because people change with time, and experiences changed me. The struggle of parents, death, stress, imbalance; I went through phases where I was all black or all grey. Grey, it dominates in

the subtlest way. A color taken for granted because it is so dull, almost non-existent, the in-between of white and black. But it finds people and presses them down, sits on them, waiting for them to fight hard enough to stand. People bathed in grey make me sad, make me wish to throw some color onto them, even give them some of mine. On the other hand, people with neon signs pointing to their heads, the ones saturated with narcissistic magenta, make me want to find their volume button and tone them down.

Children make their own vibrant meld of shades with every swimming class they go to, every vase they break, and every piece of fluff they try to swallow. Experiences and age nullify most colors and bring out the one or two that truly define their personality. I know a few people that are still trying on personalities. They haven't found their color yet, and so their colors are translucent, hardly present, like a fish's eye. They adopt the colors of people around them. They do not understand the meaning of having their own shade, but live beneath the auras of others.

White and black are possibly the most misunderstood colors on the spectrum: commercialized by the black of evil and the white of good. White screams to find balance, struggles to include everything it can into itself—much like a prism, where white light is converted into a rainbow. Black is closure, abandonment and loneliness, but with a mask on.

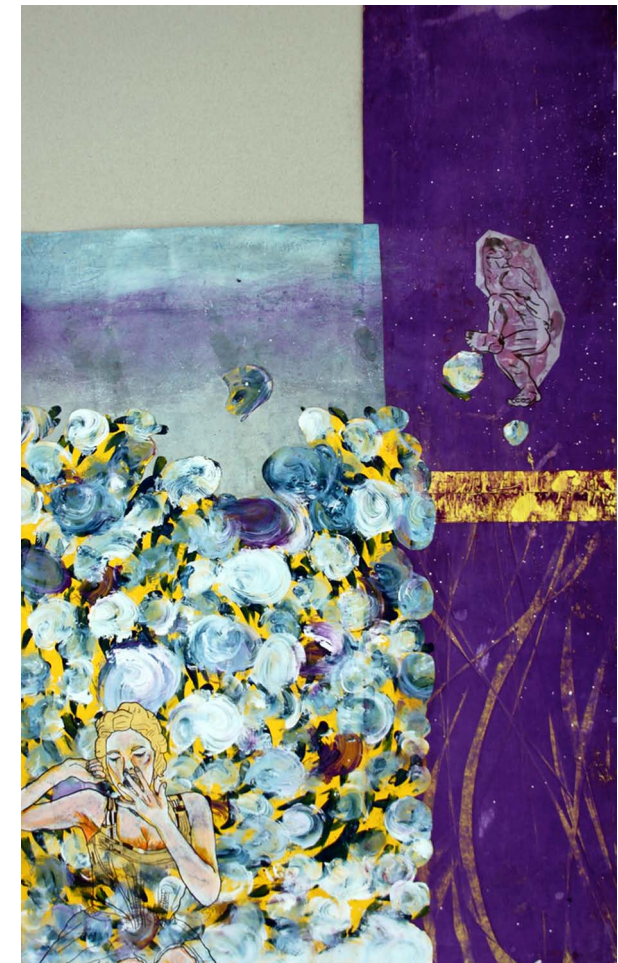
Those with false power cry black before the white of sleep overtakes them.



Kelly Gillikin
SOUND OF SILENCE
ACRYLIC ON WOOD



Jolie Chang
WAR AND PEACE
PAPER TOWEL, TAPE,
RICE GLUE, TEMPERA



Jolie Chang
SPRING AWAKENING
ACRYLIC ON PAPER,
CRAYON, MARKER, PLASTIC



Kristie Dzurnak
TIGER PLUME
LINOLEUM BLOCK PRINT, OIL-
BASED INK ON RICE PAPER



Kristie Dzurnak
WINIFRED
SILK SCREEN PRINT, ACRYLIC
INK ON PAPER



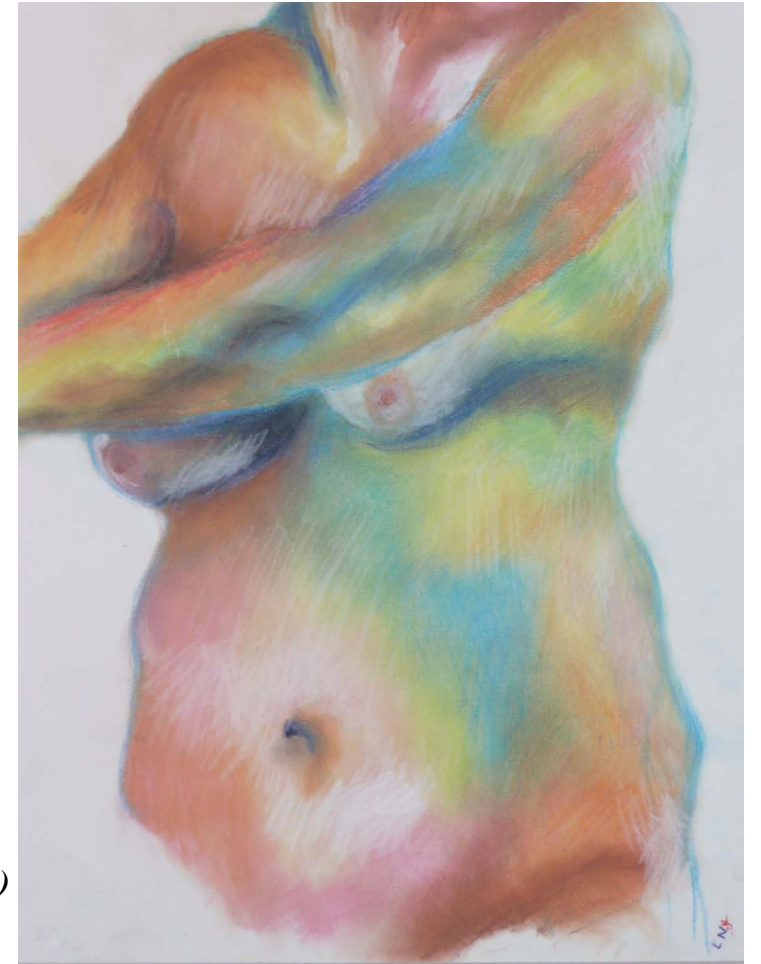
Jamie Goode
SELF
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



Christopher Tran
FROZEN HELL
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH



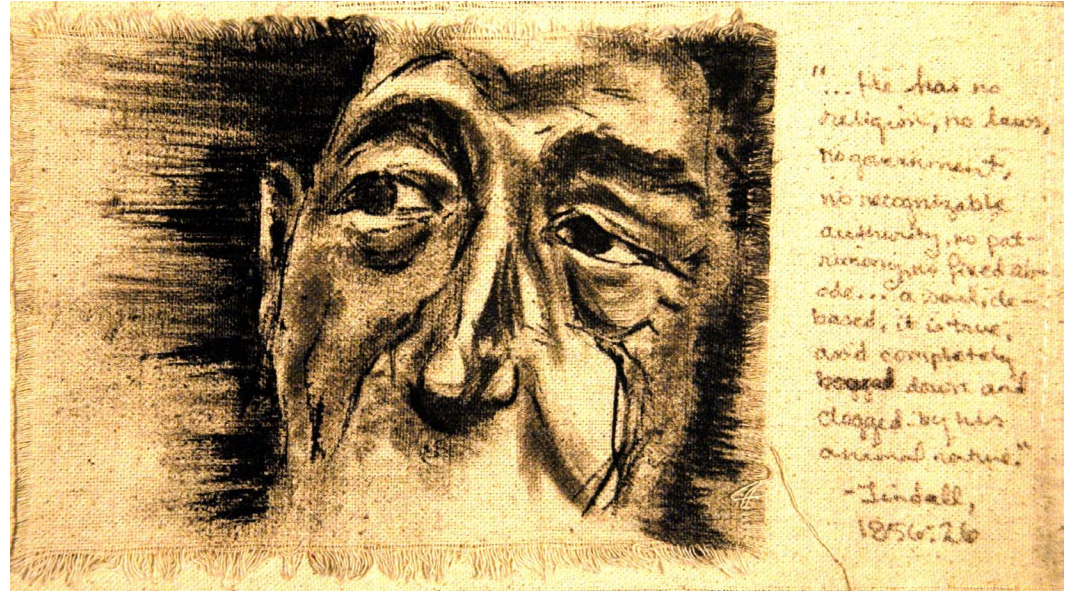
Hannah Wolfson
ZEBRA
STIPPLING



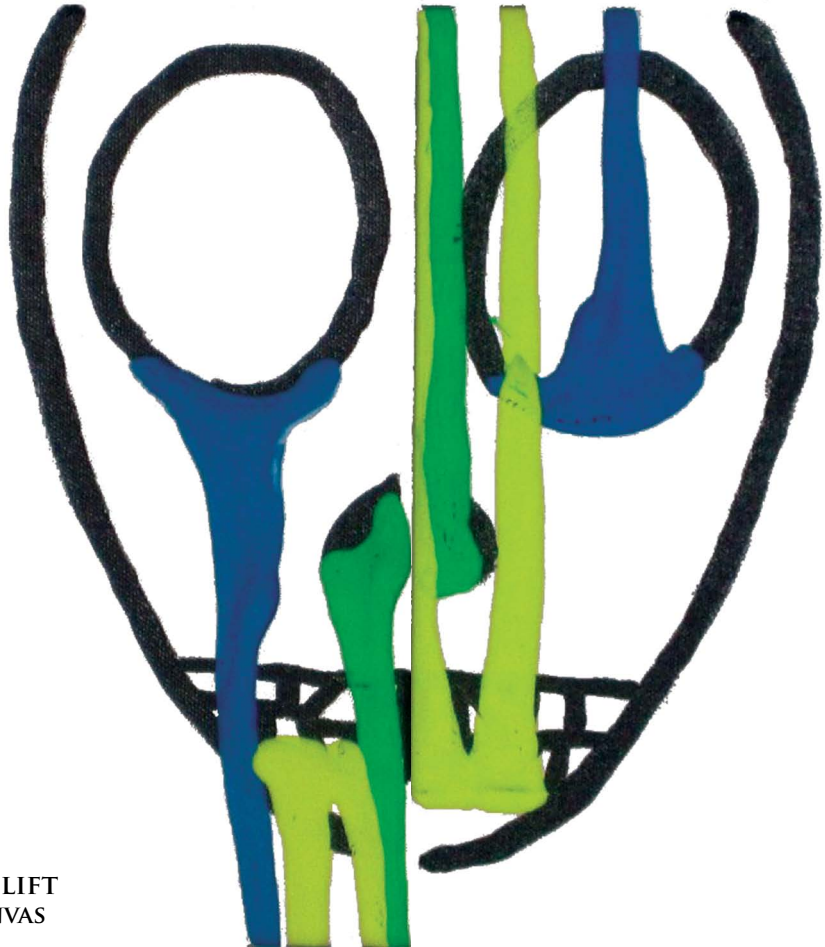
LN (Ellyn Marmaduke)
EXPRESSION
CONTE CRAYON



Krissy Pollock
EXPELLED
INK AND CANVAS



Krissy Pollock
NAPEPE
INK AND CANVAS



Hannab Torres
DOWNLIFT/UPLIFT
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



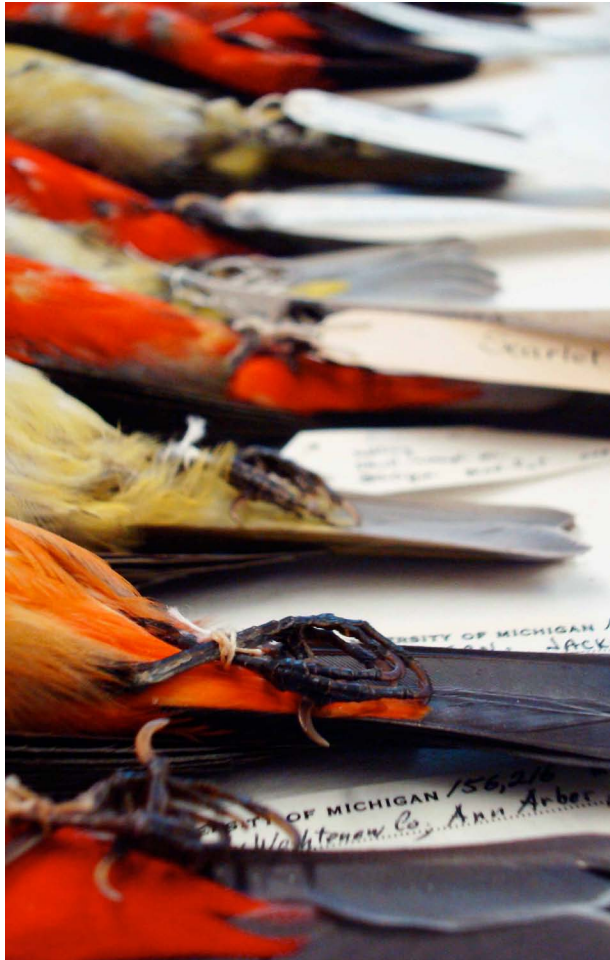
Jackie Vresics
BONEHEAD
OIL PASTEL



Karen Lee
A ROUND TRIP
ACRYLIC PAINT ON
PAPER

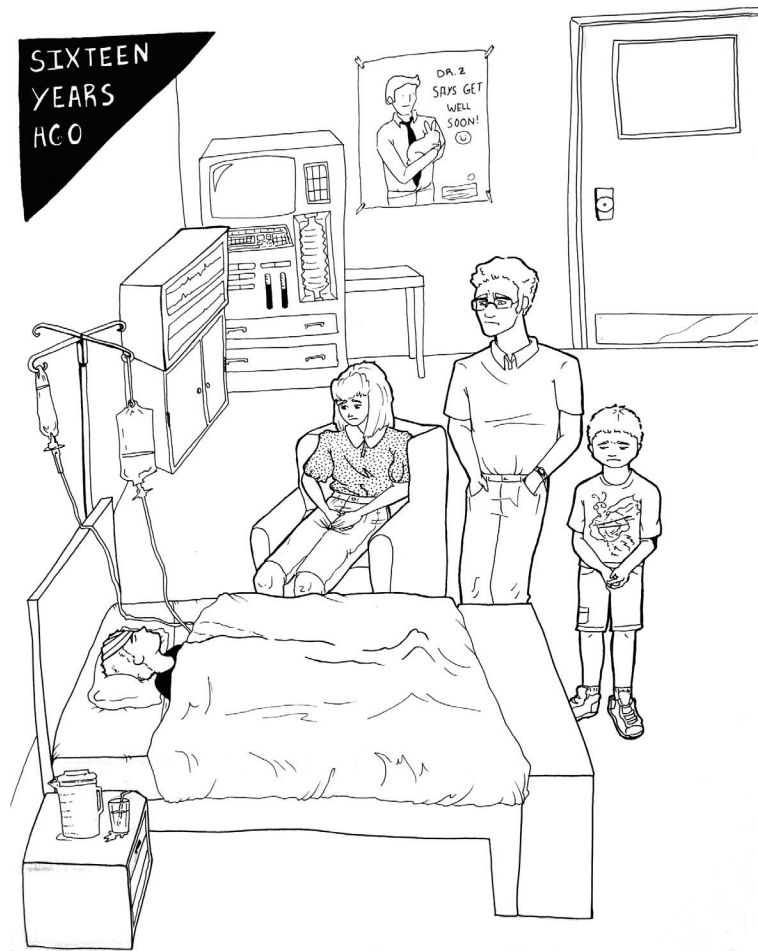


Steve Chesney
TILT SHIFT OF DOMINICA
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

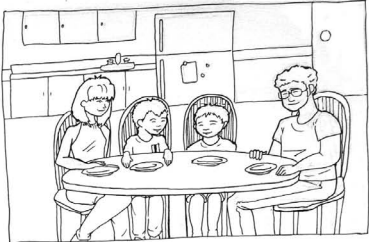
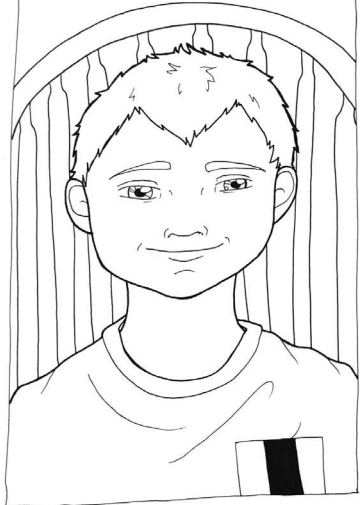


Ashley Allis
FALLEN
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

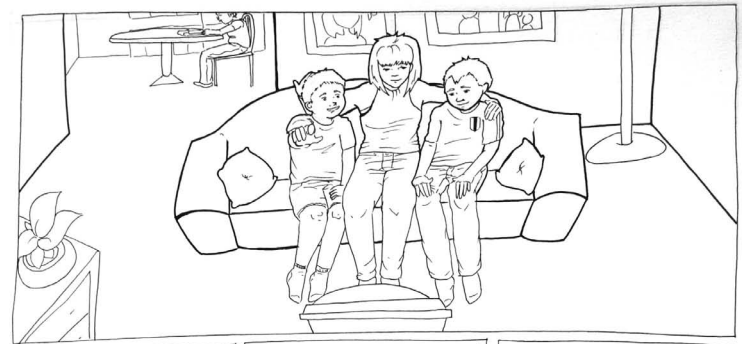
BLOODLINES
A COMIC
Alexandria Peters



THE PREVIOUS NIGHT



WAIT, ISAAC. IT'S YOUR TURN TO DO DISHES.

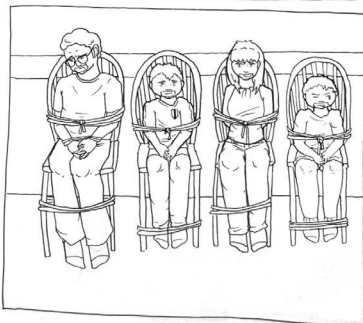


DID YOU JUST SEE
MAX. HAHHAHAHA! DO
YOUR FACE NO
YOU' NEW



E THAT?! THAT WA
N'T BE SUCH
WAX! COM
TO EIGH
THA
RIG





Miguel Pedraza

THE AFTERMATH OF INTRUSION

Forget about me?
I'm your other black son
Dirty spawn
I'm the product of a warring faction
Pulled from the womb
Fingers wrapped around a gun
My father is the monster of unresolved action
My mother lays in tears
Years of pain leave her with scars
She tries to appear brave for her children
But no longer do we see the stars
Those behind her eyes that spoke of pride
The faith that kept us sane inside
At least now it's rare when dad comes around
He doesn't even remember us
We're just on in the background
We've tried our hardest to be noticed
But regarding his attentions
We don't have a bid
Although we feel we are the only ones
He's not the first father with unwanted kid

Lily Bonadonna

BURNING

A girl sits at a diner—it's called Legends. It's just her and a bunch of old people, the type that like to get up at 7:00am and make their way over to a familiar breakfast hub for some eggs with their paper. The place is a block away from her high school. None of the other kids come here because the McMuffins down the street far outweigh the smell of grandparents and peeling brown paint. This is exactly why she likes this place—it's hers to be her.

Above the far back table hangs a black and white poster of six friends laughing over a pot of coffee. They're twenty-something, and each leans in to the other with mouths open and teeth showing. There is a kind of electricity apparent—the kind that only strikes between best friends. They're happy, and they give the diner a kind of homey feel. She sighs a little looking at the poster. She stares until the pixels blur into her peripherals and it loses meaning.

Last night she had to read Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* for English class and it puzzled her. She studied the poem in grade eight and she learned it was about making the right decision, finding your own path, all that going-against-the-crowd kind of stuff. She even had to make a poster of what the poem meant to her, and she decided to do a collage of lettuce vs. hamburgers and cigarettes vs. lollipops. It made sense to her then – the poem that is – but now, it seemed different. She was missing something important.

As she thinks, her fingers stir a wooden stick in a tea mug. A bell rings at the front of the diner: a new customer is in. The sound pulls her out of her mind and back into her seat. She looks up and sees three girls from religion class. Great. They're pretty loud, especially for the morning, and she sinks her gaze down to her lap to avoid eye contact. They sit near the front, where the coffee counter meets the glass window, and order some hard-boiled eggs with grapefruit. Its 8:00 am and she is about ready to

leave. The school bells rings in fifteen minutes, but she can't move now. She's stuck. You eat breakfast alone, and in here? No one wants to eat with you. You can't find anyone, really? Not one person. The scene plays in her mind and glues her hands to her forehead and feet to the ground. She is not moving, not while the girls block the door with fire tongues and judging eyes and ready claws. She glances to her watch again – five minutes has passed since last. Her stomach starts to churn a mix of bacon and orange juice acid. Little drips of sweat form in the crevice of her hands and a lump moves down her throat and past her belly. She needs to use the bathroom but that's right by the girls, too. I don't think I put on enough deodorant this morning. I'm going to smell all day long. She looks down her black blouse to see a bit of white buildup up near the bottom. Her Dove must have rubbed off from skin to shirt. This is really noticeable. –She tries to wipe off the residue with a napkin, but the stain remains smeared and white and blotchy.

“Can I get you anything else, hun?” a nice white-haired woman smiles at her and waits.

“No, thank you. I'm o-fine. I mean, I'm okay and I'm fine. Thank you. Thanks for asking.” She gives a little half-hearted laugh that sounds more like a forced cough.

“Okay sweetie, well just let me know.”

The girl glances back at her watch: five minutes. She wants to move, but she has to sit. Her mind plays walking through the halls during the national anthem. All the teachers will know. She will walk into Algebra late – Mr. Moscone hates when students are late. She's going to get a detention. She's never gotten one. All the detention kids will make “ooo look who's here” noises. Her cheeks burn red – there's fire on her skin. Her sweater looks disgusting and stained. She needs to get up. Get up. Her legs shake and she stands. Walk forward. She does, heels then toes propel her body passed the stomach cramps and scattering dreams to the glass door.

“Sarah, hey!” She turns to three smiling girls.

“Oh, hey guys. Didn't see you. How's it going?”

“Eh, not bad. Monday morning, you know.” One of the girls answers for all three. “You heading off to school?”

“Yeah, I have algebra. Kinda sucks.”

“I bet. I gave up on math last year.”

“Smart move, this stuff is way too hard.” There is a bit of a pause. Not long enough to be awkward – more of a stumble in normal conversation.

“Will I see you in fourth?” one of the girls fills the air. “We can suffer through Mrs. Gratton's lectures together.”

Sarah gives a genuine laugh. “Yeah, for sure. I'll see you guys then. Enjoy breakfast – the eggs are good.” They all smile and wave as she passes through the door. She reaches her car and exhales heavily. The back of her neck burns like coals against flame. She starts the engine.

*

The hallways of St. Anne's are plain and unstimulating. The high school moved to a new building one year ago and the administration decided to forbid the painting of murals and posting of artwork – they didn't want to ruin the new walls. So beige brick piles on beige brick, but every fourth locker allows for a dull orange to sear the eyeball.

It's noon and Sarah sits in the middle of a classroom. Teachers always notice the work of kids in the front – in a glance they can read the pages of their spiral-ringed notebooks. And this is exactly why they are worrisome of the kids in the back – they are hard to get to and their notebooks are hidden. Everyone sort of forgets about the middle though – so this is where Sarah sits.

“What did everyone think about The Road Not Taken?” Mrs. Rozic asks.

“It was about, like, dancing to the beat of your own drum, like that right?”

Michael Robinson answers. He sits on the opposite side of the room from Sarah.

“Mhm, mhm, that could be one aspect of it. What does everyone else think? Try and consider the title.”

Well if it’s *The Road Not Taken*, it’s about the decision you didn’t make, isn’t it? It sort of scratches at you - thinking about what you could have doing while doing what you are doing.

“No one has any ideas? Come on guys, just think out loud a bit.”

“Well, I think its trying to say what’s right for you is not right for everyone else. You know, a bunch of people may be walking one road, but that doesn’t mean you have to walk it too.”

“Okay yes, try and give me more though. Try and read into the lines kids.” The sky lies void of hands.

Just answer. Put your hand up in the air. It’s easy. Who’s going to make fun of you? You’re not stupid, come on. Look, the poem is not about one road over the other. They’re both the same, and no decision will be better. It’s about looking back.

“No comments? No one. This is probably one of the most misunderstood poems on the planet. Try and think about it a little more than you did in grade school.”

Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Raise your hand. Okay, okay, do it in one, two.

“Well, if no one has anything to say, maybe you need more time to think about it. Read it over tonight and write a page about the meaning.” A muffled groan hits the air on impact of the words.

Great. Ok, well at least now you can show her what you know. Check sparknotes first though – make sure you’re not a complete idiot.

*

The school bell rings at 2:15pm and everyday a mess of kids pile into the halls

and open lockers to stuff backpacks full of books and head home. Four to five minutes pass and clicking high heels replace the squeaking of sneakers and flats. In the student parking lot it’s always a race to get out first. Some cars shake with bass and tires run black against pavement as they rush off campus. The smokers clump around the back fence for the last drag of the school day. The vice principles watch with disappointment – the kids are one foot off of school boundaries.

Sarah stands washing her hands in the bathroom. Everyday, she takes an extra ten minutes before leaving. She enjoys the walk to her car without all the crowded clicks of kids and adults.

“Hey, you’re Michael’s sister, aren’t you?”

The sound startles her. She turns to her left and sees a girl.

“Yeah, I am.”

“I thought I recognized you. You look exactly like him.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah for sure, especially the eyes.”

“They’re just brown like everyone else’s.”

“No way – they’re like this deep chocolate brown. They’re different. Well, let me see.” The girl moves in really close. She lifts her hand and drags her thumb just below Sarah’s eye to the edge of her cheek. “Yeah, definitely.”

Sarah’s eyes move a few seconds after touching the girls and she lets out a nervous chuckle. She doesn’t know where to look– so she faces her eyes downward as her palms start to moisten.

“Sorry I’m totally bursting your personal bubble here aren’t I?” The girl backs up and offers her hand to Sarah. “I’m Kaitlyn, I’m in your brother’s calculus class.”

“Oh yeah?” Sarah grabs the girl’s hand and lightly shakes it.

“Yeah. He’s really smart – always helps me out with the homework. And on

tests sometimes if you know what I mean.”

“Ha,” Sarah’s laugh is short. “Well that’s nice of him. He practically does my homework, too.”

“Oh I bet you’re just as smart.”

“Uh, I don’t know about that.”

“Can you play basketball, too?”

“No, I leave that all up to Michael.”

“He’s got a full ride to UConn doesn’t he?”

“He just signed last week actually.”

“Wow ,really? You going to miss him next year?”

“I guess. I mean, he’s not really around much now.”

“Right. Practice and everything.” There is a bit of an uncomfortable pause.

“Well I’ve got to get going -cheerleading practice. I’ll see you around?”

“Yeah, see you.”

As Kaitlyn moves to the door, Sarah washes her hands again. Walking in the same direction as someone after a conversation ends is always uncomfortable. She looks at the mirror above the bathroom sink. Straight pieces of light brown hair flow to her shoulders and she pushes back bangs that swoop over her left eye. Her skin is olive toned with a bit of acne sitting around her cheeks. Last year, giant pimples would grow like crops on top of her nose and she could feel people’s attention drift down to the white flowering harvest if she talked. It was awful and humiliating so she gave up all sugar from her diet and invested her birthday money in some really expensive cover-up. Now she looks like any other pubescent teenager.

“Any other” – Sarah thinks. Five foot six, one hundred and forty pounds. She wasn’t like the skinny, artsy girls who made funny, odd comments and wore clothes they bought at Salvation Army to look original. But she wasn’t like girls with

boyfriends and a lot of friends who wore tight pants and baggy sweaters either. She wasn’t strange enough to be weird or friendly enough to be normal or popular enough to be cool. She wasn’t really anything, and she sighs thinking about this. It’s time to go home.

*

A house lies on the corner of two streets. It’s modest sized, with a pretty little garden in front and a white shed in the back. Most of the neighbors exchange friendly hellos when they pass. A Ford Escort pulls into the driveway and parks next to the basketball post. Sarah gets out and opens the garage. A plane flies above her – its jet stream tattoos the sky.

“You fucking hate those kids. You just, you fucking hate them.”

Sarah hears shouts before she enters. An acid drip starts from her stomach to her intestines. She feels her chest tighten, the bronchioles restrict, her veins bulge with a faster heartbeat. She contemplates shutting the door, driving off to the library. They don’t know I’m home.

“Someday somebody is going to hate you as much as you hate John and Nicholas and then you’ll be sorry.”

Her father fumbles with shoes and keys and she knows he will be in the garage in seconds. It’s too late to leave. He passes her: jamming his toes into shoes, his arms swinging to find their sleeves. Their eyes don’t meet and his head doesn’t turn to her. He backs his truck away from their brick home and evergreen trees without hesitation.

She hears her mother’s sobbing through the door. She knows the scene already: middle-aged women bent over a countertop, clenching her forehead with both hands, struggling to stand. Sarah unzips her jacket and her fingertips take the door-knob. She has to go in.

“Mom?” She comes into the kitchen to see a smashed coffee pot on the floor

and chips of wood scattered from a now ruined cupboard.

“Mom, mom come sit down. You might step on the broken metal.” She takes her hand and leads her to the couch in the living room. “Be careful, let me get you some tissue. Just a minute.”

“Sarah, I always do this. Why do I open my mouth?” The sentence comes out long and staggered. A bit of saliva falls from mouth to couch and mucous sits between her nose and top lip. Her mother tries to smear it away with her hand.

“Here mom, use this.” Sarah hands her the tissue. They sit there for a long while in silence. Tears fill the tiny lines gathered from years of exhaustion beneath her mother’s eyes. She looks older when she cries. Sarah holds her hand, whispering, “It’ll be okay, Mom. It’s okay.” She doesn’t know what else to do. Her throat itches – she tries to scratch it with her tongue, by swallowing, but it doesn’t help.

“I don’t know, Sarah. I don’t think your father and I are right for each other anymore.”

“Okay.”

“I was never strong enough to leave, but maybe now it’s time.”

“Okay.” Sarah knows she won’t. This happens every few months. Her parents fight – usually over her two oldest brothers, John and Nicholas – and five days later they pretend to be a happy couple. Her father’s voice rises loud like the crack of thunder against her mother’s, then the rain starts. Sarah comes in the aftermath and replants the broken trees – to be grown until the next storm.

The family is sort of a mix-match of parts. Her father knocked up his girlfriend Katie when he was twenty and married her out of respect. They ended up having two kids together, a dog named Rocky, and a blue house near the downtown area. Luckily, Ford Motor Company was hiring at that time, so he got in with a good job and a steady paycheck. Katie wasn’t fulfilled with the normal suburban life though. She felt

the need to recapture the so-called wild years when her oldest son John turned eleven. Sniffing and drinking her youth back, monogamy became too difficult and one night, Jack caught her in bed with another man. The kids were asleep in their rooms. Jack, with a good job and clean drug test got the kids, but Katie received one half of his saving accounts – twenty five thousand dollars. So with the filling of her pockets came Jack’s complete abandonment of the word trust.

He remained single for a few years until he met a pretty college girl named Mary. They met at a bar and fell in love. He was ten years her senior, and she gave up the idea of grad school to be his wife. So like pieces of broken fabric, they sewed together a family and had two children of their own – Michael, a future basketball star, and Sarah.

Now, as her mother cries and her father sits at some bar shooting whiskey and smoking a cigarette, Sarah wonders if they were ever right for each other. Kids hate stepmothers and stepmothers hate stepsons, so why do they ever take a step in the first place? But of course, if they didn’t, Sarah herself wouldn’t be sitting here thinking these thoughts. She wouldn’t hyperventilate over seeing three girls at a diner, and she wouldn’t be scared to raise her hand in class. She’d be off in some world of could-have-been-but-better-to-not-have-been-babies. Life is all so confusing.

“Mom, are you hungry? Do you want me to make you some dinner?”

“No, Sarah. I’m going to throw up if I eat.”

“Okay.”

Her mother’s tears eventually dry and leave her eyes stained red before she drifts off to sleep.

*

Sarah’s bedroom is a soft purple with a white border circling the top. Her closet is filled with four pairs of dark jeans a few plain colored t-shirts and a couple of

hoodies. There is nothing too fashionable nor unstylish - just clothes. The only thing shocking about the room is a big mural on the back wall – Sarah painted it herself. It’s very colorful and complicated. It looks like people are running into the sun, but melting before they reach it. The image isn’t dark or morbid – it’s beautiful the way the colors flow from people to the sun and back to people on the other side.

Sarah lays on the floor listening to some soft violin music. Her fingers ache to play the instrument, but she doesn’t know how. Maybe I should learn. She hears the front door open followed by the smack of a bag on the ground. Michael is home – she knows his sounds.

“Michael?”

“Yeah?” He climbs up the stairs to meet Sarah face-to-face at her bedroom door.

“Try to be quiet, mom is sleeping.”

“She’s sleeping? It’s eight o’clock. Where’s dad?”

“He left. He probably won’t come home tonight.”

Michael’s face frowns in understanding. “They had a fight?”

“Yeah. Dad smashed a coffee pot to the ground. Mom was pretty shaken up, but she’s seems okay now.”

“Okay. Uh, they should just get a fucking divorce already.”

Sarah looks to the ground. “You know they won’t.”

“Yeah. Okay, it’ll be alright. You’re staying home tonight?” His question comes off more as a statement. It’s Friday, but Sarah usually stays home on the weekends.

“I don’t know. Where are you going?”

“This girl Kaitlyn from school is having a party. I’ll probably head over there in a bit.”

“Kaitlyn?”

“Yeah, you know her?”

“I met her in the bathroom today. She’s a bit taller than me, red hair, really pretty?”

“Yeah that sounds like her.”

“Do you think I could come with you?”

The question sort of startles Michael. He isn’t used to his sister asking him for things, especially party invites. “You want to come to the party?”

“Yes, I mean, I, I don’t really want to be home, here, right now.”

He looks at her so uncertain in her stance, leaning against the doorframe.

“Sure, Sarah. You can come. I’m leaving in about an hour, so be ready then.”

“Okay.”

*

The walls of Kaitlyn’s house vibrate with bass and sweat with heat. A pool of adolescents swarm in the living room, connecting and disconnecting like the electrons of an atom. They are dancing the contemporary form of dancing which basically involves girls rubbing up and down against the male genital area and boys grabbing on girls’ hips and thighs. The carpet is sticky with beer and vodka, and in the kitchen some young kid hangs face first towards a metal barrel with a black tube sticking out of his mouth.

“You ever done a keg stand?” Some obnoxious drunk yells in Sarah’s ear over the music.

“No.”

“You want to do one? This guy’s about done.”

“Maybe later?”

“Okay, beautiful. You just let me know.”

She stands against the wall with this boy progressively leaning closer and

closer to her. Michael left downstairs with some basketball friends.

“You want to smoke? Buddy o’mine hooked me up with some white kush – best weed money can buy. Better than medical, if you know what I’m saying.”

“Oh, um, you know, well, I have, I have asthma.”

“Shit so do I, doesn’t mean you can’t hit a joint.”

“Sarah!” Kaitlyn comes from around the corner to give her a hug. “Jacob, stop hitting on my friend. I’m so glad you came. Here come on.” She pulls her to the refrigerator and pours together two white liquids that bubble and spew over the top of a red cup.

“Drink this.” Her hand forces the concoction to Sarah’s lips. Sarah pauses for a moment. “You’ll loosen up, babe. Promise.” Sarah takes the cup from Kaitlyn’s hand and gulps it. It tastes like peroxide, but she doesn’t stop until the glass sits upside down on her face.

“Okay, now let’s go dance.” Kaitlyn pulls Sarah to the speakers and starts to move her hips against her. Sarah stands stationary as her stomach burns with the passing seconds. She feels dizzy and lights stray across her vision longer than usual. Her pores expand, and sweat oozes from the openings. Two boys approach her and Kaitlyn from behind and they are squished even closer together. “Guess we’ve got company.” This is the first time Sarah’s been drunk. She starts to move a bit and mimic the other girls pressing themselves up against the boys.

“You’re a good dancer,” the boy behind her says in her ear. Kaitlyn moves in close so their noses touch.

“You should kiss her,” a deep voice plants the idea in her mind. Sarah’s head spins and spins so she sees faces move up and down in vibration. Her eyes lock on Kaitlyn. It’s not scary now.

“Kiss her.”

She moves an inch forward and touches Kaitlyn’s chin with her fingertips. The two girls touch lips and the boys move closer in to them. Kaitlyn pushes her tongue into Sarah’s mouth and moves her hand to her collarbone. This is Sarah’s first kiss. She feels the boy rise behind her and everything blurs in lights and sound and touch. She hears faded whispers.

“Who is that?”

“Is that that quiet girl Sarah?”

“Look what she’s doing.”

They’re all talking about you. What’s happening?

“You want to go to the bathroom with me?”

Sarah doesn’t know who’s speaking. Someone moves their hand between her thighs. She tries to stop them, but her mind can’t coordinate her body anymore. “Wait” her voice is weak. “I’m going to, I have to go to the bathroom.” Her stomach feels thick and a lump rises to her throat. “I don’t feel good.” She falls into Kaitlyn and the heaving stomach pains become heaves of vomit. She passes out on the floor, eyes blurring in a stream of faces.

*

Sunlight bursts through ripped shades. The carpet is covered with cans and cups and the room is empty. A foot nudges at Sarah’s ribcage. “Wake up. Sarah, come on, you got to get up.” She frowns, and suddenly, feels everything. Her mouth tastes like rotting flesh and her stomach feels weighed down by metal iron. There are little bits of dried throw-up around her mouth and her nose is plugged with mucous and bits of carpet. More gunk than usual fills her eyes and she starts to rub them open. “Sarah?” She turns over and as her vision clears she sees her brother standing over her, a hand reaching down.

“Michael?”

"We've got to go home. It's morning. Mom's going to notice soon."

"Yeah, okay."

Michael grabs on to her hands and drags her up to her feet. "You can walk right?"

"Of course I can walk. Do you want to drive though?"

"Definitely."

Sarah's throat burns for water – she's never been this thirsty.

"Here, I got you an Aquafina." Michael hands her the bottle– the top is already open.

"Thank you." Slowly the liquid runs down her tongue to her gut, cooling the inferno of last night's stupidity. The two reach Sarah's Escort, and Michael opens the passenger door to let her in. They drive down the suburban streets in silence.

"Why did you do that, Sarah? I was downstairs and someone comes telling me you're throwing up everywhere. I didn't think you would even drink. What's going on with you?" Michael breaks the sound of air.

"I don't know Michael, I'm just...tired of being this way, you know."

"I don't get it. This is isn't you."

"Okay, well, I don't know how to explain it."

"Can you try and help me understand what's going on. Come on, Sarah."

"Alright, well, you know when you're walking down the hallway and someone is coming the opposite way as you, and one of you has to move so you don't run into each other?"

"Yeah, okay."

"Well, whatever way I go the other person goes too, and then I move right, but then they move right too, so we start doing this awkward dance thing."

"Okay, that's happened to me too, Sarah. It's normal. It's sort of funny isn't it?"

You can laugh about it."

"Yeah, but it happens to me everyday, Michael. I'm just an awkward person."

"Well what's wrong with being a little awkward? Some people find it endearing."

"There's a difference though. There's the cool awkward people – they have friends – but then there's just the awkward, awkward people."

"You have friends, Sarah."

"Yeah sure, I mean, I can talk to people I guess, if they start up a conversation. But yesterday, for instance, I was sitting in the cafeteria and a bunch of people were talking about going to a party Saturday. And they asked if I was going, but it was weird because they didn't ask me to go with them. So what am I supposed to do? Go alone? Maybe call them up and see if they need a ride. But then that would be awkward too. It's like I just don't know how to be a normal, social person. Not even normal, I just don't even know how to be a kid. I'm always going through this cycle in my mind, and its running and running, and I just can't breath and have fun for five seconds. And mom's always crying, and there are kids dying in Africa, and I just feel stupid for feeling this way."

Michael pulls the car off the concrete and to the gravel side of the road.

There's a park on the left – where most of the neighborhood takes their pets for walks. "You want to play Frisbee?"

"What?" Sarah feels flushed, and the question is odd to her.

"Come on, let's go play."

"Mom's going to wake up pretty soon."

Michael glances to his watch. "We have twenty minutes and I know there's a Frisbee in the trunk. Come with me, it's a nice day out." Michael opens the door and Sarah follows him outside to a patch of grass. The smells of early spring dampen the

air. Worms squirm in new earth and bees start their pollination.

“Take off your shoes Sarah. And your socks.”

“This is stupid.”

“Come on, Sarah.” Her Converse shoes fall from her feet and her white ankle socks lie beside them. The grass is cool and it tickles at first, but like anything else, she gets use to it.

“Okay, now you just got to catch the frisbee and throw it back.”

“Michael, I’m not dumb. I’ve played Frisbee before.”

“Okay, okay, just checking.”

They throw without talking for a long while. The wind buzzes in their ears and the sun soaks their skin in light. Early morning pinks and oranges fade and clouds drift like puff balls around the air.

“It’s kind of weird thinking dad had a whole different family before us, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it’s weird.” Sarah agrees without pause.

“Do you ever feel like mom is trying to erase John and Nicholas?”

“All the time. Did you notice she took down all their pictures from the walls when they moved out?”

“Yeah I did – I think that’s why Dad was yelling at her a couple weeks ago.” Michael misses Sarah’s throw and runs after the Frisbee a few feet over from him.

“You know I’m going to miss you when I leave.” Michael admits as he bends to the ground.

“You’ll make friends quick though. You always do.”

“I’m still going to miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too, Michael.” She doesn’t blush and her palms don’t sweat and her head doesn’t spin with ideas.

“All of my friends say you’re pretty. You know that, right?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, of course. Alright try to jump and catch this one.” Michael throws high above Sarah’s head and into the sunshine. “Run, Sarah, run back quick.” She sprints backwards, blind and with arms waving through the air. She can’t see the Frisbee or the sky – it’s all just a blur of bright yellow light. “Left! Go left!” She turns her heels to the voice. “Okay, jump!” Her bare feet rise from the ground and her fingertips skim the edge of the disk. It is just out of reach. Her teeth clench as it skims the blades of grass and settles a few feet from her feet. “Aww, you just about got it.”

“It was right there.” Sarah rubs her fingers against her thumb in frustration.

“It’s alright though. We still had a good game right?”

“Yeah, we still had a good game. Should we go home?”

“If you want.”

Sarah lifts her chin to the sky and takes in the breeze. “Let’s go home.”

“You going to be okay?”

“Maybe not all the time, but for now.”

“Call me if you want to play Frisbee, okay?”

“Okay.”

Sarah walks back to driver’s seat. She takes the keys from Michael and shifts into drive. The tires spin back home, back to her parents, back to Legends, back to school. Back and forward. Going and coming into the sun.

Lily Bonnadonna
THE LOST CITY

The ancient city rests
with its brothers,
the Andes.
Twice named for its glory,
Machu Picchu
watches like the condor,
life racing below.

Its face carved of smooth stone
like puzzle pieces
not even the clouds
could grasp and drag down
from eight thousand feet

The terraces,
steps to this earthly heaven,
were walked by kings
who bathed the mountainside
in gold
and conquered
the hand of God,
the sweet smell of
greenery filling
their nostrils.

Part of nature,
Macho Picchu survived
Spaniards
when Kings did not.
The eye of the Andes
watched the torture,
blood dripping from hills
as men killed men,
stole the civilization,
melted its existence.

And after
nature continued.
The sun still rose from the mountains
and fell into the sea,
the air smelled sweet of trees
and dew of dampened earth.
And God's hand,
in the highest peaks and
lowest valleys,
still spawned life.

Claudia Celovsky

SEWN

Splash, splash
Our feet travel fast
Across soaked pavement
(We're leaving our past)

Destination: unknown.
But say goodbye to the bones
Weighing us down
(For we're no longer sewn)

Sewn to worries,
Sewn to strife,
Sewn to discontent,
Or selfishness, or life.

How could we be
Weighed down
With an endless sky above?
How could we not see
That what constrains us
Is only just a glove?

Sam Cunningham

PERICLES

Pericles attempts his concluding pirouette in
A tottering stance,
Atop a mound of porcelain dolls
Pale in their eternal slumber, as
Sparta shuts her pounding eyelids.

The commended waterfall of speech
Pours royally from Pericles' mouth and
Swirls unpleasantly inside my mind
And my tongue snaps impatiently at his nerve to
Proclaim an end to any form of chaos.

But then a pesky pig wanders on the set
And peers through moldy velvet to
Complain of some imperfection. He
Pastes on tawdry wings and flutters in
Tight circles around my throbbing cranium

And I pose my butcher's knife carefully
Determined to silence
The roar of every person and pig and war general
From the graves of deceased Peloponnesians to
Old MacDonald's decaying farm.

But instead, some sort of graying mist
Rots around my aching eyes,
I swat furiously, and it chuckles, fading
Into the now-fuzzy future of my
Inflamed mind.

And I wonder, as I so often do on these occasions,
If I am pregnant.
I glare at Pericles: he sticks his pointed nose in the air and
Keeps rambling.
My god, if I am pregnant...
That impertinent rind of pork rests on his
Haunches, and surveys Pericles with
Infuriating patience as something red
Behind my left eye throbs.

And if
I am pregnant,
What would happen to that
Doomed clump of cells
So lovingly discussed over school
Books and vacant stomachs?
And often these little tribes of
Students, with
Lying eyes and empty wombs, will

Tremble at the idea of murder, of
Death.
Flat stomachs are not good proponents of truth
I don't care if it's wrong. I sure as hell would be scared.

Maybe not Pericles, that damn war king.
But I am no champion and suddenly
I am a little girl who spills her
Lunch and her secrets on a
Cotton shirt.
Pigs and panels of ancients
Flutter dangerously close to
My exposed eyeballs and
I back up quickly, hitting the wall in my haste,
My tightened back against something I cannot bring myself to
Turn around and face.

Women with flat stomachs cannot be trusted.
The immigrant is welcome until he moves in next door.

And to you, Pericles,
Who said it would be fun to live in ancient Greece?
Dirt mixed with culture and diaries of the dead
Leave me no longing to cuddle with
Odysseys and Odysseus. But
In all his untimely trials,

At least he was alone in his own body.

Pericles...I know next to nothing about you.
You pet my head with heavy pride and
Pose in marble half destroyed by the
Years and
Perhaps you are responsible for the
State of my social life.
Perhaps you died so I might pine away
At graying snow.
Would you ever daydream about someone
Who is no more than a half-remembered name
From a superficial education?

You glorified Athens, a city imperfect
In many rights, inhuman in many others
You fought and you must have fallen at times
For deficiency and freedom, yet I
Stand here hating the freaking miracle of life
For wreaking havoc on my
Unsettled mind.
But you might feel different, dear Pericles,
Upon feeling a nudge in your stomach that
Would lithify your heart into the marble from which
You are carved.

We women, we are soft,
But we are liars.
We are little girls who scrape their
Skin to remove any traces
Of red paint.
We stare haughtily down at mistakes
Until we are one ourselves
And then, we
Reflect that even
The almighty Greeks
Died.
They spoke glorious speeches of
Immortal cities and now,
Only the cold of broken stone remains but
Is that still alive?

Can we be killed if we are dead?

Or not yet living?

The lights fall and my head pounds as
The perpetually spinning actors
Troop back onto the stage and
Prance around on stupid pink ponies,
Refusing to sink in frozen stone and shut up.

Ben Gloger

LEONARD'S WEDDING

I would like to kill Pericles right now
Just for some silence.

I want to be alone in my own self.

We women, we are the affectionate,
The genetically giving and gregarious
We perform our part with the gift of any true actor
We lie with our warmth,
Yet
Pray that our cold eyes
Keep the needy at bay.

The wooden handle of the shovel grew heavy, the skin on Leonard's upper palms now tender and red. He set the shovel aside and stared down at his right palm, rubbed his fingers over it. A dull pain meandered through his body and he kept rubbing until he couldn't feel it anymore. It had taken him most of the night, but he was close now; he could feel it. Considering how important the matter at hand was, he was making fantastic time. It was everything Leonard could do to keep himself from jumping up, shouting into the night sky. He was getting married tonight.

Sweat dripped into his right eye and he instinctively raised his arm to wipe at the irritation, forgetting how soiled the sleeve of his grey sweatshirt had become from the night's labors. Tiny flakes of dirt and rock streaked across his forehead. No matter, he thought.

Letting out a long exhale, the cool summer night enveloped him, wrapping around his arms and legs, the perspiration on the back of his neck setting his hair on end as the air ignited it.

He reached for the shovel again and pushed it into the dirt below him, resting a weathered boot atop as he pushed down, ensuring it was fully submerged. It wasn't necessary, the hole had only been recently filled and the dirt was loose and malleable, but Leonard wasn't taking any chances. Raising the shovel, he heaved a mound of damp, black dirt over his right shoulder onto the pile. He had been doing the same movement for hours: into the dirt, over his shoulder, into the dirt, over his shoulder. How he just wanted to throw himself face first into the hole and dig like a crazed dog, howling as he threw debris between his legs, the ends of his fingernails turning black.

He remembered the first time he had met her, at a friend's wedding a few years back. Couldn't even really call it a friend. Just a co-worker at the factory; someone he saw in the hall and never said much of anything to beyond the usual pleasantries. Bill.

He had heard of the wedding, but hadn't even conceived the notion of being invited until he was staring down at the white invitation letter, roses encircling the heading, the sparkles on them twinkling from the fluorescent light in his trailer's kitchen, the envelope torn and discarded on the floor just out of sight. Shit, he figured. Open bar. An open bar that threw light into the darkness that followed him into the men's restroom at work, relieved the pain that crept into his stomach when he saw a group of people laughing, made him forget he even owned .45 caliber American Classic 1911 Commander Pistol he had inherited from his father that he kept under a towel beneath his bed.

He walked into the party alone, wearing the same suit he had bought for his parents' funerals that year. His mom had Alzheimer's and couldn't remember her only child's face anymore, couldn't love the man she had woken up next to for the past forty-five years anymore. Leonard found them at seven in the afternoon, coming over to fix the cable or something, his father hadn't been very specific on the phone that morning, just make sure you come by he kept saying. Maybe he said sorry in the end, that he loved Leonard so much. Leonard didn't remember. He probably didn't. The car was on, the garage door closed, his mother's distant gaze solidified for all time. Leonard saw tears dried onto his father's face.

He had walked straight to the bar at the wedding and had already been there for about an hour by the time she came up and bumped into his right elbow, knocking the glass out of his hand as it fell to the ground, shattering into a thousand pieces by his feet. He turned to her aggressively, ready to take down anyone—he was drunk, payment was owed for his woes—but then he saw her face and stopped all bodily function. She was it. Plan and simple, the most confusing thing he had ever laid eyes upon. Nothing different than any other attractive lady he'd ever seen, yet he cowered in her presence.

She lowered her head and smiled up at him, apologizing for the accident as she touched his arm. Leonard watched her lips form the words, watched as they moved like everyone else's but created a deep, southern twang that slithered into his ears and down his spinal cord. No drug could substitute. No sunset or gently crashing waves in the distance. He raised his eyebrows and mumbled the word dance.

She took his arm and led him to the dance floor. Her body moved between his hands like sand. Her skin no different than his. He hungered for more. Do you want to get out of here, she had whispered into his chest.

It wasn't too unusual for a lady to take a liking to Leonard, his strong jaw line and lean frame was often the first thing they noticed. What was unusual was for them to come back to him, a man defined by his blue, cold set eyes, cigarette butt scars, and spider web tattoos. Yet, for whatever reason, and Leonard could conceive none, she called him the next day. And the next. Until he could remember exactly how she felt next to him in bed every morning, until nothing else in the world existed.

With a thud his shovel struck the coffin below him and Leonard leaned down and brushed a thin film of dirt off its wooden surface.

There'd been one night: a man had been forward with her in a bar while Leonard was in the bathroom, and had his hands worked around the straps of her bra by the time Leonard had hurried back, her distinctive shouts carrying him like a ravaged wolf to an injured doe. The man felt his ear catch on fire as he a jackhammer swung into them, his head bouncing off the floor as he fell to the ground, another blow exploding his nose, two rock solid blue eyes visible through the blood, boring through him. Margaret yelled stop and grabbed Leonard by his shoulder. He turned toward her and saw the fear in her eyes. Leonard dropped his fists to his side, blood dripping of them. Putting his arm around Margaret he turned and walked out of the bar. They got into his truck and he stared at her for a minute before looking down and starting

the ignition.

They were going to get married.

It should have been him staring out the window at the red light, coming home with the video for their date night. Should have been his head the steering wheel smashed, his brain dripping from the dashboard, forming a pool on the black floor as the paramedics held back a woman who could simply not comprehend what was before her. It should have been her moan that caused them to drop their hands at their sides and stare on as they watched a woman cradle a dead man for one last time, her shoulders heaving with raw emotion as they held back tears of their own, spinning their wedding rings around their own fingers. Should have been her dancing blonde hair that was left untouched.

Kaitlin Lantz

PERFECT

The last thing I ever want to hear
is that I'm perfect
Perfect means you don't know me,
Perfect means you don't want to know me, enough
To see the gleaming imperfections that make me, me
My stubborn nature, my argumentative blood,
that sizzles, up,
Up, until I burst, and suddenly I'm not perfect,
I'm broken, in repair,
the robot is on the fritz,
but what's left when the metal melts,
a tin heart that flutters, that freezes
Its arrhythmia seems unfitting for my solid soul,
My stubborn heart is far from perfect.
I want to hear, baby, you're imperfect, and that's why I love you.
When I hear imperfect, I hear honesty,
I hear your heart and mind collaborating,
To speak the words that only you can say.
The perfect answer, confidently uttered from your lips.
Because you know me better than anyone else has.
And boy, you are imperfect.

Sam Trochio

ODE TO THE WINTER SKY

The sky broke apart today,
a solid thin sheet of white glistened
as it shattered,
millions of shards sprinkled the
tops of dead leaves,
still clinging on.
Its beauty demanded attention
denied gravity
this doesn't fall from the silent voices of the
Sky
it floats
occasionally sitting still to peer
inside the windows
at the dreamy spectators

I stare out
of the translucent barrier
into the floating flakes of freedom.
I long to shrink
and ride on the their backs
as I stroll
a normal path
Your wind pinches my cheeks
and you
soothe them

With an unexpected soaring kiss
You distract me
from the coldness infecting my bones
Your blankets lay in vain
no warmth
will generate to the rooftops,
Your coldness is not transferable
it melts
it blends
falls into
the warm, pumping thick
hearts of lovers
who stare into you
With a demand for introspection

Sam Trochio

VIEW FROM MY BACKYARD

The clouds have dozens of bruises today,
but they don't know
what it means
To be beaten
They don't know how to
fall,
instead they carry the sky
through the broken patches.
These holes are
Bluer
Whiter
Brighter
on the top of the horizon
White sky.

Do the inhabitants of this gleaming horizon
have any idea where they are?
A single tree stands out there
withstanding the wandering wings,
growing through the sopping, pooled
half-frozen soil
Reaching up
only to expose
Lonely, creepy bone.

Through the deep earth the cattails
continue to push up
through the green fir
lining the civilized, containing concrete.

There will always be a tree line
a jagged line of blacks and browns,
that doesn't take offense to neglect
because they know
just as well as I
that without their crooked, bell-curved, dark tops
the clouds would have nowhere
To end.

Zach Stimmel

BOARDS

Monday morning and I caught the first shuttle bus to the shopping center. I wanted to get there early to be sure the store had the supplies I needed to complete my final project for the semester. If I could nail this project, my first semester would be a success.

It wasn't hard catching the first bus; I can't sleep. I hardly ever do. My roommate sleeps. He always does. I used to sleep all the time, things were a lot quieter back then. Now there are too many distractions. My clock is ticking loudly; it never did before. I don't know how my roommate can sleep through it. People are always slamming doors in the hallway. These December thunderstorms are the loudest I've ever heard.

Not that my roommate cares about my sleep. See, I'm one of those people who can't sleep in total silence, silence is deafening. That's why I like to keep music playing at night. Usually Pink Floyd. But my roommate doesn't let me. I'm not arguing that my sleep is more important than his, but why is his more important than mine? Naturally, my resident advisor sided with him. She's always coming in here with complaints. It's as if this isn't even my room, it's her room, and she's renting it to me. I just can't stand it when people don't mind their own business.

I couldn't believe it when I saw it. There were so many notes scribbled on that piece of paper that it was illegible; I had to throw it out. Maybe I'm not remembering correctly, but it was definitely not what I wanted. Probably an F. People usually expect me to get As. Maybe I did this out of spite. But I didn't. I needed to do well. Lately, that's been harder than ever. I'm constantly studying. I always know the answers. Maybe it's the questions that are the problem. That must be it. But still, I'm always confident with my answers. Then why does she give me an F? I remember one comment that she made. It wasn't exactly a comment. It was simply a question mark

next to one of my answers. It was a question regarding my family's history; it may have been written in Spanish. Not only did I provide an answer, I gave her something that most students of my caliber would not consider. I brought the question into a new context. I discussed progressivism in the modern world, specifically changing policies in Switzerland. I'm sure it was the best answer in the class. I don't know what more she could possibly have wanted.

Hopefully things will make more sense now. I see no possibility of me leaving my room when the outside world doesn't seem to make sense anymore. I'm certainly not the person I was. Or maybe everyone else changed, and I'm the only normal one. It doesn't matter. All that matters is that I'm not leaving my room. It's not even a big deal. Am I really needed anywhere right now? The answer is no.

That's why I made my way to the shopping center, the one on Main and University. It was just me and a crazy looking guy on the bus, giving me the evil eye. The hardware store is like something out of the 1950s, filled with dusty cans of paint and screws and nails in every shape and size. I needed duct tape, wood, nails, a hammer, anything to keep people out. Especially that Joe from down the hall. And that girl Sabrina, asking to borrow a pair of scissors. Does she think I'm stupid? Does she really think I don't realize what she plans to do with those scissors, how she'd like to hurt me? I hope you understand.

I had just enough money on me. The duct tape came out to \$4.52, the wood was \$20.85, the nails were \$4.25, and the hammer was \$30.10. I had exactly \$0.84 left over. I boarded up the windows with some of the plywood that I got from the store. This left me with exactly eight planks of wood and fifty screws, just enough to securely board up the door. It took me 192 minutes to completely secure both the windows and the door.

And this is why I finally feel safe. No one can get in, no one can get out. Un-

less I will it, but even then, I'm not sure if it's possible. But then why does everyone else leave? What calling do they have that allows them to feel comfort outside. The only logical answer is none whatsoever. The reason that people try to integrate themselves into society is because they think they are supposed to. And why do they think they are supposed to? Because everyone tells them what to do. Whether or not we want to acknowledge it, we are all groomed from birth. We think we are supposed to get good grades, play with the other kids, get a job, but do we really need to? I for one do not care. That's why I'm in my room. I don't need to come out. No one cares if I do. Even if they did, they wouldn't be able to get me out.

But if my room is finally safe, why is it so loud in here? The constant banging is making my ears bleed. I keep hearing that banging sound. I think it might be my fridge, or maybe it's my window. It's probably the door. But why? I hope it's not my teacher. I really don't need to talk to her right now. I don't need to talk to anyone. That's why I'm here in the first place. But what if someone tries to stop me? I spent 192 minutes turning this prison into my salvation. What if they have an axe? They must. I don't even have the opportunity to escape due to the windows. I won't stand for this any longer. I don't want to escape. I want everyone else to escape. I don't know who else to turn to. Everyone always wants something for themselves. They never are really trying to help. I feel trapped in a corner.

And now I'm in my bed, suffering. I can't escape the banging. I wonder if I'm the only person left in the building. I must be. How can anyone deal with this pain? I'm sure everyone else has already escaped. I have trapped myself in this inescapable torture chamber. I thought solitude would bring salvation. All I have found is misery. I thought all of my calculations were correct. But I must tear these boards down. Regardless of what's out there, I have to escape from this room. But now there's a new sound. My door is opening! In the doorway I see my roommate. He looks as if he is

just getting back from the library. "Hey there," he says, pushing aside my imaginary boards. I rush past him and throw myself into the hallway, where all is silent and vacant as a tomb.

Alyssa Slayton
CROOKED

Like most members of my generation, adolescence hit me precisely on the kisser. Junior high meant not only a new school with multiple teachers, but also orthodontia. After extensive prodding, my dentist determined I was another lucky candidate for correction. A slight overbite. I was fitted for my own set of braces. Months of gingival agony and weaving floss maneuvers ensued. As I mastered basic algebra and braved the swells of preteen angst, my unruly canines were slowly restrained. Along with my middle school diploma, I was handed a fabricated mouthful of perfect teeth and my metal-flavored jailors were removed.

On the brink of high school and equipped with two flawless rows of pearly whites, I found myself contrastingly imperfect. My braces, however, had taught me a lesson: with the use of the proper implements, all failings could, and should, be suppressed. It was not adequate, I determined, to think and act from inclination, but necessary to refine my nature. Mirroring the orthodontist's correctional methods, I adopted a goal to painstakingly straighten out my personality and thoughts. I focused unflinchingly on my inadequacies, and with each scrutiny these flaws appeared increasingly prominent. Possessed, I clenched the wires tighter, imprisoning my helpless jaw in an attempt to correct what was naturally crooked, what existed inherently in "imperfect" form. It was a strained and hopeless manner of living: dominated by diligence, but devoid of passion. Ignoring my misery, I continued to obsess, entombed by the pursuit of perfection.

As an escape, I read. I savored Nabokov, reveled in Stephen Crane's free verse, and became entranced by Lawrence and Lee, The Transcendentalists, and Dickinson. I was inspired to write. Margins and notebooks bristled under my pen, filling with my desperate, eager hand. This "distraction" was far more enriching than my initial objective for superficial perfection, and I became interested in what might be called

imperfections: the frailties that prove the universe to be fallible, but still, miraculously thriving.

As humans, we are inclined to search for meaning in life. Such a giant endeavor is bound to be peppered with obstacles. In states of immaturity we seek fulfillment in the wrong locations. For me, such a detour was caused by the tantalizing concept of perfection. In a society where no tooth is warranted the freedom of misalignment, I cannot imagine that similar mistakes are uncommon. However, I've learned that, unlike dental structure, human nature is not malleable. Some aspects of being a person are simply meant to remain crooked. It is not wise to fancy oneself capable of perfection. Rather, the acceptance of imperfection is profoundly freeing. To embrace deformities in the mind, personality, and world is a first step in becoming fully human.

Alyssa Slayton
PAS D'ACTION

BEFORE

The storm was calming. How trivial, thought Lucia, to focus on the weather at such a time. Door closed behind her, she examined her reflection in the spot-free mirror, on the cream-colored wall. She'd still not become used to American hotels and their glaring perfection: not a frayed sheet-hem, not a sign of wear on tile or carpet. At home, she's always seemed to trace some fossil of former inhabitants, however faint. Funny that these places seem so private, so much more clean than one's own home, no excess belongings to skew the sense of complete solitude. Yet everyone knew such havens had been infiltrated. People coming and going, bodies pressing down on the mattress night after night, and now she neared her entrance into that communal yet personal bed.

As thunder sounded outside the frosted, peek-safe window, she realized the irony. Of all places, this is the kind at which she should feel the most ease. Hadn't she traveled city to city with the company, stage-to-stage and bed-to-bed, both figuratively and literally? But now she was dressed in white. Maybe that explained her discomfort. Head to toe, unmentionables and all, save for the powder blue laced garter. (M's mother was traditional and dressed Lucia in the color of purity, mistaking her broken English for innocence) The last time he'd seen Lucia so beautiful, gasped M at the alter, was the last time she'd been wrapped up in white. That, of course, was from afar, as Lucia fell to her character's death in Swan Lake. Was it Lucia's strong dancer's limbs or Odette's weak doomed ones he so loved?

A final glance and Lucia emerged. Face set straight, she opened the bathroom door, approaching M in the dim light. When she noticed him smiling, she realized she wasn't. Lightning crashed and she knew, tragically, that she did love him. With equal

clarity she knew that she loved performing more. Such is life. But the storm was calming. This, after all, was an act of fate. Tchaikovsky's ballet spinning on the turntable, she approached her husband.

AFTER

Seven years later, the sun shone blindingly. Lucia had never cared for the California days, preferring the dank gray mornings of her past, in Romania. M had learnt this, and since nicknamed her his "sullen European china-doll." Yes, their relationship was precious. Adorable, how he apologized for her accent at cocktail parties, distinguished acquaintances squinting their eyes, begging, "Pardon?" Quaint, how she called herself a "homemaker" with no children to her name, living at an estate created and maintained completely by the housekeeping staff. It wasn't that she couldn't cook or clean, M hated to see her lift a finger (and, truly, she knew how his delicate palate really felt about her foreign dishes). Lucia knew she should feel thankful for her comfort and health, as well as for the man who provided her with both, and she was grateful. But not satisfied. In sum, M did not cause her discontentedness; he was honestly a very good man. Her pointless, overly indulgent life with him was the culprit. Month after month of creamed coffee and cookies had turned her body soft. Nights in a warm featherbed shifted into mornings, the custom of shielding her eyes from the sunrise, wishing only to sleep (to dream?) for another quarter hour. The calluses on her feet had been rubbed tender.

BEFORE

At sunset, Lucia was oiling her feet. Her toes had bled copiously, preceding

the opening of the ballet. Impact, wear, and exhaustion made for the injury, a common dancer's ailment. A ballerina's feet, she often joked, were hidden proof against the assumed glamour of her profession. If only audiences knew, while milky-skinned girls pranced and leapt, that their delicate footwear was drenched in blood. Lucia was in her dressing room, preparing to open in Swan Lake. By dark, the girls were dressed and laughing, briefly, of how their roles flew only by day, morphing into humanness in the evening, while they themselves transformed into swans only by night. Lingering on tiptoe, they awaited their flight.

Lucia was not one to moon over princes. She did not understand Odette's ultimate sacrifice, the grace and honor of Swan Queen traded for a man she'd met mere hours ago. With one confident and fateful leap, she threw it all into the lake, her life on earth exchanged for love. For her art, Lucia accepted that she had to charade as a ninny. Hers was the lot of all prima ballerinas: relentless study and hard-earned strength, all funneled into the portrayal of bleeding-heart waifs. Once awkward in Odette's skin, she learned to don it comfortably. The music had saved her. Eyes closed, alone in her apartment, she entered its world. Minor-keyed tones lingered on violin strings, resolving to major only when Odette died with her lover. Those strains guided Lucia's performance. Obediently, she flew only during sounds of melancholy and perished among melodies of triumph and joy. Onstage, she ignored the irony, hiding the rebellious parts of herself in the music, allowing them to become dormant. Only then could Odette appear.

There was an ovation and an encore and backstage her crown was removed. Complements were exchanged, pages of notes distributed from the director. All in a day's work.

Red roses overflowed her dressing room, and hidden, another offering, yet unknown. Thrusting her left foot (bloody) out of pointe and into flat, she felt a poke.

She removed her foot, and deep in the toe of the shoe, stained red from the wound, was a diamond. It was attached to a silver band, unengraved. A mistake, she assumed, and set the ring on her makeup table. Often, dancers had suitors who returned every night, transfixed by their grace. It must have been intended for the girl who danced the lead before Lucia and, for this reason, deposited in the best dressing room. Lucia, of course, was new. Certainly no man, already, had noticed her from the audience. One night, in all reality, is a span far too fleeting to fall in love.

AFTER

It was raining that afternoon. Lucia finished her coffee and dressed in dark street clothes. She made their bed, carefully smoothing the white top-sheet over bottom, white comforter over sheets, white pillows fluffed and propped where they belonged. It was still late morning, M would not return until 5:30. She made a phone call (she knew what she was doing was wrong). She packed very little. She left no note.

Amanda Wenger
SWORDPLAY

is dangerous to the untrained hand,
but more to the untrained eye.

I read a poem once
sprawled--I won't tell who did the sprawling,
I or the words, we sprawled together, perhaps, it was a large sofa
and could fit both of us with our feet at maximum extension.

Sprawling leads to scrawling,
and that impulse to experiment with stylistic line breaks
indent
indent
indented

(Exiled)

to the exotic corner of the right-legged margin.

Who can resist the sprawl and scrawl together?
And with our multiple sharpnesses, we--you and I, the words and I, us, them, every-
one, nobody, an entire ambiguous collection of pronouns, all--
whittle the tip of an excellent beginning.

Amanda Wenger
DOGWALKERY

requires a dog, I am told,
and I, who am always jerry-rigging things,
I who refuse to believe it,
protest that, contrary to what seems necessary
I do not own a dog.

In an attempt to show
my solidarity with all of
you, who are constantly putting leashes on things
and tying them up outside restaurants,
I have devised a method to
get around and over and under
this shortcoming.

I have tried several ways
to bring what will not follow,
and after the experience
I can only say with certainty
that there are some things not meant
to be lead down the street by the neck.

YuCheng Cai

THE DEATH OF THE CANAL SIDE PARADIGM

Each day, on my way to high school, I passed by road construction sites and building construction sites and the subway development project, and then went over a bridge where one lane was being repaved, then onto the street where the noisy cranes were operating from both sides, through dust and sand blowing in the wind, in the vain hopes of escaping from all of it.

I always sighed. What I saw was my hometown Wuxi, a typical canal side city, which has lasted thousands of years, gradually disintegrating to give way to a modern city. Those histories, typical images and what should be the stereotypes of the eastern region of China, are now buried under steel and cement of skyscrapers. All that are left are caged in tourist zones, for the purpose of showing, visiting, preserving, but isolated from where residents dwell, as if it is a dream that passed, without traces left after awaking.

At the time of my birth, most of the remaining traditional houses were already secluded from the people's daily life. But there were still some amid the cement of the city, like natives living among the Caucasians. I loved to roam with eyes open wide, full of appreciation, among those buildings with typical white wall and black roof tiles. Thinking back, I might have been worrying about those survivors' future, so I wanted to imprint them in my mind. By touching the rough walls of the bungalows, I always felt that I was listening to stories, stories told to me by someone living in the past.

Going through the narrow and dark passages, crowded by the bikes belonging to four generations, I could see an abandoned worn stone mill and a mahogany square table and chairs in the court yard. Through the yard is the house, three floors with an attic; those stairs in the house would make cracking sounds when stepped on, sounds from remote times. When my mum was a young girl, these bungalows dominated the

city; the canal, rivers and streams were connected to each other, knitted in an intricate configuration. People lived on both sides of water. In summer, a cool breeze would blow across the canal into the window that faced the water. Bridges and rowboats were the most common transportation methods, and at night, lanterns would be lit to brighten the roads. The paper lanterns with the candles inside would be dimmed by the wind from time to time, casting different shadows on the wall. It converted the white walls into a vivid show, like a traditional shadow play. And the kerosene lamps from the households shined orange light, flickering, creating a warm tone on the night street.

The mutual connected houses made the neighborhood close and friendly. Housewives would babysit for free when both of the parents could not stay at home to take care of their children. They went to wash clothes together, usually in the early morning. The rhythmic sound of a laundry rod hitting the clothes on the slate by the side of the canal was the morning call for those still in their sweet dreams.

But to promote the development of the city, these historical and beautiful houses were destroyed one by one. The places they used to stand are now hosts to large shopping malls, supermarkets, skyscrapers and apartment buildings.

What is gone surpasses much more than these houses. Most of the rivers were choked years ago and now roads take their places. Children need to be driven a long way to access a swimming pool. I myself grew up in loneliness, accompanied by a radio and, in later years, by television and a computer. Living in our apartment I only knew a handful of neighbors. We barely talked to each other. Concrete becomes the mask of modern men, shearing the mutual trust. Stainless doors constitute an insurmountable wall between people, even people who live just next door.

Now, walking in my own city, I get more and more lost. Standing at a cross-road I feel puzzled: is this the city that I have lived in for all my eighteen years? It's

something more than sadness that emerges when I find that the city where I was born is becoming distant even to me. The city now appears more remote than familiar. It is losing what distinguished itself and losing what distinguished us, its residents. It could be anywhere. Sometimes in my dreams, I am back, back to be that young girl, touching the tough wall with bare hands, staring at the architecture, trying to imprint it all in mind.

Aubree Sepler
RESCUE DOGS

We were just buying guavas that day
The ones Rodrigo had bought were mushy
Rotten and slimy when you sliced them down
To their dried blood black core.
Sliding the mushy peel off the fleshy fruit,
I had a premonition it was going to be sour.

The bus itself was packed with the kinds of
Decaying odors one would expect from a fishery,
A tannery, a public washroom. It was the stench of
Hard work and desperation, trying to make it
Past the officials, into the market, then back home
Again. But there were barriers that day, borders.
Natural disasters don't need personal crises.

There are no survivors, that's for sure. Not even
The guava was as rotten as our bodies will be
After officials finally decide to move their pawns. We
Tried to hold on, but for whom? Bloated bellies
Filled with straining babies and pork long digested, our
Intestinal juices churning acid. Our green bile matched
That morning's guava peel. Those wet, black intruders,

Exhaling hot carbon dioxide on our bodies, sniffing for
Survivors. Those noses smelled our guava tinged bile.
Those noses smelled the charred rocks and dirty rain
Staining our once-clean bodies. They didn't smell our
Families whose bellies were not bloated, but grumbling
Back at home. Those noses didn't smell our mail on the
Table by the door, reminding us we were long overdue.

Aubree Sepler

SKIN-COVERED LIGHT BULBS

we ride in on japanese water beetles and pretend to be fierce
really, though, we're miniscule.
we are china dolls without the smiles
still innocent, still fragile-
just harder on the outside.
just so we don't look hollow.

but every so often you see cracks
if you hold us up to the light.
we are skin-covered light bulbs with raw
redness nudging through where fingers don't intertwine.
fleshy and rare, we have no structure,
knuckles or freckles or wrinkles.
we are brutal cranberry blobs, offensive.
ignorant and unholy.

we smear orange peels across our faces.
honest to goodness-
we aren't trying to be fashionable
if we wanted rouge, we'd use fuchsia
grapes, raspberries, red lacquer nail polish.
we just want the appearance of summer
we desperately want to glow.

Aubree Speler

REMAINS

we fear not for our faraway futures. for we know
not if we deserve, deign, desire to possess
them. we are not safe from ourselves, so why
bother rescuing us from the world.
we just clap our hands together and clasp our hands
together: we rejoice in our own destruction.
we rejoice in our own whispering, our own silent screams.
no need for introductions. we are your sacrilege.
we were in the cave but we didn't care.
we stepped outside and we were lost.

Just try and imagine walking down the street without a face. You have all the parts mapped out precisely where they're supposed to be: a perfect "O" of an eye socket right above the brittle cheekbone, a square jaw reminiscent of nobility, the kind of straight teeth a dentist's kid should have, a high-browed forehead without worry lines. Everything is in order, and yet you're just a carcass, a remnant of what life is modeled upon. You're incomplete, and therefore cease to exist to the rest of the world.

I was whole once. Back when a warm breeze couldn't play wind chimes on my rib cage, when a low-flying bird wouldn't become lodged up near my collarbones. I had flesh. It wasn't cold back then. I recall hot life blood coursing through my body, head to heart, feet to head and back. I remember what eating felt like; Hell, I remember how my entire day looped around my digestive system's schedule. Imagine having a body without bodily cycles to complete. What is your function then? Do you even have one? Are you really even dead, or is life just simply stripped from you until you become purposeless, directionless, a series of fragile bone connections that drift about remembering what French Toast smelled like?

Imagine waiting for nature to have its way with you once your body has run out of steam. Watching as year by year your flesh decays more until it slides down your long bones and rots off. Waiting as your senses dull to nothing, so you can't even ponder the smell of your own destruction, the sound of the mealworms living their lives to the fullest in what remains of your brain. Waiting for your eyes to shrivel into nothingness and your fingertips to desensitize. Without perception, you are not even a newborn, but a fetus. Wrapped up in your own parts that have no use to you now, you just wait for what comes next. Fetuses don't have friends inside their body cages either.

I don't mean to glorify death for you, or clarify it even. Nowadays, the living

invent holidays to do that all on their own. Having children walk around pretending to be someone else's skeletal remains? How sickly saccharine. The embodiment of lifelessness never looked so cute. At least one consistency between death and old age is an utter craving for youth. For vitality, for a heartbeat that taps faster than my once-smooth knuckles on that old countertop, waiting for a stout, sweating, heavily-breathing waitress to bring me my French toast. My insatiable hunger. All that remains.

Modern Tribalism
2011 LHSP MUSIC AND
SPOKEN WORD CD

- Track 1: **Degora Anderson** | *A Letter to My Mother*
Track 2: **Katherine Goffney** | *Excerpt from "Heartbeat of the Townhawks"*
Track 3: **Nick Gerard** | *The Lovesong*
Track 4: **Claudia Celovsky** | *Sewn*
Track 5: **Lily Bonadonna** | *The Lost City*
Track 6: **Lily Bonadonna** | *Excerpt from "Burning"*
Track 7: **Nick Gerard** | *Peaches II (The Return of Peaches)*
Track 8: **Amanda Wenger** | *Dogwalkery*
Track 9: **Amanda Wenger** | *Swordplay*
Track 10: **Sam Walker** | *Temperance (High Winds in Low Places)*
Track 11: **John Bohn** | *I'll Prove You Were Right All Along*
Track 12: **Lauren Scales** | *Into the Wilderness*