co editors: victoria petrosino, krista morris, scott newton

cover photography: theresa sullivan

staff: kristen barone, alex blum, christie diaz, sadie lansdale, lauren inch, liz lynch, leo mahler, emma shakarshy

founding editor: cal levis

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webpage: http://ase.tufts.edu/outbreath/

e-mail: out_breath@hotmail.com
Writing the beginning is more difficult than writing the ending. We start with a blank page, with every avenue open to explore. So, we pen a few words down as a starting point, and then (though I am not sure how it happens) time speeds up and we are forced into a conclusion, forced to wrap up all the loose ends to fit neatly into the page count.

In my four years at Outbreath, I have seen a lot of endings. Some have been peaceful and have fallen naturally into place and led seamlessly into the next chapter. I finish the story satisfied that the narrator made the best choice, that anyone would make the same choice given the circumstances. But in most, the peacefulness is only a guise, a way to cover up the uncertainty and speculation that is sure to come in the next scene, in the blank space that follows “happily ever after.” These are the ones that have left me stunned, begging for the page to be turned to bring about a new beginning.

As this is my last semester at Outbreath and at Tufts, I want to say that the pages of this magazine, and writing in general, have always been my escape and that I am uneasy of leaving them behind and starting again with that blank page. However, I take comfort in the fact that captured on these pages are only pieces of stories. There is always a next scene, even after the writing stops.

Victoria Petrosino
Co-Editor
nothing less

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Jennifer hated pointillism. She always read the dots in the wrong way (that’s how she thought of it, “reading” the dots) so that she saw something different than what everyone else saw. She thought “Sunday on La Grande Jatte” was a painting of teapots.

Jennifer was colorblind. She was one of the .4 percent of females on earth with deuteranopia, a condition in which there are no green receptors in the eye. As a result, Jennifer saw everything through a faint orange haze. When she looked at a rainbow, she saw seven shades of brown, mustard yellow, and blue.

Yet now she stood solemnly in front of another huge Georges Seurat canvas, basking in the masochistic satisfaction of doing something that she considered a complete waste of time and energy. She squinted slightly and leaned backward on her heels. The picture remained flavorless as the rubbery stick of Juicy Fruit she had been chewing for three hours. She chomped her gum fiercely and imagined she had superpowers. The formless dots remained formless dots. And they were still orange.

She had not been dreading the class trip to the Art Institute. Highland Park High School rarely allowed field trips, and anyway, it wasn’t art Jennifer minded, it was pointillism. Pointillism made her feel inadequate; most art didn’t. Now, though, she was beginning to feel that her decision to take Fine Art in the first place was unfounded and absurd. At the time the choice had seemed bold, unbound by physical limits. But here, Seurat mocked her with his cruel neo-impressionist dots.

Jennifer drew her eyes away from the puzzling painting and glanced at the rest of the class. They mingled around the hall with other museumgoers. A mother held her little boy’s hand and stared at a small picture of dots. An elderly couple stared at the picture of dots next to it. A group of University of Chicago art students cradled notebooks and stared at a larger picture of dots.

To her left, Calvin Seonwoo stared at the largest picture of dots, head titled a little to one side. He was a tall, dark boy who sat in the back of the classroom next to Jennifer. He was a quiet person, prone to pulling his knees up to his chest in his chair and resting his sketchbook on his thighs, and sketching past the bell through lunch.

When Jennifer heard the word “perfect,” she usually thought of Calvin.

“There’s an awful lot of … grass… in this picture, isn’t there?” she said densely, immediately regretting the decision to start a conversation.

Calvin Seonwoo shrugged. “Green’s my favorite color,” he said.

“That must be nice,” said Jennifer.

If Calvin thought this was a strange thing to say, he didn’t show it; his dark eyes stayed focused on the painting, studying ardently. Jennifer continued to stare at the array of orange dots, nonplused.

“I kind of hate this,” she said pleasantly.
“Well let’s go then,” said Calvin, still staring at what Jennifer was convinced was a teapot painting. He blinked, put both hands in the pockets of his coat, turned deftly on the heels of his sneakers, and began to walk with a deliberate, unhurried stride toward the two doors leading to the grand staircase.

Jennifer watched the back of his head leave, then hurried after him: up a flight of stairs, around a corner, towards a small exhibit on the second floor.

Calvin waited quietly for her with his head down, contemplating a brochure of the museum floor plan. His coat made him look like a black brushstroke. Once he saw her he smiled, then walked through another set of double doors, into an exhibit marked “Lichtenstein.”

Lichtenstein, as it turned out, was a pointillist as well. His pictures used something called Benday dotting, in which many dots of the same color appear solid when they are grouped together. This way, like Seurat’s dots, small swabs of color that had no meaning on their own made meaningful things when they were combined.

Jennifer and Calvin walked up to a huge comic panel of an explosion, hanging on one of the wide white walls. It said: KABLAM!

Jennifer smiled, and walked to the next one, which showed a machine gun firing rounds. It said: THE EXHAUSTED SOLDIERS, SLEEPLESS FOR FIVE AND SIX DAYS AT A TIME, ALWAYS HUNGRY FOR CHOW, SUFFERING FROM TROPICAL FUNGUS INFECTIONS, KEPT FIGHTING!

Jennifer sat down abruptly on the bench behind her. Calvin sat too, his eyes still appraising the painting. He crossed his legs, took out a sketchbook from inside his coat, selected the sharpest of four number two pencils, and started to draw. He saw inking and dithering and negative space.

What Jennifer saw were sharp, bold outlines. The comic book colors were lost, but what remained was the bare skeleton of feeling: the jerk of acceleration, the blast of bombs, the thrust of rockets. Each stroke was sure, each line its own motion. Each little dot was neatly packaged between the black strokes — she was reminded of a flock of herded sheep or a new box of crayons. Now things had shape, had form and crispness and purpose.

It was then, staring at the painting that described exactly how she had felt a while ago, that Jennifer noticed an illustration on Calvin Seonwoo’s left shoe, which was being propped up by his right knee. It looked like this:

Underneath someone had written, in delicate cursive, a quote that Jennifer recognized but could not attribute to anyone, which went: “And yes I said yes I will Yes.”

“What’s that?” she said, without thinking to clarify. Calvin pulled his head up from his work and raised his eyebrows quizzically. “Oh,” he said after a minute. “That’s jeong. It’s Korean. My mom showed me and I liked it.” He turned his notebook to a fresh page and wrote the Hangul character out again fast. “So I drew it on my shoe.”

“What’s it mean?” said Jennifer, disregarding this strange logic. The deftness of his stroke and the simplicity of the line impressed her.

“Love,” said Calvin easily, leaning back on one arm. “Kind of. It’s a little different.”

Jennifer nodded silently, trying not to think too much. Calvin must have sensed she wanted more,
though, because he went on. “Jeong isn’t really the feeling of love, like ‘I love you;’ it’s kind of… the force of love. The thing that brings other things together. Like gravity. That’s the James Joyce bit, the ‘Yes I said yes I will Yes’ bit. You know.”

More than anyone, she thought.

Because there, in the white halls of the art institute, the word on the page and on the off-white canvas of Calvin’s sneaker became another line, another stroke of ink that held the dots in, that held everything in like gravity held things in; Calvin became a black, bold line, and she was a thousand little dots, scattered and dithered and pointillized there against the white walls, random until she was held in by something and became a color.

And the color, she decided, was fully and patently green.
to my dead car  

It was the driver side light  
that drained and drained  
like a fading yellow sun,  
it sucked the life right out of you,  
it’s always the little things.

It only took a moment  
to make you whole again;  
one quick jolt, and you borrowed  
a bit of life. I watched the engine smoke  
spit clouds over the pavement  
like desperate, gasping breaths.  
I wanted to ask you if there was a heaven.  
I wanted to know if you met god.

The first time I knew death, I was eight,  
eight and watching my grandfather’s face  
as it stilled and became icy cold.  
His eyes froze like the buttons  
I used for eyes on my snowman, lifeless  
and a carrot nose.

I was holding his hand;  
Mom told me his life passed into me,  
but I never felt it, I never felt warmth  
between our palms, just that cold, dying pulse.  
All these years, I’ve been searching,  
wondering where he is inside me,  
but I don’t know where a life like that goes.

The mechanic tells me to keep you running,  
that you only need a few minutes  
to recharge, to be like new.

I think maybe you’re more human,  
I think maybe he’s wrong about you.  
I wonder if you know you’re living again,  
if the life you took from that  
dusky pickup truck is empty,  
if it rattles around inside you,  
a hollow cage.
You
underwhelm me

—owe me 40 dollars I’m bound
  never to see,
drive me to Ringing Rocks but
  get us lost and forget the hammer,
make laughing unfunny jokes
  about your unwashed hair,
talk about depth and fake it
  (with infuriating works like nihilistic),
assure me no one will ever (ever, ever)
  care for me like you do—

We
accidentally kissed

—again, under a blanket fort,
  Kaki King yawning
  words through speaker holes
  and now—

I may just be trapped

—under the giant thumb
  of your way-too big hands,
  knuckles like pennies I still wish on.
I’ve dabbled in foreign frat boys
  who lure me with bottles,
the coziest boys who go to
  temple and Temple,
Egyptian boys begging for mono but—

Jesus Christ
no one kisses like you do.
I met Alli on my daily run at the track. The sky was a pure blue, the sun strong, the air crisp and cool, warning of the autumn. I ran two miles before I noticed her about a hundred meters ahead of me. I decided to cut the usual sixth mile and slowed into a cool-down lap. Every few steps, I shot a glance in her direction, hoping to make eye contact. She looked up and I glanced away. When we are within talking distance, our eyes met. I edged over and introduced myself.

“Pick a hand.” I offer both hands. David taps my left fist. I open my hand to reveal a black pawn. I reach over and place it on the leftmost edge of his side of the board. Within a minute, both armies are assembled, waiting to be commanded.

“So how was your run today?” A glint of mischief plays across David’s face.

“It was good. I had to rush off to shower before going to English,” I respond, pushing my king’s pawn two squares up. David prefers queen’s pawn games. Knowing this, I force him to play king’s pawn when I can.

“Did you shower by yourself?” A short burst of laughter follows his question. I sense his scrutiny as he pushes his own king’s pawn up against my own.

I laugh, slamming my knight down on f3. “Yes, I showered by myself today. Your mother couldn’t make it.”

“Funny. You are a funny man.” David nods and sends his own knight forward.

“You saw me with a girl today,” I offer.

“No, I saw you with the girl today.” He points at me with his pawn. “She’s the one I told you about. Emily’s freshman friend. Remember? The one I saw at the gym.”

“Oh. Well. Now I know her name.” I send my bishop to exploit his weakened side.

“Knowing you, you probably know her number as well.”

“Actually, I didn’t get her number,” I lie. “But she told me to come by her room tonight.”

“Are you serious?” I hear admiration tinged with disbelief. I laugh as I castle, moving my king out of the center. “Of course not.”

“You are such a fucking manipulative liar.” So much for roommate love.

“I can’t help it.” I laugh, edging my rook over two squares. “I’m just so good.”

“Not at chess though—you just lost your bishop.”

“That bishop, good sir, was a poisoned bishop. It cost you the game.” I place my queen in front of his king. “Checkmate.”

Clad in tight faded blue jeans and a heavy gray hoodie, Alli strides through the book shelves toward me. Reaching the table, she shrugs off her backpack and peels off her sweatshirt. Her chest heaves from her walk to the library.

“Sorry for being late. I realized I brought the wrong book half way here.” Such gorgeous eyes set on such a lovely face. Green irises rimmed with a light brown.

“Don’t worry about it,” I assure her, taking out my highlighted syllabus.
“Guess who I met at the gym today.” A pause. “Your roommate David.”
I look up at the sound of his name. A pang of jealousy takes the place of a heartbeat.
Oblivious, or seeming so, Alli pulls out her books. “All right, so we’ll do Psych first. Then maybe you
can help me with the Religion paper. Are you sure you wanna go running today? It’s getting cold.”
“Up to you.”
“Teach me chess instead. David said that you two play every week or so. That’s really cute. You’ve
gotta teach me.”
“Not today, but definitely after this test.” I laugh, indicating the flashcards I had prepared for the up-
coming exam.
“Wow, these are intense flashcards.”
“It helps me organize the information in my head,” I explain, tapping my right temple.
Alli takes the notecards and flips through them, glancing at the backs every few cards. Her long brown
eyelashes flicker with every blink. She pulls her long hair over to her right shoulder and adjusts her shirt. Her
eyes flash up at me. A growing smirk opens into a wide smile. I am absorbed in her green irises.
“What’s the difference between sensation and perception?” She asks.
Challenged, I keep eye contact and pull up the definitions from memory. “Sensation is how sense
organs detect external stimulus. Perception is the brain’s processing, resulting in an internal representation of
stimuli. The difference is that sensation is detection while perception is construction in your mind.” Again I tap
my right temple.
“Very solid.” Alli nods. “So sensation is you looking at me, checking me out. And perception is your
reconstruction of me in your mind.” This time, she taps her right temple.
I laugh. “That’s right.”

“Pick a hand.”
This time David nods to the right. Again, he plays black.
The first game opens up with the Spanish Game. I win. The second game opens with Queen’s Gambit
Declined. I don’t take the offered pawn, eventually hindering my development. David uses his greater mobility
and my cramped right side against me. I lose.
“Let’s play twenty bucks for this last game.” David suggests smoothly.
I cautiously place my final pawn and stare incredulously at him. “What?”
“Twenty bucks. No? Fine, we’ll both put ten in and winner takes. How about that?”
“David, we never play for money. Why not a lunch or a dinner?”
“What are you worried about? You’re the better player, right?”
I am the better player. But that’s something you never let anyone else know. Ever. Something is different
today. David is playing at a deeper level: stronger moves, each move with good reasons, hidden reasons.
I shrug. “All right, let’s do it.”

Alli laughs. Her eyes become thin slivers and her mouth widens into a smile, unrestrained and pure,
like the smile of a child with no inkling of self-consciousness. “You are such a nerd.”
I smile back. “I take that as a compliment. Definitely an upgrade from dork.”
Alli furrows her brow quizzically. “What’s the difference?”
“A dork is socially inept. A geek--intensely interested in one subject. And a nerd--interested and proficient in multiple academic subjects; the key is: no implication of social inability.”
“I like you better when you’re running. You don’t talk as much.”
“Well, I like you better when you’re running. But for different reasons.”
Alli pulls herself up from the bed. “Back to chess.”
“All right, so now we’ve played a few games and got the basics down, we’ll work on a little more advanced stuff. There are three parts to a chess game: the beginning, called the opening, the middle game, and finally the end game. Very simple. Since most games are very different by the end, it’s understandable that it’s mostly the openings that are studied.”

I push both kings’ pawns up two squares. “This is called an open game, because once both players start developing, there’s quite a bit of interaction, conflict for space, pieces, power. As opposed to a closed game, which opens with queen’s pawn. Feeling me?”
Alli giggles. “Not literally.”
“Of course not.” I smile. “Now, the most popular openings for players of our caliber are, say, Ruy Lopez, Queen’s Gambit Accepted or Declined, Two Knights Defense, etc. I enjoy playing the Italian Game. By nature, it’s very straightforward and simple. It allows for good development. It can be played aggressively or defensively, depending on the situation. Don’t tell anyone but I tend to play it a bit too slow. I should develop faster.”
“Don’t worry. I’ll keep it a secret.”

After walking Alli back to her dorm, I retreat to the track, breathe some night air, clear my head. I wonder if anything will happen. Then, the real question, I wonder if I want anything to happen. We’re definitely close, very close for having known each other for just a couple of months. And the flirting is definitely fun. I wonder how much intent she perceives, also, how much intent she wishes me to perceive.

Green irises with brown rims.

Ethan, the world’s smartest procrastinator, pulls me aside after math class.
“Julia’s birthday was on Wednesday, so we’re throwing a party tonight in Keeney.”
“What time?” I ask.
“Be there by ten. Oh, and try not to lose to David again.”
“Wow, word gets around, huh.”
“Keeney. Ten o’clock. I’m meeting Lana for lunch. See you there.”

While waiting for David to come back from his computer science lecture, I flip through older flashcards to see how much I can recall. Theory of mind – gaining the understanding that others also have minds with separate beliefs, desires, and intentions.

I hear keys jiggling outside the door and keep my back to him when David comes in and throws his backpack on his bed.
“Hey, have you been waiting long? I had to arrange a meeting with project partners. You’re going to Julia’s tonight, right? We’ll just play a couple games tonight.”
I shrug. “Sure. Are you coming to Julia’s too?”
“Nah, I’m meeting up with someone to work on physics.”
“Maybe I shouldn’t go either. I know Julia on a personal one-to-one level. I don’t really know her friends that well.”
“Dude, you should go. I’m just gonna be working thermodynamics here.” A smirk.
“Oh, I see. That kind of thermodynamics. Maybe some simple harmonic motion, too?” Such lame nerdy jokes.
Two losses and one win later, I pull on my nicer jeans, a shirt, and my heavy winter coat. Walking across campus, I feel extremely light and free without a backpack or even a book. I should get out more. A little fun never hurt anyone.
When I get to Keeney, I pull out my cell to call Ethan. But before the first ring, I see someone coming down the hall. I slide in after him. Looking for Julia’s room, I think about how Julia and I had been closer last year but the way life worked out, we just haven’t seen each other as much.
I knock on her door, sensing the energy and life ready to spill out.
“Daniel! Wow! I haven’t seen you in years!” An entirely inebriated Julia bursts through and grabs me in a full bear hug.
“I know. Happy birthday!”
She pulls back and looks up at me. “I’ve had a little to drink.” Julia states sheepishly.
“I can tell.” I smile.
“Alli’s here, by the way. Don’t.” She sticks her pointer finger in my face. “Don’t give me that look. Everyone’s seen you two together since school started.”
Before I can respond, another friend comes through the door and I let Julia attack the new arrival. I walk through the common area, greeting friends and acquaintances. No Alli. I check the open rooms. No Alli. Julia must have been mistaken.
I pull out my cell phone and call her. Five rings--no answer. “Hey, this is Alli. Not here right now. Please—” Her soft voice conjures up visions of her lips. I try once more. No answer. I consider making up an excuse to leave, but remember David’s not-so-subtle indication of his present activities. I decide to stay.
X number of shots and Y number of beers later, I find myself making small talk with a couple of friends I ran cross-country with. Emily, also a junior, presses herself against me. Wondering where I’ll be spending the night, I think back to David. I wonder who this girl is. Usually, he’ll be talking about her for days on end. I try to remember if Alli takes Physics. I hit the button for recent calls and dial her number again. It’s odd she hasn’t answered. It’s also odd the past seven calls were to her. When did I make those calls?
My body moves on its own. I tell Julia I’m heading back to Pembroke and find my way out to the night. The winter night air is crisp and clean. Outside my door, I silence my breathing and listen: can’t hear anything. Curiosity piqued, I raise my hand to knock but don’t. Instead I walk up a flight of stairs, and lie down outside Ethan’s door. He won’t mind.
Ethan pushes my shoulder and tells me it’s nine. I’ve been awake for a couple hours but remained on Ethan’s futon semiconscious. I decide it’s late enough to go back to my room. I thank Ethan for his hospitality, bowing out.

I make little noise as I unlock my door. Not knowing what to expect, I inhale as I look to David’s bed. No one—but that doesn’t mean anything. I shake my head and remind myself that I have class in a bit. I unplug my laptop and gather my Psych handouts.

A flashcard falls to the floor. I bend to pick it up. On it, someone has written “I miss you. Thought you’d be at Julia’s. Alli.”

“Pick a hand.”
This time I’m black.
“Let me tell you a story from my Comparative Religions class.” David looks over at me.
I slide my king’s pawn up against his.
“The second king of Israel, while walking on the roof of his house, sees the beautiful Bath-sheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, and sends for her. The king then lies with her and she conceives. To cover up his sin, he summons Uriah home from the army. However, Uriah refuses to violate the ancient rule regarding warriors in active service and chooses to remain with his troops. Uriah is a loyal man, bound by morals to his country. Seeing that Uriah abstains from his own wife, the king tells his general to abandon him to the enemy. After Uriah dies, the king marries Bath-sheba. The second king of Israel was named David.”
The skyline is my nerves.
Taut, stretched and trembling, with lights
strung out along its jagged edges, bridges over riverdark, and curves
of asphalt; the cars and buses roar along my veins
(so distant now; with distance, signals fade,
as the soul is left behind the body and the brain);
my arteries are tracks carved out by trains.
“The eyes are windows to the soul,” they said,
“He’ll see your deepest dark desires there”;
as though the retina could speak, as though the cornea contains
the dreams that would escape, but – do I dare?
And would he care?
My soul’s half-hazel, then, and tinged with blue.
If you strum my optic nerve,
twist out the photo negatives I’m helpless to preserve,
do you think it would enlighten you?
Windows to the soul. I am a window soul, an empty blur
desperate to hold the gray damp fields and forests as they pass;
a cool touch on fevered skin, clenched helpless fists, at you – and her! –
breath vanishing on a pane of glass.
But what’s a girl to do?
And then – and then? Each sunrise brings decisions down again,
each silent sunset sweeps them all away.
And even if all fantasies came true,
I still would never know just what to say,
and anyway, even the perfect you
couldn’t keep all of my whimpering wolves at bay.
No, not with all your love, nor grace, nor pity;
while I came home to a town of ghosts,
you ran home to the city.
Here they whisper things, like “that slut!” and “how pretty!”
Here streets are made for cars; while travelers with weary feet
and homeworn mouths, and low-heat fireside eyes,
are sent off from the perfect lawns, and distances are magnified,
and malnourished souls starve on too much to eat;
my childish enchantment with this place has died,
and now the solitude is crowded, and the rite
of passage, baptism in teenage sweat,
in lipstick and in beer,
is opened up to its bare bones (how endearing, oh, how trite!)
I’ve done my living here; I’m ready to forget.
I remember – still remember – quiet crowds,
And storefront warmth, and hidden pathways, and the clouds
That swept the sunset silver, and the hilltop rimmed with frost;
And breath vanishing from a pane of glass,
Quick now, before the memories are lost…
There, where you are, the nights are clear and cold,
and all the skyline shimmers, etched in gold.
the way words leave your mouth

“Legs and arms and feet / in a beautiful jumble. / Me, here, with a cup,” Ernest thought to himself, blowing a dance of tiny ripples across the surface of his chamomile. Passerby after passerby was passing by, the only literal separation between themselves and Ernest being a thin piece of glass, but oh, how much more there truly was, furtively lurking between all of the atoms holding that glass together! Table for one, yes. Human connection was an odd thing: he felt it the most when he saw writing in the margins of pages of books, made fleeting eye contact with someone, or swayed to the same pattern of beats as the people around him when he saw live music, but nothing more concrete or intimate than that. He glanced outside again; fat rain droplets had begun to fall, and after a few seconds umbrellas and hoods were on the upswing. Ernest watched, feeling a strange, muddled pang of kinship as a barefooted man, seemingly clothed entirely in toss-away fabric swatches, sat holding out his shoe, begging for change. “Charity loafer. / Rain makes it a sinking boat / filling drop by drop.”

When had it all begun? Somewhere between the time he vowed to never go through revolving doors, and the moment when the role of number two pencils graduated from simple alphabet letters to filling in bubbles on standardized tests. Way before jean shorts were ‘out’, but after he had realized he could make imprints of the Sunday comics in his silly putty. On a Tuesday, that much was certain. He had been teetering on the top of a ladder twelve shelves back in the very far reaches of an old library, biding time until Janice picked him up (of all the careless babysitters Ernest had throughout a childhood of an almost perpetually-absent mother, Janice deserved award upon award). He had felt unsteady since seven that morning when Janice had forcefully poked his shoulder and woken him with her gentle words: “Change out of your flannels now! I have to find somewhere to drop you off in fifteen minutes.” So even while calmly searching for books on the top shelf, Ernest couldn’t shake the unsteady feeling.

That was why, when the earth began its soft and unexpected shake that afternoon, when historic rocks dislodged and any sort of balance Ernest had was lost completely, the situation seemed so fitting to the feeling he had woken up with that it didn’t really surprise him.

The aftermath is tragically fuzzy. The tremors he felt from the scratchy carpet of the floor up to the tips of his crew-cut follicles only lasted three seconds, but it was three seconds enough to send him flying off the ladder, and to send a small book of poetry flying down after him, knocking him out. Later, Ernest had learned that the quake was too small to have even registered on the Richter scale, which seemed like somewhat of an injustice. By that point though, it didn’t matter. By that point, the irrevocable poetic burden had already befallen him. The first words out of Ernest’s mouth when he came to? A haiku (an ode to a haiku, nonetheless) in perfect five/seven/five syllable formation. “Three lines are so small/ I could almost pick them up/ between two fingers.”

From that point on, haikus came toppling over Ernest’s bottom lip as easily as if someone were sitting on the back of his tongue with a pen and paper eloquently composing them. The vowels, consonants, the po-
etic ‘pause’ between each of his lines- all of this would come flowing out, and soon the control of speech and thought was no longer his. Everything was five seven five at first, until “Lying backwards / counting constellations / Are they closer than I think?” when he realized he could speak and think in some free-form haikus as well (it tended to come and go). Pretentious hipster kids marveled at the man with ever-ready haikus and thought he was struck by some divine, righteous inspiration, but for him, it was an unshakable curse. Simple acts, like ordering a cup of tea, became such a painstaking ordeal that he had to stick to routines, minimize words, get things from people who knew him. Everyday conversations became as awkward for him as those faint upper-lip mustache shadows on pubescent boys. The looks he got from people were the worst. Eyes, eyes, eyes. The eyes seemed to follow him down the streets, and soon Ernest became frantically certain that everyone—the businessman pounding the pavement towards him, the little boy messily eating a popsicle, the woman carrying bags in her arms and under her eyes—knew the way words left his mouth.

As Ernest walked down the sidewalk towards the pet shop, he felt bits and pieces of his heart dropping slowly onto the ground below him. Subconsciously he bent down to retrieve them, and his foot landed on a brochure. “Chicago, IL? / I’d like to parachute there, / drop into new life.” He picked it up, folded it into an airplane and tossed it away, watching as it passed through the frame of the shop door. Ernest’s eyes followed it to the foot of the parakeet cage, and there, he saw a woman. His life was an awkward mess of trying to avoid human connection, but all of this seemed to melt away.

Lolita looked up from the parakeet that was resting on her index finger, and saw a man. Her life was an awkward mess of trying to avoid human connection (Who would understand what had happened to her? A woman only able to speak in quotations from famous novels was almost too absurd for anyone to believe or take seriously), but as he walked up to her, all of this seemed, somehow, to melt away. “What’s this? Am I falling? My legs are giving way under me,” she thought, Tolstoy’s words taking over her own, and next, Burgess’s, “Oh bliss! Bliss and heaven!”

Ernest walked over to her, for all the timidity and apprehension he usually felt had disappeared somewhere between the doorway and the few feet to the parakeet cages. “I’m Ernest (often) / What did your mom think fit you? / Jennifer? Susan?” Nabokov fell through her lips, “Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.”

Ernest found himself fumbling to explain, quickly get it all out- there was this dire need to see if it would be alright. Somehow, he knew. “I’m not confined much / -to schedules, people, places-/ but I am to haikus.”

He had known. It wouldn’t matter to her- it never would have mattered to her. Then she spoke, and he recognized Siddhartha once the lines were out, “Words do not express thoughts very well. They always become a little different immediately after they are expressed, a little distorted, a little foolish.”

Ernest smiled and the corners of his eyes crinkled. Lolita. “I know a table / where the light hits it just right. / Tea for two?”
Lolita placed down the parakeet. “And yes I said yes I will Yes.”

It had been a Tuesday, that much he could remember, when Ernest first felt the shakes that had changed the course of his life. Walking out the door next to Lolita, feeling new shakes, good shakes, in his chest, Ernest glanced at the calendar hanging on the wall and quickly found the date. A Tuesday.etic ‘pause’ between each of his lines- all of this would come flowing out, and soon the control of speech and thought was no longer his. Everything was five seven five at first, until “Lying backwards / counting constellations / Are they closer than I think?” when he realized he could speak and think in some free-form haikus as well (it tended to come and go). Pretentious hipster kids marveled at the man with ever-ready haikus and thought he was struck by some divine, righteous inspiration, but for him, it was an unshakable curse. Simple acts, like ordering a cup of tea, became such a painstaking ordeal that he had to stick to routines, minimize words, get things from people who knew him. Everyday conversations became as awkward for him as those faint upper-lip mustache shadows on pubescent boys. The looks he got from people were the worst. Eyes, eyes, eyes. The eyes seemed to follow him down the streets, and soon Ernest became frantically certain that everyone—the businessman pounding the pavement towards him, the little boy messily eating a popsicle, the woman carrying bags in her arms and under her eyes—knew the way words left his mouth.

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Oh, look the world is melting, look the streets
Themselves are rushing, like the newborn streams
That cross the forest floor beneath my feet,
Ice cracking like emergence of a dream—
For though the wind blows fierce, and early night
Sets in to slow the progress of the sun,
Still mud stays soft ‘til morning, it will fight
Against death’s blanket ‘til the war is won.
Ground once protected by white winter’s shell
Now feels the urge for growing things inside,
And roads and forest paths alike rebel—
They beg for spring with love and limbs sprawled wide
Just as the sun-warmed earth prepares for seed,
So I am burned by new-awakened need.

spring!
sadie lansdale

headed for talbot ave.
a photo by caroline woodruff
the morning after your death i woke
to find a single pair of your workboots
waiting empty by the kitchen door.

-- in this life i have stared down the
length of the great wall of china, sailed
to the center of the atlantic, touched the
legend eye of the hurricane and known
the immensity of a desert's night sky --

but in your two abandoned shoes i found a
space to fill more impossible, more vast than
the hugest place to which i have ever travelled.
I am eight years old, listening to Baba’s story about a unicorn in Baghdad. We are in the living room, surrounded by ceramic statues from other worlds that most children wouldn’t be allowed to touch. I am having a tea party with golden goblets from Babylon. In my grandfather’s story, the unicorn is leading him down long, dusty roads to his childhood home. Baba is only a boy, but he has somehow lost his way. The unicorn’s hooves are throwing dust, but its coat never dirties. It casts white light like the moon, like a beacon. It guides Baba home.

I am ten years old, and Imi is teaching me Arabic. She only teaches me phrases of endearment: I love you, my doll, may I die for you. I form the words easily. I am familiar with their sound, but I want to write them; I want to learn their shape. Imi says this would be too hard for her to teach and too hard for me to understand. They are not your letters, she says. She traces the words with her finger in long, graceful strokes. I try to form an image of the words falling into the air from my grandmother’s fingertips, but I cannot see them. She writes them only to be invisible. They are not your letters, she says again. This is the language of my family.

I am thirteen, and we are celebrating Christmas in my grandparents’ living room even though we are Jewish. There is a large tiled mural of Moses parting the red sea on the left wall, and a Christmas tree in the corner. It has always been easier, Baba explains, to pretend to belong. I press my palm into the ridges of the mural and come away with an Egyptian on horseback molded into my hand. Baba asks me if I know the story. I tell him I don’t, even though I do. I want to hear it again. I have not heard it enough. Baba’s voice fills the room, and I stare at Moses’ long, bearded face as the Christmas lights color it red, then green, red, then green.

I am sixteen, and we are eating Imi’s pancakes with rosewater syrup. Next to me on the table, the newspaper headline reads of Baghdad. It is not the Baghdad of Baba’s stories. In the front page photograph, young Iraqi boys are casting stones. A small drop of syrup falls on the page, and I can no longer see their faces. The ink bleeds. They look like watercolor ghosts. Baba turns the paper over and takes a bite of pancake. Awafi, I tell him, in good health. The words fall into the air and then are gone. I want to say more, but it is all I know of the language.

I am twenty-one, and Baba no longer tells stories, and Imi cries whenever I speak Arabic. The house is heavy and quiet. I ask Baba to tell me about the unicorn. Baba is just a boy. He has lost his way. The unicorn’s coat casts white light like the moon, like a beacon. Baba stops. He looks tired. “Will you finish it for me?” he asks. “I no longer have the words.” I follow the unicorn down long, dusty roads to Baba’s childhood home, to Baghdad. Awafi, I tell the unicorn. His coat shines like a beacon. I reach out and touch it. I reach into a past I have never known to tell a story I know by heart.
Take that cloth and
Scrub wax polish
Photocopy molds
Of artificial antiques.

Hope that Jap returns
With his polished suit,
His crisp cut currency,
That slender frowning wife.

She follows him around,
Placing elegant little toes
In larger craters dented
By his seismic reputation.

Narrow eyes glancing
Doubtfully at my wares,
She knows the truth,
But she won’t dare tell.

She wants the shiny
Shimmering silver grail
From Antebellum America
Wink wink.

Always ahead of her
With that invisible leash,
He’ll throw down green
To inflate that frown.

He’ll make her smile.
But I’ll make her mine.
She wants the pretty
Fake old real jewels.

But she wants them from me.

(authenticity by Scott Newton)

(based on The Man in the High Castle by Philip K. Dick)
When Pepito heard his chief’s command, he looked away from the bleachers. The leader of the Philippine National Police jumped up and down on the pitcher’s mound, waving his hat in the air while the star pitcher for the Little League team, an eleven year old from Cebu, sprawled on the ground, biting his mitt. In his haste, the commander had pushed the boy down.

The last pitch, a foul, had been lost to the bleachers. One man caught the ball, but it slipped from his fingers and another man now held the ball. One man pushed the other. This ignited more pushing and soon, the crowd churned. The pitcher had been ready to throw the next pitch, but his batter turned around to track the shouting from the bleachers. It was as if a giant hand hovered over the crowd and smashed.

Several people fell from a row to one below.

The new police recruits, who came from many different Philippine islands, shared English as their common language. That morning, before the game, the commander’s spit had landed on Pepito’s nose and cheeks, “Above all, keep the peace. The eyes of the world watch us today.” The commander talked for at least twenty minutes, long enough for sparks of his spit to dry from Pepito’s face.

TV cameras from national and foreign news gave live broadcasts. Earlier that day, Pepito had phoned the local bar in his baranguay, promising the bar owner a large tip to bring Pepito’s parents to the bar, so they could see their son on TV. Pepito would make his parents proud for once. If the camera panned his way, his parents would catch a glimpse of Pepito in his uniform and know what a success he was now. His parents did not see him off on the bus that took him from his little village to the capital city.

Ever since Pepito was ten years old, he knew he would not live out his life in the barrio. He felt it in his aching, growing bones and in his twitching muscles. He was destined for greatness. As soon as he was old enough, Pepito told his parents he was leaving home.

His father warned, “We don’t know anyone in the city to help you.”

His mother said, “You’re too ambitious. You can make a beautiful life here. Even if you’re poor, you will never starve.”

“Young reward is not in this life,” his father said.

His mother said, “Be a good boy and you will go to heaven.”

“You don’t understand,” Pepito started. He wanted to tell his parents that he could do both: Be good in this life and earn a spot in heaven.

“You don’t understand,” his father mimicked. “This is not the American movies. Shut your mouth.”
Pepito knew his family did not live like the American movies. There were no hugs or birthday parties or the expectation that dreams would come true. On this day, Pepito didn’t react the way he used to: by staring at a spot on the ground so he wouldn’t cry; by turning his lips under his teeth and biting down. He stared at his father and wouldn’t look away. They just glared at each other as if meeting a stranger.

“Come,” his mother said gently. She waved Pepito over. “Rest your head in my lap one more time. I bet your ears are full of wax.” His mother slipped the thin metal hook from the pocket in her housedress and waved it in the air.

Pepito’s life with his parents didn’t include long embraces or kisses on the forehead. After he had been weaned, his mother only touched him if she had a chore to conduct. He loved coming home from school after another lice infestation, scratching spots on his head raw, knowing his mother would spend the rest of the afternoon picking nits from his hair. He was happy when he got a splinter because then his father would hold his hand, squeezing Pepito’s skin until the sliver of wood oozed out.

The last time the Philippines had been this close to Little League glory, there were accusations of age violations. Investigations revealed a couple of players in their twenties, even a home run hitter from Mindanao in his mid-thirties. When this scandal broke, like all the other hoaxes, The First Pregnant Man is a Filipino Fraud; Love Bug Mastermind Found in the Philippines; First Lady Imelda Buys Thousands of Designer Shoes While her People Starve; Filipinos of the world, from the busboys cruising the high seas to the nurses in Canada, felt the need to apologize for their countrymen.

The chaos in the bleachers was spreading now.

“What are you waiting for?” Pepito expected lava to burst from the top of the commander’s bald head. “Shoot into the crowds!”

Pepito’s commander yelled in a high register that startled Pepito. He jumped. This was his same reaction whenever his father would smack him to emphasize a point—the same smack his father gave to Pepito’s mother, his brothers and sisters, the carabao, and the mule. Pepito could have sworn he felt his father strike his skull as he tumbled forward, the first one to shoot. Not to be outdone by Pepito, the other men pointed into the rioting crowd, pulling triggers.

After the crowd felt the drops of blood on their skin, they were silent only a moment before they started running and pushing to escape. The bullets flew until the stands looked like the grill of a jeepney after a long drive through the province.

When there were no bullets left to shoot, the silence opened a space for Pepito to hear his commander’s voice.

“The clouds,” the commander said. “The clouds.”
I sip you  
Can’t hold the cup for long  
Hot.  
The space between my finger prints is red, raised higher  
Marbled dank, exhale cracked  
And caked sugar  
Levitating from the  
Black Porcelain  
Too much cream.  

Heavy—  
I push my fingers through the loop  
You push your russet fingers through the loop, faster  
But steam slowly curling  
Infiltrate my nose and wrap the taste.  
The mug with its hand  
On its hip  
Handle—  
Still too hot.  
Mud mixed, lait cement, French kissed  
I sip.  

Burned my tongue  
And the sugar rushes in.  
Harvested, I’m awake  
Third world wanders in  
Kiss the rim  
Take a sip  
Almost addicted again  
Smell, well, ineffably inviting  
Acquired, bitter when you’ve cooled.  

But it’s been two days— and not a word, song’s machine whet.  
I’ll drink you to the dregs, ground  
Grind, fine vanilla  
But I much prefer my head straight
Not dependent on the morning’s
Kind:
Fueling my fleeting, stunting my growth.

I sip you all day, venerate
The infatuation
Cooler now, more bitter…
But the grounds are sweet:
And the sugar is at the bottom.

You exhale smoke, ineffably inviting steam
I pour more
And the sugar is at the bottom.
“Excuse me?”
I peek into the seemingly deserted room filled with computers on stand-by and huge stacks of books sorted by name. The building has long been cleared out by the final triumphant bell announcing release for the summer; I shouldn’t have waited so long to come here. I fidget nervously, waiting for a response and hoping there won’t be one. *Maybe no one’s here, I think to myself. I should just go.*

Glancing back to the empty hall behind me, I see the exit silhouetted in sunlight, beckoning to me like a portal to another world. I desperately want to just walk away from this room and back to my car. I could make up some story about them not having what I needed to get. The thought of lying to her mother fills me with guilt, however, and I reluctantly turn back to the empty room. *Just one more time, I reason. If no one answers this time, then at least I can say I tried.*

Louder, I call out, “Excuse me, is anyone here?”

A portly woman waddles out of the connecting back room. Damn it. She looks up at me with curiosity through the dull lenses of her glasses, which are perched on her nose in an old-fashioned sort of way. I can see her taking in my anxious foot-tapping and judging me for the nail I was midway through biting, as I always do when I’m in situations I’d rather not be a part of. I quickly drop my hand and hide it in my back pocket, flushing with embarrassment.

“Here for pick-up?” she asks uncertainly. “You’re lucky; I was just about to leave. It’s very late.” She emphasizes this last part, as though I’ve inconvenienced her greatly by asking her to do her job. She’s supposed to stay another thirty minutes at least; all the school officials are required to be here until five, even today.

“I’m sorry, I was in a meeting and could only just come by,” I lie. In truth, I had been waiting in my car until the last possible minute, unwilling to run this errand that I shouldn’t even be responsible for anymore. The woman squints up at me suspiciously, as if she can sense I’m lying, in the way adults always seem to be able to do.

“Weren’t you already here for pick-up last week, young lady?” she accuses, frowning. I sigh and run a hand through my hair. I knew this wasn’t going to be easy.

“It’s not for me. It’s for a…friend.” I stumble over the last word, which causes the woman to raise her eyebrows doubtfully.

“Everyone must pick up their own,” she declares, as if reciting the rule from a handbook of some sort. I hate it when school officials start making up rules just to assert their authority over us, those unruly, rebellious students.

“Look, I know everyone is supposed to pick up their own and you need your ID and everything like that, but this is a special circumstance,” I try to reason.

“Your friend can just pick it up at a later time. The office will be open through the summer,” the
woman replies in a dismissive tone, turning to go back into the other room.

“She’s not coming to get it; she’s not even around anymore,” I snap, a little too much bitterness filling my voice. The woman turns back around, giving me her full attention. I take a deep breath and try again. “She can’t pick it up, and her mother asked me to do it for her. Can you please just give it to me? It’s the last day of school.”

The woman sighs, although she seems a little more convinced now. “What’s the name?” she asks. I tell her and watch carefully as her displeased expression immediately changes. Suddenly, instead of being officious and annoying, she is filled with sympathy and pity. “Of course, dear, just give me one moment. I wish you had told me earlier.”

I stand in silence as she shuffles back to the connecting room and rummages around there for a few minutes. Unconsciously, my hand wanders out of its pocket prison. I quickly jam it back in just as she returns with what I had been sent for. She holds it out to me, and I snatch it away a little too quickly. The thing is so heavy I almost drop it in surprise. The woman doesn’t seem to notice, however, and merely pats my hand, her small eyes filled with that familiar mixture of pity and morbid curiosity. I flinch away from her touch, and she takes a small step back.

“Give my best to her mother and tell her we miss her here at the office,” she murmurs comfortingly.

“I’ll be sure to do that,” I reply, immediately regretting the snide tone of my words I smile half-heartedly and mutter, “Thanks for your help. Have a good break.”

The short drive back home is plagued by the shadow that is cast over the car by the object lying on the passenger seat. Insinuating memories start to flutter around in my mind, called up from where I had locked them away. I accelerate faster than I should, trying to dispel the urge to throw my cursed burden out the car and speed far away from it and the memories. I push the sibilant sighs of long ago away as best as I can and try to console myself with the fact that this errand should be over in a few minutes. Then I can get back to my life.

Unfortunately, I remember that my mother needs the car to pick up my sister, which means I’m going to have to walk. I park the car in the garage and seize the thing before sliding out of the car. I grab a pen from the cup-holder and hurriedly scribble something on what I’m holding so as not to lose it. The corners dig painfully into my soft palms, and I struggle to carry it with downturned eyes and straining muscles. It’s hard to be comfortable when you’re carrying a heavy object.

As hard as I try to fight this second surge of memory, I lose out this time; it’s too much. In my mind’s eyes, she is running ahead of me, skipping playfully in her silly camouflage pants. The joy reflected in those summer-sky eyes of hers causes a familiar ache in the center of my chest; my arms droop a little with the weight of my burden. I can chase after that carefree young girl, on the cusp of adolescence and at the end of bright-eyed innocence, until I could no longer stand. I have things to do today, though. Still following her footsteps, even now. I can’t believe I agreed to do this.

I try to focus on putting one foot in front of the other and think of all the things I have planned for tonight but to no avail. All I can hear are snatches of youthful conversations, with our inane little-girl games and convoluted inside jokes. I try to remember when that childlike innocence died in both of us, but there’s no defi-
ing moment, just a fading away. I was almost a sister once, a sister and a best friend, but not anymore. Now I’m just the messenger, the only one willing to do this for her out of some hollow sense of obligation. Resolutely, I shut out her laughter and the reverberating echoes of her voice in my empty chest and continue on my way.

The trees whisper their summer secrets to me as I walk down the familiar road. With each step, I can’t help but think of the countless times I had sprinted down this very street, to the rescue once again. Through rain, snow, and crazy Texas storms, I had charged down this tree-lined track with single-minded determination; I was like a goddamn postal worker, summoned by the plaintive tones of her emails and messages after the beep. I can still feel the fiery protectiveness that she used to inspire in me. I can still hear my sneakers thudding against the hard pavement and the cold air burning through my lungs and whipping through my hair as I rushed to save her. I can still see her standing on her front porch, eerily shadowed by the lone streetlight.

My hand-me-down winter coat could do little to protect me from the chill in those days. I would skip every other step and end my mad dash with a crushing embrace and whispers of comfort. We would sit for hours on that stoop, with her spilling out whatever was bothering her from the day and me valiantly- naively- trying to stitch it up in a neat little solution made only of words. I wonder when she stopped being my almost-sister and started becoming my always-burden. The thought just inspires a new wave of resentment for having to do this for her.

I can see the park from here and imagine it carpeted with a few bare inches of snow. My traitorous mind calls up the image of the undiluted happiness in her smile as she tilted her face up so it could be showered with those rare flakes. Her footprints in that snow-covered sidewalk will be burned forever in my memory. I was always one step behind, always watching her lead. And I would have followed her anywhere. I can see her sitting in front of her computer later that afternoon with a cup of hot chocolate in her hand as I lounged on the floor, counting the flowers in the pattern of the rug. We could see the white flurries drifting down from our warm safe haven and dreamed up the next day’s adventures from our shelter. It hasn’t snowed for two years, and sometimes I think she took the miracle away when she started to change.

I stop walking, unable to move as all of these old memories rush from my brain straight to my heart. The ache in my chest won’t go away, even as my temper flares at the thought of the woman in the office staring at me pityingly and how I had to be the one to stand there and explain that she wasn’t here to pick it up herself. No one else would get it. I’m the only one left; everyone else had written her off as a lost cause long ago. I didn’t want to be the only one. Yet, still, here I am, walking down this road once more. Why? I can’t choke back the toxic self-loathing that I feel for still acting like I owe something to that little girl dancing in the snow. She’s gone.

A rush of anger like blood floods my mouth, and I fight the urge to throw my burden down and run. Because I can’t take this anymore. I can’t keep reliving those horrible moments and wondering if there was something, anything, more that I could have done. My heart stutters as I remember the night I had to drive home without her when she collapsed in the movie theatre. It was the third in a series of events that occurred over two months but seemed to have overtaken my life. I remember driving to her house anyway, even though it was out of the way. I sat in my car with the radio turned up as far as it would go, screaming at me, dulling the pain and the confusion and the anger. Without thinking, I began to pound the passenger seat with my fist, over and over again. Thunk, thunk, thunk to the wild beat of a rock song as I started to cry. I wanted to beat that empty pas-
senger seat out of my mind, out of my life. I hammered the seat for so long that I had ugly bruises all down the side of my hand for a week.

In my twisted timeline of events, it feels like we had many more weeks like that one, with friends giving up and peeling away one by one. It felt like years before I was pushed to the point where I just wanted it to be over, wanted her to just go away. Bile rises in my throat when I think of that wish, how close it came to coming true, though not in the way I had wanted. I had never wanted *that*. In truth, though, it couldn’t have been more than two weeks later. There were only two of us then to really care that there was an empty place at the lunch table. Only two of us to frantically call again and again with no answer. Only two of us who got the phone call in the middle of class with the name of the hospital. And now…now there was only me. I start to walk again. I have to drop this thing off before I got sucked up into the black hole of memories from the time after that call.

It’s too late, though. The last leg of this journey tears at me with every plodding step of my worn-out sneakers. I haven’t walked down this road since that night. I remember the beauty of the world that night as the full moon lit everything up in a graceful blue glow. I wasn’t paying attention to the moon then; I was running as fast as I could, trying to escape the nightmare that became reality, the prediction that became truth. Everything had gone wrong, and I couldn’t stand it anymore. I was running away from her and what she had done, away from my own guilt of not doing enough, away from the shame of doubting what she said even at this point. Because, even in the despair of that moment, I was still unable to believe her outrageous stories, the lies and tales that had grown monstrous over the years.

That night, I had torn down the posters and threw the gifts and the emails into a box and hid it in the deep recesses of my closet. I couldn’t bear to look at the reminders of what she had once been. Had I been blinded by childhood innocence and friendship, rendering me unable to see the end to this story? I had crumpled the letters and cards and stuffed the memories of used-to-be and before to the back corner of my mind. I had tried to take down the photos, too, but I couldn’t. I needed- still need- proof that the other her existed, once upon a time before pills and lies and delusions and self-imposed exile.

In front of her house, I stand without moving or really even thinking, so caught up in my whirlwind of memory and sadness. My hands hurt from gripping what they hold so tightly, and tears are shining in my eyes. Because she’s never coming back, never coming home. My emails have no reply; my voicemails have no answer. I’ve been cut off by the girl who claimed her body- or maybe the girl she had always been, the girl I hadn’t wanted to see.

“When did you give up?” I whisper, staring at the window that used to be hers.

I snap myself out of my heartbroken reverie and jog up to the front steps. Unceremoniously, I drop my burden on the stone porch and sprinted away. Before I turn completely away, I see the playful summer breeze flip through the pages of the unsigned yearbook where only one message is scrawled in my tiny handwriting: *Do you remember playing in the leaves and singing songs and forging a friendship that is only a memory now?*
Eleven days awake
and I haven’t even seen God yet –
a thousand cartoon birds
and the drone of puppet people
so loud that my ears
hear only silence;
the garish glare of the sun
and the nefarious shine of the moon
burn my eyes into a
harsh blackness so deep
that I lose myself in the inky tide;
the velvet electricity
of the TV misting towards me,
caressing my face with static danger,
coaxing me slowly, gently,
into ephemeral relief –
I startle and curse the heavens
and fade to wakefulness.
We sifted bright-eyed through church libraries and
    university basements tearing out yellowed pages
    of Rumi and Sartre,
carrying them crumpled across the backs of trains
    in rail yards lighted with electric gnosis,
    turning our faces gold,
tireless in our search and finding that it's bigger than
    time and no deeper than each others' hands,
that it's pilgrims in chamomile glow, grid-iron censors
    trailing smoke above stone tiles,
it's braided beards dipping low in the shadows of minarets,
    all eyes to the artisan and from there to his works,
    white mosaics of his hundred names,
it's towering zigurats bared under white violent stars,
    flowered priests blowing sage into the mouths
    of captives and opening the rivers of the chest,
it's the Untouchable death-caste wading to the knees
    in black Ganges, floating downriver like gray flowers,
it's cross-legged figures immolating in wild orange streets
    in protest of wars, blazing in the firelight of Hanoi,
it's Navajo dream walkers climbing the heights of mesas,
    half blue light, breathing like flutes in the rhythm
    of pines and buffalo thunder,
it's the unbridled amorous connectivity trembling in the space
    between us, all atoms too blessed to touch,
impossibly far is in communion with everywhere,
I am my father and children and all of us at once.
It’s Saturday, but Shaun will be out all day, helping his mother pack her bags to move to Tequesta for the winter. I can hear him on the stairs now, each step too loud. I clench my teeth and close my eyes and try to remember how much my silence hurts him.

“’Morning Elizabeth. Is there coffee?”

There is always coffee. He knows that there is always coffee, that I wake up thinking about which roast I want. He just talks to fill the space between us.

“What do you have planned for today?” he asks as he pours milk into his cup, diluting the contents entirely. He puts the cup down on the kitchen counter and stands behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist and pressing his lips to the side of my neck.

“Nothing.” He keeps holding me, until I am annoyed and try to step free from his embrace. His arms resist at first, causing me to slosh some of the coffee out of my cup and onto the sleeve of my black sweater. He turns away from me, pouring his coffee into a travel mug and leaving his cup in the sink.

“I’m going to head out. I should be home around 4:00 this afternoon. Do you want to go out to Brindisi’s tonight, get dinner, just the two of us? I can call my sister to watch Henry.” He looks so hopeful, standing with his hand on the doorknob, in his faded jeans and slip-on loafers, his brownish-gold hair sticking up a little in his haste to get to his mother’s house.

“Alright,” I concede, “that would be nice.” I have no excuse to say no to him, so I smile a little and reach over and smooth my fingers over his hair.

He catches my hand and places my fingers against his lips. He looks satisfied as he grabs his car keys and opens the door to leave.

I turn my attention back to making vegetable soup for Henry’s lunch. I sever the veins in the celery and peel the skin from the potatoes and carrots. I cut everything into thick chucks, piling them on the cutting board as I wait for oil to heat in the pan.

Henry is still asleep. But soon he will wake up and want breakfast and will leave a trail of milk along the counter, because he insists on pouring his bowl of cereal himself. I know I will get impatient with him, so I try to finish the soup now and leave the kitchen before he wakes up.

Sometimes, I would trade everything I have just to be able to want it again, just to be able to again have the illusion that I wanted it in the first place.

I met Shaun in college. It was my junior year and I was already dating another boy, a senior philosophy major named Philip. Philip was coy and playful and unforgettable. He was in my poetry class, though I had seen him before, walking around campus, wearing sandals until late in the fall and carrying a single worn, black notebook. On the second day of the class, we all brought in first drafts of poems we had written. He stood while he recited his work, his clothes dark and softly wrinkled, unbranded. I sat across from him at the large wooden table that dominated the room, and I couldn’t stop watching him, the way he dipped his shoulders as he was talking, his lanky body supported on the back of the chair.
“…and all the lambs go off to slaughter/ their black eyes already dead.” He finished reading, shrugging his shoulders and dropping the paper to the table.

Professor DiSalvo nodded and started to smile, but quickly looked down and pulled her tweed blazer more tightly over her chest. She cleared her throat. “We all put some of ourselves into our poetry,” she began. “What does Philip’s poem say about him?”

We all kept silence a moment, not wanting to be the first to speak. The class was still new and we were still uncertain how much to criticize.

“Well, Philip said earlier that he doesn’t like to edit his writing,” the girl next to Philip began, her red fingernails playing with the silver hoop in her eyebrow. “I think the lamb is the poem and he is expressing his reluctance to censor the original emotional draw of the work.”

I looked at Philip and he smiled and shook his head, his black hair gently curling at the ends, his dark eyes gleaming in the violent afternoon sun. Part of me was afraid of his nonchalance.

“It’s about me; I mean, I’m the lamb. My parents want me to become an investment banker. They are leading me to slaughter.” He smirked, tilting his head to the side to reveal the perfect obtuse angle of his jaw bone pressing against his dark skin.

The next few classes, I sat next to him. Or, if I got to class first, he sat next to me. We would let our legs gently touch as the class critiqued each other’s works and defended their own. He asked me out for coffee one afternoon after class and we talked about consumerism and our favorite memories. He would touch his fingers to his lips and tilt his head to the side whenever I was talking. It made me feel like I was saying something important. We used to take long walks in the middle of the night, getting lost on side streets. We held hands and I leaned into his shoulder. He was always playful, pulling me into him as we kissed, holding me inside of his jacket. We talked conspiringly about the people we passed, making up stories about them. Late one night, we were taking the subway back home and trying to guess how long the couples around us had been together.

“Okay, look at them.” Philip touched my arm to get my attention. “Look at the way they are holding hands, but not talking. How long do you think they have been together?”

I turned to watch them. The man pushed the woman’s hair to the side. She closed her eyes as he brushed her cheek. “Three months.”

The train came, and we stepped into the largely empty car. “Hey, what do you think of this couple?” he whispered in my ear as we sat down. The seats across from us were empty, but I could see our reflection in the train window. His arm was around me. I kissed the side of his jaw.

“They look safe.”

I wish there were more of those moments, but Philip pulled away from me, like a band-aid off of a wound. Slowly, the plastic ripped away from my reluctant skin and afterwards the adhesive stubbornly remained, as much as I tried to scrub it off.

So I started dating Shaun, who studied architecture. And when we walked, he talked about the foundations of houses, which would crumble and which were secure. He pointed out stone walls that held back layers and layers of dirt, the gaps so small that nothing could escape. Our conversations were like lists. Each topic we covered was one less thing we had to discuss in the future. Are you liberal? Do you believe in God? Are your grandparents alive? I knew none of these things about Philip. After months of talking about the value of art and
whether we really have a soul, I could tell you the way Philip thought, his lips parted and head tilted, his smirk reaching up to his eyes. I couldn’t tell you whether he was pro choice, against the death penalty, whether he read the newspaper. So with Shaun, everything was a category, but I craved those details. And somehow, just knowing them was enough. Long after Philip stopped calling, they were enough.

It seems foolish now, valuing the investment in a market that has long ago crashed. So in retrospect, the choice seems obvious. I guess I feared that Philip’s philosophy was an act, that under the surface, he was really like everyone else and we would have only been left with a shell, that our foundation wasn’t secure enough. I guess too that I always believed, somewhere in the back of my mind, that someday my life would end up like this, endlessly living the same day over and over. I never realized that anyone can learn the little details: the quirks, the fears, the defenses. Not many people take the time to learn how all of those pieces fit together. I never thought about which conversations were more important to have.

***

I finish the soup around 10:00 in the morning, and leave the pot on the stove to simmer as I pour a new cup of coffee and go back upstairs to sprawl out on my bed with *Kafka on the Shore*. I lay on the white bedspread on my stomach, propping myself on my elbows and using my fingertips to hold down the pages, sometimes reading, but mostly daydreaming. I hear Henry get up around 11:00 and walk carefully down the stairs to watch cartoons in the living room. I return to my novel, trying to decide if the faint hum of the TV in the background is comforting or irritating. I get lost for awhile in Murakami’s world of cat thieves and lost soldiers, until I hear Henry’s faint knock on my door.

“Is the soup ready?”

I stare at him for a second, his feet bare and half covered by the red plaid pajama bottoms that I meant to hem a few weeks ago. I sit up too quickly, making myself a little dizzy in the process. I close my eyes to reclaim my balance; I can tell this makes Henry uncomfortable.

“I can pour it myself. I just wanted to make sure it was done.” He rocks back and forth on the balls of his feet, his hand placed securely on the doorframe.

“No, I was just about to get up.” I smile at him and get up to follow him down the stairs.

He sits at one of the stools around the kitchen counter and waits patiently as I pour him a bowl of soup, as I carefully ladle the broth to get an even balance of the potatoes, carrots, and celery in the bowl. He eats slowly, dunking his spoon into the red broth and letting the soup pour in on all sides of the spoon, carefully holding back the thick pieces of celery. I forgot that he hates celery. Henry hesitates and starts to swirl his spoon around the edge of the bowl.

“Are you going to eat too?”

I lean over and ruffle his hair. Light brown, the same as Shaun’s. “Not right now.”

***

Shaun promised me security, that’s why I stayed with him. We moved into a large brick house on a quiet suburban street. The street looped around in an elegant oak-lined turn with a stop sign at the only exit. I didn’t know then that I would feel so trapped by security. I stood outside with him after we had signed the final contract. We had gotten married about a month before; just long enough for me to stop being surprised when I looked down and saw the ring on my finger. We admired the solid, sprawling white veranda and the sturdy
maple tree that grew to the right of the house. Idyllic. When I walked inside, though, I was shaken by the overwhelming emptiness, room after room of dark wood floors and curtain-less windows. I thought of the years it would take to fill those rooms with possessions. Our possessions. Each one tying me to this house and this life. I reached for Shaun’s hand for comfort, but he put his arm over my shoulder instead, leading me around the rooms.

***

After our Brindisi’s dinner, Shaun and I drive home. Though we did our best to fill dinner with conversation, the ride home is strangely silent. He holds the door open for me when we enter the house. When my back is to him, I roll my eyes. I go upstairs to make sure that Henry is tucked into his bed. I watch him sleeping for a little while, his fingers gripped around his beloved blue blanket. I leave his door slightly ajar and then saunter into the living room where Shaun sits curled into the right side of the couch, watching television. I sit next to him, rigid and uncomfortable, though his body is as familiar to me as my own. He wraps his left arm across my shoulders, his fingers curling protectively around the edge of my body; I don’t look at him.

“Elizabeth, what’s the matter?” he whispers, stroking my hair and leaning over to kiss my neck. Sometimes his compassion makes him unbearable.

For a long time I don’t respond, though I have rehearsed this conversation for weeks. “I am having an affair!” my brain screams out, as my jaw remained stubbornly clenched. In my vision of the conversation, I can see him jumping up and kicking the coffee table, displacing the magazines that lay so carefully and carelessly on the polished teak surface. And I will remain sitting, smug and satisfied at his anger, because his anger will justify what I did to him. But I know that it won’t happen like that. Shaun will remain silent, his fingertips moving up and down my arm as his eyes gape vaguely for an answer somewhere on the warm vanilla walls. That possibility is more terrifying, the stunned uncertainty of not knowing my next move. Either way I know he won’t look at me, and at least that part is appealing. So I just sit here, unable to breathe, as the tension eats the oxygen between us. I rub my thumb along my wedding ring and try to look anywhere except for his eyes.

“I’m tired; it’s been a long day,” I finally say, closing my eyes and curling into his lap.

He runs his fingers over my collar bone.

“I know.”

***

I ran into Philip two months ago in Boston. It was a Saturday afternoon. Henry was at his friend David’s house. I was trying to find the side street where my favorite used bookstore was located, trying to remember the city from over a decade ago. I was standing in the middle of the sidewalk, a black embroidered scarf falling loosely around my neck with the fringe blowing lightly in the breeze.

He was wearing a charcoal pinstripe suit and a dark green tie and his hair was still long enough to look slightly tousled. He saw me and we both stopped in the middle of the crowded sidewalk and stood, staring at each other as people bumped into us. He smiled his same coy, playful smile and walked over and took my hand and kissed my cheek.

“Elizabeth, god, I never expected to run into you!”

“I never expected to see you wear a suit!” I responded sarcastically, by reflex. I wanted to hug him and run my fingers over the short stubble on his jaw and through the ends of his hair, but I played with the fringe on
my scarf instead.

“I gave in; I work at an investment firm now.” He looked down at his tasseled loafers, but remained standing so close I could smell his aftershave. Intoxicating. I suddenly remembered every kiss, every late night walk, talking about conformity and our worst fears and what great artists we would become. His worst fear was leading an unfulfilled life. I felt like a hypocrite now, working so hard to fill the gaps in my day, trying to create meaning with activity. I wonder if he felt like a hypocrite too.

“I can’t believe it,” I heard myself say. My body was shaking from the shock of seeing him after all this time. I pulled the sleeves of my sweater down over my hands and kept my arms tightly crossed. I hoped that he wouldn’t notice the shakiness in my voice.

“Do you want to get coffee? Do you have time?”

“Yes,” I smiled.

We found a café and sat down and ordered coffee. He still drank his black. I asked him about the novel he was writing, though it was over a decade later. He put his mug down and leaned back into the black velvet armchair.

“I gave it up.” He stared at me, judging my reaction, before leaning forward and taking both of my hands in his. “I have given up a lot,” he added softly, rubbing the outside of my palms with his thumbs, his dark eyes pensive.

I paused, unsure how to respond.

“Remember the first night you came to my house?” he asked, breaking the silence. I tilted my head to the side, thinking. Twelve years was a long time. “I invited you over for dinner, and we took a walk afterwards, and we sat on the concrete ledge outside of my house, talking and kissing.” He smiled reminiscently. “Then I invited you back inside.”

“I remember.” I paused thoughtfully, “We went up to your room, and you leaned over and shut the door. We were sitting on your mattress, the house was silent. You asked if I felt trapped.” I hesitated, trapped in the memory, thinking about how I had looked around at the unfamiliar possessions and the bare white walls, and how I had run my fingers lightly over the embroidery on his bedspread.

“You didn’t look at me. That’s when I knew it was too fast.”

I leaned forward, reluctantly pulling my hands away from his and resting my elbows on the table. The palms of my hands cradled my chin, my fingers framing my smiling lips. My hair fell gently over my shoulders; I pushed it back. “So you jumped up and grabbed a National Geographic photo book from one of the stacks of books against your wall, and we sat and flipped through the book and talked about the photos.”

I remembered it so clearly: his long fingers cracking the spine of the heavy, hardcover book, our shoulders touching as we carefully pointed to our favorite details, the silence warm, as we thought about our comments before we spoke. He turned to a picture of a young girl standing near her house after a flood, the ground still covered by slimy water. The photo showed the algae-green water blanketing the landscape, rocking against the chipped and stained paint on the old, wood house. The girl was standing by a fence, the thick green water up to her waist, darkening her thin, cotton dress. Her eyes were green. As if the flood waters had penetrated her as well, as if she were just part of the wreckage.

***

40
Shaun wakes up early today in order to help his sister paint her garage. It is already the end of September and soon it will be too cold to spend afternoons outside. Already, the sunlight is misleading, and the air in the shade is chilled and a blanket of crumbling yellow leaves covers the ground. I can tell that Shaun is reluctant to leave: he curls against me in bed, pushing up my white t-shirt to run his fingers along the outline of my ribs.

“I’ve missed you,” he mutters as he bites on my earlobe, as if our dinner last night had changed anything. If he only knew how hard I had to try.

I don’t get out of bed until he has left. He made me coffee, but I pour it out and start a fresh pot, convincing myself that he probably made it too weak. He left the newspapers on the counter for me as well, but I bypass them and take my copy of *Jane Eyre* from the bookshelf in the study. I sit under the bay windows in the living room, reading and blowing the steam away from my fresh Italian roast. Streaks of morning sunlight fall in through the window panes, and I rest my head against the glass and let the sun warm my face and chest.

I hear Henry wake up and come down the stairs, his footsteps soft even on the creaking wood floors. I hear him walk into the kitchen and open a cabinet, probably grabbing a bowl and cereal to make himself breakfast. He has been so careful around me lately. I feel guilty that I don’t have more to give to him.

I remember one time last year, around this time in the fall, when the days were newly crisp and the wind pushed the leaves onto our front porch, I made blueberry and banana pancakes. Henry and I ate them rolled up, dipping them into a bowl of maple syrup. When we finished, we went outside to rake leaves, creating a towering auburn and gold pile. We stood, proud and satisfied, looking at the only intrusion in a sea of bleakness. I took Henry’s hand, his small fingers cold and eager, and we started to run, giggling and grinning and collapsing into the pile as the leaves flew up over our legs and faces. We lay like that, the fermented scent of autumn mixing with my perfume, until we got cold and we went inside for cups of hot chocolate with thick dollops of whipped cream covering the rim of our mugs.

I wish I could live in that moment. Peering up into the clear, expansive sky from the pile of leaves, I didn’t know those days were limited.

***

For a while, it was enough. Just knowing that Philip was nearby, knowing that he felt the same rain, heard the same news each night. For a while. Then, a few weeks ago, I called the number on the back of the napkin he had given to me and closed my eyes and pictured his face as his surprised voice answered the phone. And suddenly, I could see us living in a cabin near a lake somewhere in Vermont, and only coming out on Sundays to buy milk and eggs from the farmers on the other side of town. I could see us being woken up by the glare of the sun off of the lake waters and smelling like coffee together through breakfast. Our house would be filled with stacks of books, teetering precariously in piles unbalanced by bookmarks, and notebooks filled with ideas for our own novels. The funny thing is that I always hated clutter. But here, it made sense. Sunlight falling in streams through the open French doors. Our arms around each other as we watched the lake waters grow blacker and blacker in the dusk. Blowing out the candles as we walked familiarly and contentedly to bed.

***

The best view of a city is always on the way to somewhere else. I intend to leave the house this Sunday afternoon to go see Philip. I spend over an hour in my bedroom before it is time to leave, pacing and deciding if I should take off my wedding ring. I can’t stop shaking, worried that I have already gone too far. I
think about staying. After all, I’ve made a lot of promises that I couldn’t keep, that I had no intention of keep-
ing when the time eventually came. Maybe I should stop now, before I owe Philip too much, before my debts are too great to pay.

I play music to relieve some of the anxiety. The first song is mellow and warm as a single woman’s voice cries out over a piano. I sit on my bed for awhile, wondering if the instruments will drown out her voice, but they don’t. As long as the music keeps playing I am safe, I think as I pull my legs up on the bed and rest my head against the pillows. As long as I am here, I am safe.

I walk past Henry on my way to the front door. He is sleeping on the sofa, his legs curled up to his stomach and his hands loosely balled at his throat. I brush the outside of my finger tips against his cheek and push his hair back from his eyes, revealing his auburn lashes and his delicate, fluttering lids. He has Shaun’s coloring, but always looks more like me when he is asleep, tensions and worries finally able to rest. I wish he could inherit my memories, like he inherited my grayish-blue eyes. I wish he could know that he is not the reason I am leaving.

I stand for awhile, watching Henry’s chest rise and fall with each breath, the sunlight from the window blanketing his face and shoulders. His shoelaces are untied and red broth from the soup has stained a streak down his shirt. His jeans have a hole in the grass-stained knee. He needs me.

So I sit on the floor by the couch and rest my head near Henry’s and fall into an easy sleep.
It is my choice to stay.
I

Years ago
Revolution
Sky blood
Ellis Island

building
building
building

New words
Fresh life

Years later
Grandma and I
A journey, she says
Iran to America
So that a granddaughter can grow free

II

My grandmother and I don’t speak.
Sometimes we try, then laugh
at the foreign syllables we hear,
the mess we fail to understand.

Like soup.

She makes Persian stew,
with lamb and herbs and spices
and deep red beans.

I make chicken noodle soup,
all clear broth, no surprises,
an All-American favorite.

And our soups just don’t mix.

So we sit, in silence, and sip our soup
and speak in clinking spoons and
slurps and swallows and smiles.

III

My grandmother is living
in only the simplest sense of the word.
She isn’t dead.
There is only one alternative.

But she isn’t living in any other sense.
She doesn’t wake up and think of the day
waiting patiently outside her bedroom door.
She doesn’t move to move but to remind herself
of the body she inhabits, the home in which her soul resides.
She doesn’t dream or hope or smile or wish.

My grandmother is living only in that she is not dead.
In every other sense, she is dying.
She is dying a life-long death.

I wonder when she stopped living
and started dying, when she crossed
that invisible line and left us.

Did her slow death start the moment
she was born or did it creep in years later?
Was it a conscious decision or
was it out of her control, like a disease?

Did it seep in, slinking quietly
like a dark beast or did it arrive
in pieces, flown in shipments, fragile cargo
dropped into her loaded mind?
Did she have to make room
or did it eat away at all that was left?

I wonder, too, what will happen when she dies.

I wonder if then the disease will pass and, at last, she will be able to live.

IV

She sits, her gnarled hands
like beach wood, stiff and twisted.
She shakes.
Rumbles.

It comes from within and moves
to her lips, to her words, to my ears.
Words.

Her words are strange food
I can’t digest. I don’t know
this woman.
Listen: this is a true story. When I was seven, I snuck into the bathroom where my little sister was in the tub, opened the shower curtain, and pushed her underwater. She was very small, and I remember I held her by her shoulders, which were thin, with strange, slimy skin stretched over them. Her heart under my wrists felt like the bird I rescued after it crashed into the glass door at the back of the house. I remember I buried it, black feathers tinged like oil, under my neighbor’s porch stairs. I’m not sure if it was really quite dead at the time, but I hated the way its beak hung open, the way it shuddered in my hands. I remember it watched me as I dug the hole with a flat stone scrounged from the walkway. My sister had her eyes open the whole time, too, and her mouth. I think she was trying to scream. The first girl I fucked used to make faces like that, eyes and mouth wide, and I remember my sister’s face flashed in my mind the first time I watched her come, shuddering, silent. She was the one who told me that good girls didn’t need to scream or moan, that it was vulgar. I remember that was one of the things I hated about her. I think that’s what bugged me about the bird, too. And when my sister stopped thrashing and splashing, I lost interest. I didn’t like the way her eyes closed, slowly. People should look at things, look things right in the eye. My father told me that, you know. I remember he sat me down one day with tears in his eyes, and held my face in his hands and called me son. He didn’t usually do that. “Son,” he told me, “the only true things you will ever see will be found in the backs of the wide eyes fluttering in front of you.” My father was a little bit crazy, I always thought. He used to wander around the house saying the strangest things. When he wasn’t looking, I would leave him gifts, reminders. Two long oil-tinged feathers from the almost-dead bird buried by the neighbor’s porch. A cloud of stuffing pulled carefully from my sister’s teddy bear, tied neatly with the bow from its worn, ratty neck. I remember I left the cat’s tail on his pillow, once. He liked soft things. Like my sister, with her soft, smooth, rubbery skin. I remember for her first day of school, he bought her a coat, a pale beige coat with sheep fur all lining the inside. It reached all the way to her chubby little knees. Her knees were actually the only thing chubby about her. Otherwise, she was smooth, bony. Frail under my hands, like all her little bones would snap if I pressed any harder. I don’t think people should ever be that small. It’s not fair, really. Not fair to them. They can’t even put up a proper fight. How can they ever stand a chance? I’ve never been a fan of easy fights. I don’t want to know that I’m going to win, every time. I like the theoretical possibility of losing. I like knowing that, at any time, it could all come crashing down around me. It never makes a difference, you know. I always win. I remember that was another thing my father told me. “Losing is for losers. Losers deserve to lose, to have the crap beat out of them by the winners.” My father was kind of a loser, even though he said things like that. My mother used to tell him so, before she left. But let me tell you, I am not a loser. I love winning. I love the smell of futile sweat shed through desperate skin. I love the electricity that fluttering eyes spark when they know they’ve lost. I love the sounds, the screaming that becomes gasping, the dry heave of defeated mouths.

Do you know the moral of the story yet? You’re lost; I can see it in your eyes, your shifty, shifty eyes. Look at me. Look at me. I want you to scream. I want you to fight. Do you understand me? If you try hard enough, maybe I’ll even let you live. What do you think? Try to escape. See if you can’t get out. Scream.
cannes

a photo by anonymous
the first thing to do when we arrived on the island was to weave our fishermen’s bracelets, bleach-bone white rope braided round our skinny wrists. to luck, we said. for tradition.

that june the lobsters didn’t show and the haddock wouldn’t bite. the fishermen kept salty vigil on the docks, bewildered at the barren sea and i took to the woods, staining my fingers with raspberries. they hunched over ragged balance books, trying to get us through the summer. i worked in the kitchen. i thought if we couldn’t have lobsters we could at least have pies.

when august turned we had no money but the sunbaked hoods of every truck flowered green; when the time came for zucchini with everything, i watched mama’s hands learn that vegetable a thousand furlongs over. bathed in flour, baked in ketchup, rolled in old crumbs from weathered hands, ever practiced at making something out of nothing.

it was the summer our neighbor’s mast snapped from his ship; he’d made it halfway around the world on forty feet of varnished wood hewn together with his two calloused hands, and it took one noreaster night in our backyard harbor to bring that era to an end. i was on the deck when it happened, scrambling around in the watery dark for the winch to tighten the stays and then i heard it; the slow motion splinter snap, spraying fireworks against the lightning split sky.

when i returned to the city, the rope around my wrist was gray, muddied by a bad-luck hard-up season. in the shower i let the water run over my bruises, the scars, the earth deep in my skin, my summerlong sunburn. peeling back the bracelet, my wrist underneath was white, clean, untouched. i wriggled it off and turned the taps shut. to work, i resolved. for family.
To be fair, they don't have
the mouths to say "STOP"
or the arms to flail, warning.

They may only burn, burn,
breathe tendrils down your
wet throat. They may only
infect you from the outside
in, paint your lungs black
as you paint the town red.

It's true, they don't have
the mouths to say "STOP"
or the arms to flail, warning,
but if they did, the mouth, the arms
would go dry, unused.

Because the truth is
they ache to be fingered,
sucked, blown, guided through
the hole in your lips, innocent
white as you are on trial
for their silent pollution,
as you are found guilty
and sentenced to death.
the light of the city

a photo by alex zadel
about the authors

kristen barone is a freshman majoring in English Literature. When she’s not writing, she likes to rock climb, listen to her iPod on random, try out new recipes, and, of course, read whatever she can get her hands on.

adam geiger is a freshman not majoring in anything, but is most certainly thinking about possibly becoming something or someone someday. He enjoys making, writing, and watching films and thinks that the night sky is one of the most terrifying and most beautiful entities in existence. His ninth most firm belief is that “a revolution without dancing is a revolution not worth having.”

chase gregory is a freshman majoring in English. Much to her roommate’s dismay, she compulsively brings home things she finds on the ground that other people have thrown away. Some people just don’t understand the incalculable value of discarded plastic Christmas trees.

daniel jeng believes in truth and harmony.

sadie lansdale is a freshman most likely majoring in English and Community Health. She enjoys running the forest, nice weather, and Indian food.

leo mahler is a senior majoring in Greek and Latin Studies and English, which is all well and good until someone born after about 1600 tries to strike up a conversation. The secret government agencies working on time travel should come knocking on the door any day now, though. As far as we know, Leo does not have a younger sister.

krista morris is a sophomore majoring in International Relations. She loves walking (fast), sushi, company, talking. She believes that the universe has a great sense of humor; most of her writing is capturing these jokes. She laughs often and rather loudly and loves reading the news on the BBC.

scott newton is a sophomore majoring in Political Science. He is known for writing strange, life-changing poetry and for wearing the same hunter green Nike track jacket every day. He will be sorely missed next year as he faffs around while wangling high marks at the uni in London.

jenna nissan is a senior majoring in English. She likes coffee in the morning, white horses, and sunflowers. She will be attending a graduate M.F.A. program in fiction writing next fall.
victoria petrosino is a senior majoring in Economics and Community Health. She likes picking tulips, reading about vampires, and cheating at Monopoly.

jimmy pianka is a senior majoring in Cognitive & Brain Science and Philosophy. He is currently wandering the foothills of Nepal and hopes to one day find employment in the middle ground between scuba instructor and politician.

kat robinson is almost no longer a freshman, but still lacking some kind of reassuring direction. She finds comfort in sincerity, long walks not on the beach, eating Greek yogurt very slowly, and the scene in Pulp Fiction where Vincent and Mia dance. Besides constantly searching for the best pens to write with, she also enjoys wrapping herself in warm laundry and buying more books than she'll ever be able to read.

emma shakarshy is a freshman who likes old lady sun hats, boggle, and wimples. She spends class time passing haiku notes and free time discovering terrible a cappella groups on youtube (See: Orcapella). Emma looks forward to noting, for the eighteenth year, the growing volume of her hair in the coming summer months.

theresa sullivan is a freshman who anticipates soon being happily jobless, armed with her English and Drama degrees. Someday she'll finally take that cross-country road trip with an old van, best friends, her camera and guitar, and plenty of music. Her other loves include travelling, island life, her scarf collection, theater, and always, always poetry.

professor grace talusan is a lecturer in the English Department at Tufts University. She is the recipient of an Artist Grant in Fiction from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Her story “Shoot Into the Crowds!” first appeared in the online literary magazine Ghoti.

lisa tannenbaum is a freshman who would like to major in Carpe Diem or Mythbusting, but will probably have to settle for Biology and English. She has been known to scribble out sonnets without the slightest provocation, and she's tackled a sestina or two in her time, along with an occasional free verse holdover from her slam poetry days. She loves the universe, despite any and all attempts by the universe to convince her otherwise; after all, what's a little quantum uncertainty between friends?