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Foreward

A bipedal creature is standing atop a plateau, gazing into the star-studded African night sky, scratching his head and beating himself on his chest. The tropical breeze entraps itself in his unruly, entangled hair. He is experiencing the first organized thought, unrelated to hunting and avoiding encounters with predators. This might have been the moment that the first *Homo sapiens* had emerged. The beast-like creature may very well have been my great-great (insert roughly 10,000 more “greats” here) grandfather. The evolution of humankind has been paralleled by the evolution of expression and of abstract thinking. The beating of the chest progressed into crude cave paintings, pottery making, drumming to dances around a bonfire, skin illustrations, and finally a transformation from spoken word to written word. Now, at the pinnacle of our creative existence, we are penning poetry, exploring our inner worlds through memoirs and fiction, painting, experimenting with photography, seeking any medium through which we may manifest our innermost realizations, insecurities, hopes, fantasies.

And those inflicted with the creativity “bug” need a forum, a stage, a microphone, a showroom, a gallery from which to communicate to their audience. *Rune* is all of that to the community of MIT. We must thank those who have supported us through our process of reinvigoration. We sincerely hope that *Rune* will remain a cornerstone of the MIT culture.

On a warm May afternoon much like this in 1959, thousands of years after the aforementioned bipedal beings emerged, scientist and writer C.P. Snow presented the annual Rede lecture at Cambridge University. The title of his lecture was “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution.” Snow drew a strict distinction between the domains of human knowledge – between one culture which hinges upon creativity and expression, and a second culture which approaches the scientific experimental method as rational, logical, and emotionless. At *Rune*, we are dedicated to dispelling the notions of disconnected frontiers of knowledge. At *Rune*, the cultures symbiotically co-exist, the words dissolve into expressions of quantum mechanics, the images blend into analytical geometry. At MIT, we do not view ourselves as scientists – nor as artists. Instead, we are students, observers, explorers, of both the human and natural worlds.

Just as a thespian needs an audience for fulfillment, the writers and artists featured in this edition of *Rune* rely on you, their peers, to accept and appreciate their talents. Without you, they will remain cemeteries of untold, unspoken, unexpressed brilliance. Ladies and gentlemen, I bring you *Rune* 27 – a showcase of inkblots taking flight.

--Emily D. Slutsky
*Editor-in-Chief 2005-2006*
Cellousy

she played naked once – I saw
long white legs embracing
its varnished-maple hips
stroking firmly below its waist
as the cello groaned with pleasure

her audience peered about
for the hint of a breast
as I dreamed of having strings
of being played, of her hands
coaxing forth my voice

still seated, she bowed
liquid auburn hair
brushing its wooden shoulder
as one scarlet-tipped toe
tickled the endpin

Emily M. Levesque
A Study Old Film-like

Lulu Liu
Platitude

so when the pressure drops outside, before a storm –

(well sometimes there isn’t a storm, but the temperature drops and it gets really windy, you know, blustery and forbiddingly bright, committing suicide just doesn’t fit in with a day like this which is totally life-affirming, with the sun up over the bay-view windows, shining down past the front lawn, down the grassy hill, over the country road, which gets a surprising amount of traffic these days, past a couple fields and up through sparkling morning lights to the mountain’s edge, the piedmont, the everfresh line where the rain starts to break and dissuade its father storm from coming down the mountain - no sir we can’t have the harsh rain brutal thunderclap drenching car and tree alike - simply drifting cumulus, thirty or forty mile an hour wind, a chill in even a summer sun, hearing the swish-swish of april trees bending, hearing the octobering trees click-clack on the basement window, sunny bright ordering italian food, chicken fingers and mozzarella sticks, no crisis too sharp! crash the car! stub your toe on the edge of the futon! unemployed, in love, magically sucked in to the tormenting force of giving, taking, pressure changing, rearranging wind and life and sentient tragic energy that bends me and pretends, no not pretends, that BELIEVES that this is it.

we are connected. we’re hooked into the grid. we’re alive and young and can’t be killed. and sometimes there is a storm. seeing those green clouds roll in, tuberculosis of the sky, the great infection - people that are older and out of touch: go in and worry their kids to the soccer practice cancelled and mangled late into the afternoon, get out the candles, brandish the goddamn flashlight beams and startle yourself, trickling ahead of the oh-so dangerous natural lightning flash flash flash! stay away from the windows! watch the weather channel for Severe Thunderstorm Warnings! oh shit! but the brave ones. the real-life ones. the ones who still get thrown back by walking through the woods, down the beach, away from people and out of reach, who still look at the lower branches of trees and plan out climbing scenarios. that one’s too high! look, the one on the far side, you can just barely get your leg up over that, oh come on! reach a little higher! we have to get up this damn thing! and gossip about things that only make sense if you can still make-believe. the ones who still play tag. they come out. they come out and sit in the front yard. no umbrellas, no worrying-oh-my-god-get-away-from-the-trees, we’ll get struck by lightning for sure! those beautiful creatures damp to the pure bone, they look up and are awed. the look on their face is why the word “thunderstruck” exists. i want to be in a storm. i want it to rain so hard that i have to shield my face and walk at an angle. funnel clouds, come to me! torrents of water, gather your mystifying forces! this dead end street is a river to swim across, the trees battening down leaves and fucking hatches alike)

-- passion builds in people that care. i feel a desperate need, when the barometer drops, when the /terrific rumble of clouds/blustering sunshine pushing/streaking downpour/ drives past me, to take hold of the girl i believe in and attack her with the fury of the need to share in the wild chaos that fucks with technological shit and shuts down power grids. standing in my front yard, watching and listening for the first wave of wind/rain to push against me, forcing me to push back. how can we get more connected to this wave? tell me. i want and need and have to know. it’s a chance at bonding with the energy everything, singing platitudes and throwing verses right back at us in the pre-dawn cold distant silence of birds and trees all listening and waiting.

Graham Woolley
Learning Silence

Some days
on our walk home
I know to let you
have your silence,

and my curious self
conducts its own conversation,
keeping me company.

I ask, Would you rather go skating
or watch a movie on Friday?
then fill in (as you often do
in such a moment) a distracted yes,
to which I raise an eyebrow.

After a bit: If you could visit
any place, where would you go?

Here, I run through possibilities.
Back to California? No,
you like Boston. A castle in the Swiss Alps, perhaps?
Only if the computer came along.
Maybe you would rather stay here;
the answer probably is, I don’t know.

This silent one-sided talk
can’t go on forever…
I slow down and notice:
tiny, tender leaves on curbside bushes;
daffodils in full bloom; sunlight
warm around my shoulders.

If we were walking together now
I’d have to clasp my wriggling fingers
behind me (to keep from tapping
your shoulder)
because I’d know
that asking for your thoughts
would interrupt something
beautiful.
Ashes

Linda Ye
I walked down the road we had walked, two sons and our mother that summer afternoon in August in Vermont. Talked we did of the rocky gravel: “It’s tough going over these rocks,” you said as stones shifted under foot below the trees rustling in wind, you in white pumps and long sky blue dress. Mom, I thought it would be good for you, us, to walk to the Homer Noble farm, then up to Frost’s cabin in woods by field; (I recalled it much closer from years before.) But it was hard on sixty-three-year-old legs. You rested with a son on a boulder an ice-age glacier left, by the white clapboard farmhouse before we walked further up the gravel path to the cabin. (I’d no idea then you had only six years left.) I’d been away out west and memory held you in Uncle’s old saying: “She could run like a deer!” You had not been back to Vermont for a decade, and many more since you worked the dairy farm near: milking cows at dawn, pitching hay bales at noon, calling cows before dusk, earning the same wages as the men. Now years too late I say, “I’m sorry mom for asking you to walk all the way up the steep stony road to Frost’s cabin,” but it’s too late for words. I have returned here with you and without. So maybe now this walk will help me as I bound down below trees blown by brisk wind and the fall maples begin to turn red as the air breathes over green leaves of grass.

Daniel Picker
Towards New York at 2am

I am following the brother line
sibling to the bus I’m on
White line joining civilizations
dancing, elfin at sixty miles an hour.

Night on the highway expels behemoths
road loose with
eighteen-wheel stones.

My forehead greases the window as
silence encloses this
roofless tunnel,
darkness encloses these
restless eyes.

Solar Olugebefola
Wildflower

I see her. Eyes half shut, arms draped softly around my chest – she’s still asleep. But that’s fine – it’s just past five. The sun won’t rise for another hour. She still has that scar, from when we fell out of that tree. We’d met unexpectedly, seven nights ago in a get-together on the other side of the river.

+++ “What’s the matter with you?” I was alone, and I was fine with being alone – but her presence was disarming. So I turned to her and smiled, though I knew it wasn’t convincing.

“Everything’s fine.” The words were short, curt. She shrugged them off with a wave of her hand. Nerves meant nothing to her. They never had. I hesitated. In one hand, she held a glass of – I don’t know what it was. There was a cigarette tucked behind her ear, like a wildflower.

“I thought you told me you were quitting.”

“It’s been a long decade.”

I didn’t want to argue with her. She smiled at me, some sort of crooked half-grin she only used on special occasions. As when we were children, she disappeared before I could reply, vanishing into the crowd, a blur amidst a collective shhh of voices, bodies, and false personalities.

The next morning, I woke up in a bed built for one, but occupied by two. I don’t know how I got there – it didn’t matter. She was staring at me, deeply – as if I had some strange, fading mark on my face that identified myself as the one guy in town she hadn’t kissed – until now, at least.

+++ I see her, nine years ago when we were twelve. Six years after the last time I saw her (at six), and six years before I’d see her again (at eighteen). By now, she had her mother’s eyes, and she had her mother’s charm. This was the year I loved her. This was the year she loved me. Everything else was just the in-between. I see her taking my hand, and rubbing her arm against mine in order to marvel at the contrast between our skin. Mine was the color of Portuguese bread. Hers was the color of the sky at dawn. By now, she had become an uncontrollable liar. It was one of many things that would tear us apart.

+++ “Was it true, what you said...last night?” I couldn’t remember what I’d said. If I’d said it in bed, it could have been anything. There wasn’t any use in being vague with her, but I tried anyway.

“Maybe. Depends on what I said.” So suave. She frowned, arching her eyebrows in the way that drove me mad. I wondered if she was still afraid of heights. In the back of my mind, I noticed I could feel the inside of her foot with the inside of mine. We were six years old again. Then it came.

“You said you loved me.”

This was when I said goodbye to any chances of this – this being a relationship that didn’t need a steady dose of alcohol to survive – ever taking root. I wasn’t stupid. I was an idiot, but I wasn’t stupid. Back when we were six – back when we’d first met – I was there the day we walked in on her parents fighting. The day her mother moved out, took her daughter with her. It was the day she decided she’d stay the hell away from any man who tried to describe his feelings for her with a four letter word. Near as I could tell, it was a vow she had yet to break.

“I’ve got to go.”

+++
I see her, somewhere in Central Square, the day before my eighteenth birthday. The sound of her voice from the back seat of a Mercedes – doing things I’d care about if I cared about her. Of course I cared about her – I couldn’t hate her if I didn’t care about her. So I cared about her – just enough to justify the barrier we’d erected between ourselves years ago. I tried to leave before her noticing, but she saw me anyway, and for reasons I’ll never understand, we didn’t avert our eyes.

She got out of the car.

We ended up talking – about nothing, mostly, but it lasted for a few hours – just to remember what it felt like to be understood. Just to check if things were still the same. This was three years before the get-together on the other side of the river. Three years and a week before I’d see her sleeping next to me, an hour before sunrise.

+++ 

The day I told her I had to go, I did. I left her there. You aren’t a man until you leave the girl you’ve known forever-but-don’t-know-if-you-can-stand staring at you from a bed built for one, but occupied by two. At least, that’s what I told myself while walking out. Tough guys don’t cry.

It was nonsense, of course.

After speaking in Central Square, we wouldn’t meet again until three years later, at the get-together on the other side of the river. She was still a liar, and it looked like she was turning into a drunk. I’d just turned twenty-one, and I wasn’t much better. She’s still angry with me for what I did when we were twelve. I’m still angry with her for the things we said the week before. She doesn’t smoke. I’m still a foot taller. She’s still afraid of heights. Blue is still our favorite color. She’s still fluent in the language we made up when we were six. It’s five-oh-one. I don’t know what I’m going to do when she wakes up.
New Orleans Wedding

Daniel Alejandro Benitez
People change & forget to tell each other

Lara C. Collazo
Floating Three Blocks from Home

Staggering soggily
Foot follows foot.
They are my vessel
And I, a passenger at best.
I do not guide them.

I driftingly comprehend
A Mohawk on a bicycle
Made significant
By the most maddening muse:
Exhaustion.

Somehow I'm floating
Far above the quiet cars
(Colliding to my right)
My vision detached
Far from life's catastrophes

Lost
Myself
Perfect
Peace

It's weightless moments like these
(When the mind slides below worries,
Floating just above existence)

That I almost regret
that my feet will find home,
And I will drop anchor
once more in myself.

Matthew Spencer
Anna Everywhere

Anna wants to dance everywhere.

In Utah there is a landmark called Balanced Rock.
One huge red monolith, balanced atop an outcropping
In a trick of geology.

Anna wants to press one pointed toe, wrapped in pink silk
Against the rough sun-scalded sandstone,
Stretch her bone-slender body into one long arabesque,
And bare her delicate chest
To the fire of a Southwestern sunset.

Dance, Anna, dance – dance in the trees.
Spin atop a lamppost like the music-box ballerina.
Your head is thrown back to the heavy air.
You are the distilled notes of a Copland ballet.
You can straddle the smooth rump of
The New England war-hero’s statue horse,
Fall asleep on his bronze shoulder, and dream
That you are his Odette, his Giselle, his Coppelia.

In the London subway a man begs for quarters
And Anna’s pink toe should rest in his cupped hand.
In Japan the streets burst with mobs of life
And Anna should shuffle along in relevé, her head as high as a queen’s.
In Siberia her long lean arms are impervious to cold.
In the Sahara her cotton-candy tutu twirls through the sand.

Anna wants to be lifted high into the clouds
By the talons of an eagle, under its soft dark wings,
Her hips cradled in its claws, her back one curled C,
Her hair pouring through the wind,
And her toes pointed at the sunrise.

Dance, Anna, dance – jeté over the moon.
Pirouette slowly through the seaweed entrails of the ocean.
Make shapes with yourself in every corner of the world.
Spin atop a lamppost like the music-box ballerina.
Querini S. tampalia

Where he had once pulled away he now cut.

And while the heart still drew, he chiseled out her likeness:

He sculpted her face from blemishes and veins to obscure her every feature.

He traced a timeline from her broken ring and supported where he felt he must hide.

But to break up his memory the shoe man felt quite simply too much.

So from the stone he forged a new creation, to help her stand where she could not.
(Untitled)

Hanna Kuznetsov
Reclining Female Nude

Melanie Worley
His Love for Venice

The shoe man saw her slip away from so many years posed on her broken pedestal.

A balancing act wearing away her supports; his love was drowning.

He wrapped her blisters in a new façade and hid her in Formosa.

But the age was too much and her tiled breastplate puddled on the floor.

She lay so lifeless that golden saints saw her spirit flooded 100 times a year.

They cried as people took their beliefs ashore until the shoe man changed the tides.

She gave her final bow out of the lagoon and then he lifted her pieces.

Back home with him he molded her into geometric shapes that bridged their histories.

He channeled her tears to separate but not isolate his love from his planning.

And finally, he let her repose blocking her fears with his vibrant work.

Her rebirth away from the sea became his mosaic of her drowning way of life.

Kept safe upon the shore A collection of resurrected memories Evolved into a masterwork.

Adrienne Brown
Erica

Maggie Nelson
A Shepherd’s Journal

(Acknowledgement: Thanks to L.K. for inspiration.)

Near the end of that autumn, I received a long, long letter from a girl. Two flowers sketched in color pencils bloomed on the envelope. She addressed me as “Shepherd-sama.” In the letter body, she mentioned my new anthology – how she pondered over the various symbolisms and mused about the feelings invoked in her. She quoted some of my verses with different colored pens to indicate her moods and thoughts. Her neatly beautiful penmanship and sensitive insights were just like what I once had of you.

The girl also asked me why I chose “Shepherd” as my penname and tried to deduce the reasons. How could I tell her – that it was you who coined the name.

That day, you were sitting in the front row, chattering with other students about your proprietary nickname for me. It seemed like such an outrageous yet fitting idea. I was an inexperienced teacher, not knowing how to deal with your teasing and joshing. I watched as the discussion got out-of-hand with ridiculous suggestions abound.

And then you said it: “Shepherd. Because Sensei’s silver hair is just like the Belgian shepherd that me and my brother had…”

Some people chuckled and the class murmured in agreement. So from then on you all called me Shepherd.

When we were dating, you still called me by that name. And only you truly had the right to do so. The nickname has grown into my fondest memory of you.

I could vaguely remember, but never could recall exactly when I fell in love with you. That one night seemed to have sealed the fate for me. I once sought for the answer in a poignant moment of despair.

Even now in my contemporary poetry class, there are many girls with similar vivacity, arresting features, and artistic talent. Yet none of them strummed my heartstrings as you did.

I would always ask my students to close their eyes and contemplate, listen to their subconscious and feel their inner self. Then they would free-write. During those minutes with their eyes closed, I would examine each of their faces and imagine the inspirations soaring within.

Without realizing, I would find myself looking for a student who would open her eyes and smile at me, soundlessly conveying poetry. Like how you used to mouth random phrases to me and ask me to guess what you were trying to say.

Whether I guessed it right or wrong, you would tell me, “Next time I’ll say it out loud.”
I knew that you wanted to keep our relationship private as much as I did, so I never worried that you would actually say them out loud.

After we broke up, I found out that you were the one who’s prepared for the worst. It was I who kept hesitating and second-guessing myself… that I never got to tell you what I really felt.

---------------------------------

I trap myself in my own world… haunted by dreams of you, surrounded by shadows of memories that would never see the light. I have been in the dark too long that I can no longer bask in the glory of sunshine.

This is why I am tired and afraid to love.

I had a dream last night. I was in class, and there was a dolphin floating in midair in front of the board. It had a sleek silvery-white body and a translucent blue tail, and it was swimming in a circle above my head. I pointed at it with my chalk and asked all of you,

“What do you think this is?” (Like I knew.)

I watched as the dolphin flapped and swam in your direction. It dived and disappeared as soon as it touched you. Then I woke up. The dream hovered in my semi-wakefulness, and I remembered it as simply beautiful.

-----------------------------

Whenever I thought I had completely forgotten all traces of you, I would always be painfully reminded.

She saw me in the hallway and called after me. I mistook her for you because she called me… Shepherd.

I stared at her in astonishment. “How did you know who I am?”

Her eyes sparkled as she replied with mischief, “It wasn’t that hard to guess.”

She was the girl who wrote me the letter, and she wanted to audit my class. I showed her the room and told her to sit wherever she’d like.

I asked my students to close their eyes and brainstorm as usual. As I was watching their faces, she opened her eyes and smiled at me…

For the briefest moment I thought I’d gone back in time… as if it was you who were sitting there smiling at me. Her dimples bloomed like the two flowers on the envelope. I told myself…
It’s already the dawn of tomorrow, yet I still felt like yesterday. Lately I seemed to be groping desperately at nothing. It was like when I first discovered my love for you, and I suppressed the feeling as it grew ever stronger. I was afraid that even one glance would give me away completely. Thus, I stubbornly and foolishly kept my distance from you as you demonstrated your feelings in your characteristically direct way.

You described me as ever “self-centered and stubbornly hesitant.” Your love made me feel the pain of not fulfilling a promise.

I fought my tears of yearning night after night. I refused to remind myself of your love because I no longer want to love anyone else like that.

But that moment in the classroom, everything came back to me like ocean waves crashing on the shores of my memories. I lost myself reminiscing about my past love, trying to recapture that youthful ardor. (Yes, now I finally understand how wonderful that is.)

I started pretending that she was you whenever she sat in my class. And getting lost in the past.

---------------

Ten years ago, I just completed my Ph.D. and began teaching at the university, where I became your creative writing professor.

You were a freshman, busy adjusting to college life. I was just starting out on my own, trying to find my place in the world and get used to your new nickname.

Then came the summer after your sophomore year. Our department was having a retreat and a bunch of us were camping out. It was late at night but I couldn’t sleep, so I got up and decided to take a walk in the woods. You started following me, and when I arrived by the lake you called after me.

I jumped with a start. You were gazing at me with your cerulean eyes. Finally, you found the courage to speak first. You asked me I would ever fall in love with a girl like you. Without another word, I walked over and simply kissed you…

When we started dating afterwards, we would stumble upon this moment once in a while. And then we’d laugh it off, mildly wondrous of our naïve brashness all those years ago.

Maybe it was a form of uncertainty and denial.

All of our wordless exchanges during class, our time together after school, and the countless correspondence were my treasured secrets with you. We stayed like this until you graduated.
I thought that I’d be able to let myself out in the open now that you’ve graduated. But I could never convince myself…

“You’re selfish, Shepherd. You’re afraid to say that you love me… isn’t it?”

You saw right through me. I was speechless. And I lost you because of my silence and irresolution.

Reminiscing is full of pain and regrets. Ten years after we broke up, I dedicated my anthology to you.

This afternoon I headed over to the bookstore to visit my newly published book. Its Prussian blue covers rested serenely against the shelf, hopefully granting a sweet respite for the many wandering souls out there. For the first time in so many years, I felt at peace with myself.

What I was unable to promise you ten years ago has finally materialized on paper – in all honesty.

I was lounging in the second-floor café and watching the passerby through glass windows. There came a sudden rain, and colorful umbrellas opened under my eyes like blossoms…

After class, the girl who wrote me the letter appeared at my office entrance. I asked her, “What can I do for you?”

She was trying to tell me something and was gathering her courage… just like you, that night by the lake…

I waited quietly for her response.

A warm and scintillating anticipation diffused through the air.

And she said it.

“If time could flow backwards, would you fall in love with a girl like me?”

I almost grinned and tried to control my impulse to embrace her on the spot.

I don’t have the courage to love anymore.

End

Sharon H. Chou
the Cambridge Ladies with unfurnished souls

It’s the spittering type of rain when you know
God isn’t crying, but maybe perspiring
because it feels like stale sweat on your skin,
after only a few minutes outside. Your pores are sick,
full of humidity like it were a liquid quantity
and they are full to the brim and overflowing.
Toes in warm sandals are forlorn on the pavement
and they move around uncomfortably therein,
against the worn, faux leather insoles falling out.
Never got to taping them up over the summer
because who wears sandals in the almost-snow
except in Cambridge with a pair of white socks
on newly paved streets that are used to that
kind of thing and the way it solidifies pretension.
Even the umbrellas have the class of vegans,
no sugar added, all natural, cultural, ethnic:
we don’t pass judgement here; we value diversity.
So the upper-upper class, New England women,
skin of the absolute, most purest virgin white,
let their thick dark glasses fall to the bridge
of their noses as they walk too slowly to the bridge
over the Charles, scoffing at its unsanitized water,
and the way the steam escapes the dirty-man holes;
and with something in the way they look at you—
with their lips curled up as if they are disgusted
perpetually with the state of other, lesser beings—it is as if they are watching the evening news
and commenting how they’d never want to starve
to death because they’d bloat up like a balloon.

Shaunalynn Duffy
Untitled; Museum of Modern Art

Melanie Worley
Thorns
Monsoon Season

for weeks, moisture-pregnant clouds
have tormented the dessicated every-shade-of-fire
Canyon of canyons
with suffocating shades of gray and pale blue twilights
that sink to ink-purple out of thirsty exhaustion.

yucca and agave thrust long stalk tongues to the sky.
lizards crouch shrewdly on one-rock kingdoms.
the enormous silence hushes itself,
born grand and thirsty from a river,
begging the lusterless sky,
pleading with every rock, every weed, every-shade-of-fire
for rain –
    sweet storms, deliciously drenching torrents
    the slap-patter of every savory drop
    beating a cacophony of liquid relief into
    lizards who shut their eyes,
    and drink the monsoon with their skin,
    and listening to life pouring into the Canyon
    spherules of water quivering on every drought-hollowed spine
    as the freshly watered sky blooms
in every-shade-of-fire

Emily M. Levesque
I like to watch myself bleed. Sometimes I have to run the razor over a different part of my wrist to get it flowing, but it’s always worth the trouble.

My blades come from the shop on the corner of the block, Philly’s Drugs. I don’t know where the name comes from. My aunt Dana tells me that the previous owner never took down his sign, and that Mr. McMann never put up a new one. Dana also says a lot of things, like “I quit smoking five years ago,” or “Goose meat is good for your skin.” Sometimes even, “I can’t be your mother, Annie.” But she only says that when she’s too wasted to know she’s telling the truth.

Philly’s had a sale last week. A box of fifty for two dollars. Small, sterile, all-purpose surgical blades. How many purposes can a blade have? I stood in the kitchenware aisle to admire the new package design. Clean and individually wrapped, each with the Helmann’s guarantee of quality. I like the Helmann razors. They can split hairs lengthwise the way Mom used to chop celery for dinner. Of course that was all before she drove into an eighteen-wheeler. Or did it drive into her? I can never get that part of the story straight.

Mom had the creamy skin and smooth complexion of her family. Dana used to share that until the ashtray became her new best friend. Then she blamed Mom for being born more beautiful, even though Mom secretly wished she looked more like my aunt. The two of them poked verbal holes in each other’s lifestyles when they thought I wasn’t listening. Neither wanted to admit her envy.

Dana lives with my father and me now, in our two-story house with a whitewashed picket fence. She calls my father Ben and sleeps in his room. At night I turn on the clock radio because the music at my ear stops the other sounds. The radio’s on a sleep timer and on most days I drift off well before the music does. Sometimes I don’t.

Last night I had a pleasant dream. The rain outside beat in sync to Alanis Morisette’s “You Oughta Know.” Dana and I were sitting at one of the corner tables in Rory’s Café. She had an empty cup. Mine was steaming with black coffee. Except the coffee wasn’t really black. It was more of a dark crimson color. It stained my tongue the way blood sticks to clothing if I try washing it with hot water. My father was there too, holding the back of my aunt’s chair steady as if she might tilt over and fall from her seat. The two of them were laughing at a private bedroom joke. The coffee burned my throat and that seemed to make Dana laugh harder, so I poured the rest of the cup down her low-neck blouse. Her enormous chest shriveled like grapes to raisins, but faster. She could only watch the smoke rising past her pink cheeks. My father screamed and screamed.

August 10th, my date of birth. In a month I’d be a junior at Evansdale.

I made my way down the carpeted staircase, one hand on the banister. It didn’t sound like anyone was home.

The kitchen smelled foul. I could only assume that Dana had tried to make breakfast again, the way she did last year. At least she got the date right this time around. A plate of broken eggs and black sausage watched silently as I took a seat. She even left a fork. Thoughtful of her.

I gave the egg a sharp poke and yolk spilled across the sausage. That must have been what China looked like when the Yangtze overflowed way back when. A massive, yellow mess. I bent to lick what I could from the plate, but I never did enjoy the taste of sulfur in the morning. All our eggs had gone bad two days ago, when my father left the refrigerator door open all night. He told us he had gone for a midnight snack and fallen asleep at the table. He’s only forty-two but he says he has to watch what he eats because he might drop dead of a heart attack any day now. And wouldn’t that just kill little Annie?
The sausage didn’t yield to the fork, so I tossed it into the trash and left the plate in the dishwasher.

Back upstairs in my room, I pulled the silk curtains to the side and let the sun in. Same old fireball in the sky today. Mom had warned me about staring at it directly but I like to face things straight on. Dana says I’ll be blind by October, but she’s been wrong for four years and counting.

I tied my hair back and knelt by the bed. I pressed my face to the soft green carpet and reached under, feeling for the small box.

I checked the contents. About twenty left. I took one of the easy-open packages and ripped the aluminum wrap where it printed, “Tear Here.” The blades are all beautiful silver rectangles that catch the light like properly chiseled diamonds. I’ve read somewhere that apes are attracted to small, shiny objects. Maybe we really are descendents of monkeys.

I got on the bed and propped myself against the wall, rolling up my shorts. My right thigh had seven parallel white scars. The blade’s always cold against my fingers but hot on broken skin. My stomach fluttered. The cut was so thin that the wound took a while to open. A single red drop rolled off to one side and caught itself on my pinky.

The only problem with these blades is that they don’t allow for a very good grip. There were two small slits on my thumb from holding the edges, although the cuts went only one skin layer deep and drew no blood.

I took a tissue from the box of white Puffs on the table and wrapped it about the blade. I tucked the evidence under some homework in the trash.

I closed my eyes and sank into the bed. Eight scars on both legs now. I was officially sixteen. The call from my father came just after sunset. Dana was in a patient recovery room at MGH. My father would stay with her for the night. Don’t wait up for him.

She was sitting up in bed, reading an old issue of Vogue. A nurse had stacked two pillows behind her back. It was a blank room, whitewashed like our fence.

Dana looked up at my approach. “Oh, hi,” she said. “Ben’s getting coffee downstairs.”

She shifted, setting the magazine on her lap. Her foot peeked out from under the blue blanket. It was covered in long bandages.

I hesitated before taking the fold-up chair. Sitting down, I was almost her height.

“You fell.” I nodded at her legs.

“Building elevator was out. Must have tripped on the stairs.”

There were no plants. The shades were drawn tight. A single ceiling fluorescent kept away the darkness. A Glades plug-in was the only wall decoration, and it fought a losing battle against the omnipresent Novocain.

“So how was your day?” Dana asked.

I shrugged. “Thanks for making breakfast.”

“I tried.”

“I know.” I forced a smile, but Dana saw through it in a rare moment of clarity. Her eyes clouded over. I noticed for the first time the dark bags under them.

“Annie,” she said, taking my hand. “You didn’t have to come. Ben said—”

She stopped. I followed her gaze to my scarred wrists. She turned the arm over and back again, as if the lines might disappear if she kept trying.
I let out a laugh, an authentic one. “Maybe I should go. You need some rest.”

Dana was silent. Her eyes flickered towards the black purse at her side. She was mentally reaching for a cigarette.

“You know, Mom used to tell me bedtime stories. Her fairy tales. Princesses, knights, dragons. Wicked stepmothers.” I paused. “Want to hear one?”

I began to tell her a story, of a girl who loses her mother, and her father who falls in love with an evil, fat witch. But this time, there are no dirty stoves to clean. Only ashtrays. There is no fairy godmother, no pumpkin carriage, no ball, no glass slipper, no prince. At night she rubs a stubby finger across the white lines on her wrists, waiting for the radio to lull her into sweet oblivion. She dreams of songbirds and tea parties, of medieval castles riding on endless clouds.

I caught my breath. My smile faded.

My aunt blinked furiously. “God, Annie.” She said nothing more. Her hold on my hand tightened, and together we counted the seconds.
(Untitled)
A Little Girl, Dazed in Korean Culture

Somin Lee
(Untitled)  Rene R. Chen
Me, Myself and I, a Different Perspective

Somin Lee
Glasses

Jeff Lieberman
How Much

How Much Room
Does it Take to Think?
Bulbous Construction

Aviv Ovadya
Temple of Debod

Amy Wu
Self Portrait

Heather Phipps
With hope that distance ends

Lulu Liu
Free Fall  
Jeff Lieberman
Our patchwork soul in static

Lulu Liu
La Pared de Coyotitan

Joel Sadler
Girls Kissing

Heather Phipps
Psychomorphism

Razorwire twist of a smile
Bouncing smirk wavering
   as a child plays
Soak me in your weakness
I’m devoured in you
   wrapped in your defeat
Painstakingly attack all obstacles
   My whole life revolves around your apathy
     Spin around again
       While the hurricane intrudes upon the desert
         Starry skies, ocean red, develop in a fury
           Traumatic adventure is all I want
With you I’m nothing
Smile at my feet
   Smile only at the ground
     As it disappears beneath us
Embittered by cold
Winter, but for her, he leaves
Tea with orange peel.

A Passionate Affair

I decided, beforehand, that I would lie,
telling you that bald was your thing,
telling myself it did not look like the strands
had been pulled out in haphazard handfuls
but drawn from their warm follicles,
calmly, with dignity and a conscious desire for air,
like flowers pulled from sienna pots,
soil still intermingled with roots:
a solidified, conical cross-section ready to be planted-
now free.
Chajcas

High in the Andes
goats’ toes are sewn onto circlets of colorful cloth,
fifty shorn toenails, black, beige and gray, clustered
to make a wrist rattle
that crackles in staccato, cascading clicks,
like driving mountain hail, or the crescendo of screaming cicadas.

“Shake the toes,” she says,
my clutter consultant
(who charges more for an hour than a worker in Peru earns in two months).
“Clutter is blocked energy.
This will release it.”
I shake
the toes and dance through my apartment.
Showers of clicking toenails rain
across palisades of paper and mountains of magazines.
I laugh to wave “chajcas” at my “tzachkes,”
but wince to witness my cluttered life unlived, unending
piles, dusty and desiccated
pylons shoring up the shells of a life unshed,
while in the Andes
toe-less goats leap from cliff to crag
and workers bleed to sew stiff gray toes to ribbons
so I might own these rattles
(which themselves eventually get added to a pile.)
What they were meant to release, they themselves become
and musical instruments lie mute.

Mary Mullowney
havasupai

a persistent distant mystery hiss
washing down wet-soft cushion-moss stones
a brush here, a wish there
a whistling swish that will not be wind
waltzing with soft-leafed trees that whisper
secrets to the hustling stream

that weaves and wanders to see
the tumbling strip of sky
following the burbling blue
bubble-brick road
searching for the slow steady cipher
masquerading as wind
chuckling its way towards a rumble
that is crumpling lake-glass
sliding suddenly under an open sky where droplets roll upwards and see
their teeming streaming brothers gushing from the sky
hushing and swishing in a cascading cataract
and hissing into rushing seafoam slush and spraying spots, flecks, dots, pock-mark specks that press out in a mushroom cloud from the crushing roaring pilaster of perpetual pouring rain
No One Knew We Couldn’t Tango

We used to dance

Put the playlist on random
Check to make sure
that the door was locked
And dance

You would
lift, dip, and spin me
I would try
to keep my balance

Leaping
off the bed
like a broken ballerina

Twirling arms
like a six-year-old
Dizzy

Hand-in-hand
Dancing extraordinaires
in our makeshift waltz

We laughed
at ourselves
If only they knew
what we really did
behind closed doors

Bethany D. Patten
Pondering the inevitable.

Maggie Nelson
phantasmagorical

So there’s this boy...
Isn’t that how all stories begin
or at least, seems like it these days
seems like it when I talk to others
seems like it when others talk to me
and I have these fantasies
which, everyone has
well, not the same fantasies of course
because everyone is their own
little bit of weird
but in these fantasies I have
there is a strange power (I have)
over my mind
over his mind
and all control is lost
all this holding back
that is held back so no one gets hurt
that is held back to keep people happy
(without actually making either of us happy)
well... it stops being held back
and I can’t even imagine
how this fantasy plays out
how happy I would be
how thrilling exciting intoxicating
it would be.
But it’s just a fantasy
an imagined dream
and I can’t build up the power
to not hold back
and to not worry about reactions
so I suppose I’ll remain
stuck in this fantasy-free world
about as good as calorie-free chocolate.

Jenn D’Ascoli
The Great Chicken

Sunset on the beach of a desert island. JIM, late twenties, lies sprawled on the ground, face down. He wears a business suit, minus the jacket, and his tie is askew. At the other end of the stage, where a few ferns suggest the edge of a jungle, TARKEE enters. She is about seven and wears an old t-shirt that comes down to her knees, a skirt of giant leaves, and a thin crown of flowers. Slowly, cautiously, she edges up to JIM. When he doesn’t respond, she grows bolder, peering closely at him, fascinated. Finally, she pokes his side. No response. She nudges him.

TARKEE: Hello?

JIM: Mmf.

(TARKEE jumps back. When nothing more happens, she goes up and nudges him again. With a groan, he heaves himself onto his back and sits up.)

JIM (rubbing his eyes): Okay! I’m up, I’m up! (He takes in his surroundings.)... Oh. Oh, crap, oh, crap crap crap...

(Suddenly animated, he stands and paces around, frantically patting his pockets. Frightened, TARKEE darts back to the ferns and watches through the leaves. Finding something, he stops, relieved. He pulls out a cell phone and inspects it gently. At the sight of the phone, TARKEE gasps in awe. Excited but reverent, she steps forward.)

JIM: Come on, baby. They said you were waterproof.

TARKEE (an awed whisper): The Egg of Ages!

JIM: Uh... W-what? Where’d you come from?

TARKEE: Oh, glorious! Let me see it!

(She reaches for the phone and he holds it away from her, startled.)

JIM: Uhh--Are you alright, little girl? ... Wait, are any adults with you?

TARKEE: The Egg--where did you find it? I’ve waited so long.

JIM: It’s my phone. My company gave it to me.

TARKEE: The Egg has many forms. Here, I must take it to Foonkuay so that she may be appeased.
(She reaches for the phone again, but he steps back.)

JIM: Y-you can’t have my phone! It might still work. I need it to get out of here.

TARKEE: There is no time. Foonkuay must have it before sundown.

JIM: Is . . . Foonkuay a grown-up?

TARKEE (indignantly): Foonkuay is Greatest of the Great. And she must be appeased.

JIM: Alright, so later we’ll find her a real egg.

(He opens his phone, shakes it to get any water out, and tries turning it on.)

TARKEE: Blasphemer! The Great Foonkuay will not allow such deception!

JIM: Look, this isn’t what you’re looking for.

TARKEE: It is.

JIM: You’re awful sure of yourself.

TARKEE: Foonkuay never lies.

JIM: Oh! She told you I was coming, did she?

TARKEE: Yes.

(The phone chimes happily and the screen blinks to life.)

JIM: Aha!

TARKEE: It senses its maker’s presence. It knows the time is near.

JIM: And . . . I have no reception.

(She grabs his wrist.)

TARKEE: Quickly! The sun is almost gone! We must return the Egg to Foonkuay so that the cycle may be complete!
JIM: What? I’m not gonna let you sacrifice my phone on some pagan alter! (He breaks away from her and turns to stroke the phone.) I kissed way too much ass to lose you now. You’re just being temperamental, aren’t you, beautiful? You’ll save me . . .

TARKEE: The sun is almost gone!

JIM: Okay! Settle down! Good grief, it’s not the end of the world.

TARKEE (gravely): It is.

JIM: Uh.

TARKEE: Come.

(He studies her in disbelief, and she stares back in wide-eyed frustration, gripping his wrist again. Finally, he sighs and relaxes slightly.)

JIM: Fine, let’s see this Foonkuay, if it’ll calm you down. But I won’t let you hurt my phone.

TARKEE (leading him through the ferns): The Egg will not be harmed. It will merely bloom into a new level of existence.

JIM (cheerful sarcasm): Hear that, honey? You’re gonna be a PDA!

(The sky darkens as they exit. Thunder rumbles in the distance. They’re offstage for only a couple seconds before TARKEE comes back on, carrying an old rubber chicken in a carefully woven nest. She holds the nest in both hands, raising it high in exaltation. With an elaborate, kneeling bow, she sets it center stage and prostrates herself before the chicken. JIM steps on after her and watches the ritual from a safe distance.)

TARKEE: O Great Foonkuay,  
Layer of the Egg of the Universe,  
On this sunset of the Last Day,  
I bring you the Egg of Ages,  
That the Cycle of Life may continue.  
(She pauses, listening.)  
Yes, I have failed, O Great One--I did not bring it immediately. I beg your mercy--please forgive your servant and lead me to the new life you promised, in the Land of Twinkies and Ho-Hos.  
(pause)  
Thank you, O Great One!

JIM: Uh . . . little girl? This is starting to freak me out . . .

TARKEE: Now, let the Hatching begin! Let the old universe crack and crumble as a new one bursts forth! (She turns to JIM and holds our her palm. The sky slowly continues to darken.) The Egg!
JIM: I-I think you’re taking this a couple steps too far . . .

(Thunder crashes.)

TARKEE: The Egg!

(He clutches the phone protectively.)

JIM: You’re not hatching my egg! Crazy little voodoo princess--I’m out of here!

(He spins to dash offstage, but a tall fern hits him in the face. During the moment he’s off-balance, TARKEE darts over and snatches the phone away. She returns to the nest and, kneeling, presents the phone to the chicken.)

JIM (slapping the fern away): Hey, hey! You put that down!

TARKEE: And now, the Egg comes before the Chicken, and the Chicken comes before the Egg. The Cycle is complete.

(She sets the phone in the nest, resting the chicken on top of it. She sits back and bows her head meditatively. JIM watches expectantly.)

JIM (finally): . . . That’s it?

TARKEE: Sh!

JIM: . . . Can I have my phone back?

TARKEE: Sh-hhh!

(JIM studies the scene a moment longer, then exbales sharply and strides up to the nest.)

JIM: I’m taking my phone back.

(When his fingers are about to touch the chicken, she shrieks.)

TARKEE: STOP!

(He winces.)

JIM: God! Could you take the freakiness down like six or seven notches? I’ve had enough of this game. Good night.

(He snatches up the phone and turns away. The sky suddenly darkens another degree.)
JIM: . . . What just happened?

(Thunder.)

TARKEE (whispering): The Cycle is broken.

JIM: Will you stop that! There is no cycle! There is no magical egg! There is no God! And if there were, it wouldn’t be Funky the Chicken! This-- (He sticks the phone in her face.) is a cellular phone, and this-- (He grabs the chicken by the neck and shakes it in the air.) is a rubber chicken!

VOICE (booming from the heavens): WHO DARES FINGER MY RUBBERY LIKENESS?


TARKEE: You have angered her.

JIM: W-whaat??

VOICE: YOU, UNBELIEVER, HAVE DISRUPTED THE HATCHING. NOW THERE WILL BE NO NEW UNIVERSE.

JIM: Whaat??

TARKEE: I tried to warn you.

JIM: Are you kidding me??

VOICE: NO.

JIM: So . . . the universe is seriously ending?

TARKEE (gravely): At sundown.

JIM: And there’s nothing I can--

VOICE: NO.

(The sky is very black now. Only a thin ring of orange remains on the horizon.)

JIM: . . . Well, shit. (pause) I blame the chicken.
(A flash of light. Jim jerks and collapses like he’s been struck by lightning, dropping the phone and the rubber chicken. Tarkee carefully places the chicken back in the nest. The phone rings.)

Voice: Answer it.

Tarkee: Great One?

Voice: Crack the egg, put it to your ear, and say “Hello.”

(Tarkee opens the phone.)

Tarkee: Hello? (She listens, confused.) No, I am Tarkee, High Priestess to the Great Chicken Foonkuay. (She glances at Jim.) Probably not. His soul has been sent to the Abominable Land of Anchovies and Brussels Sprouts. It was the will of the Great Chicken.

Voice: Who is it?

Tarkee (into phone): Who are you? (She listens, then addresses the chicken.) His boss. (Listening) Huh? . . . No, sorry . . . Oh . . . Oh! What do you make? (There’s an exasperated shout and a click on the other end. Tarkee closes the phone in stunned silence.)

Voice: Well?

Tarkee (in wonder): They make rubber chickens.

Voice: Ah. Then perhaps there is hope.

Blackout

Ashley Micks
Reflections of the Swamp

Melanie Worley
Destiny Kitchen the Night Before the Painters Came

The room’s soul left with the mechanical spider
Which used to squat on the dinner table
Its legs curled painfully into the air
Writing in agony as electricity poured from
The four corners of the room
Making it moan in a manner
Dr. Frankenstein would envy.

Adding insult to injury,
the piles of
books,
papers,
cheap weapons,
magnets,
wires and aging food
all vanished too.

The only things still left
is the doll on the table framed
by the gaping hole in the wall.
Her eyes had been replaced by
LEDs redder than her dress
that gave her a demonic glare when they could be turned on.
At her feet, a sign reading “To Avoid Surgery, Eat this Camera.”
Dance of the Assassin

You adore my breasts,
perfect ebony pomegranates
begging to be devoured.
They are all for you, My King.
They are all for you.

You grip your golden throne
as you would my undulating hips,
my supple serpentine sinuous belly,
a cobra you will kiss, caress, embrace.
Such dangerous tastes you have, My King

Yes; I wield my fine silk shawl with skill
in a swift glittering arc
slicing scarlet from head to toe.
I can swing a knife too.
You will know.

My eyes smolder for you, My King,
imploring your Highness to avail yourself of me.
I will wait in your chambers,
draped across your cushions like a mynx.
You will smell musk on my throat and nectar on my lips.
Come a little closer, King.

The blade is strapped
high against one luscious thigh.
This precious treasure,
waiting between my legs,
it is all for you
My King.
It is all for you.

Emily M. Levesque
On Missing the Foliage and Making Love to a Homeless Man

“don’t miss the leaves next time, girly”
he said it with disdain, like he knew me,
like he knew I had just lost my mother
to the void of her own egotism and now felt
fine with the her I loved half-drowned
in a brown bottle, fizzing slightly, smelling-
in that sickly bitter way- of alcoholic potpourri.
his breath carried the same aroma,
buried deep within his beige-ing scarves.
“you let it slip by, sweety, tiny granules in an old clock”
an hour glass, my mind corrected his amiability;
his coins jangled in time:
soft ringings against a soggy, cardboard cup.
his mustache moved like a forest animal.
it was the slinking kind that curdled your heart,
creeping over your skin in time with your loathing,
dancing to the beat of your uneasy smile.
I did too; I smiled at him, and I suppose I feel a bit ashamed
now: in retrospect it was disgusting, utterly
disagreeable with all conventions-
but I still pulled the straps of my bra over the curves of my shoulders,
unhooking it lightly with his hands on the white thighs beneath my skirt.
they were warm and greasy, though he had been shivering while he reprimanded,
and as he slid in, I bet he knew what he had been working toward all along.
“you’re a good kid, honey, I hope the red ones hold out for you- next time”
a long time ago

My shoulder bumps his. We mutter our apologies. He turns away and disappears among the works of art. Same gallery, different worlds. He moves around the exhibit like he moves around life: head down, shoulders hunched, hands in his pockets. His yellow hat, courtesy of a summer job at Acadia National Park, is pulled low over his face, covering his forehead and eyes. I’ve never seen him without that hat; if not on his head, balancing on a knee, bill facing him. I guess Senior Spring mentality finally caught up with him because for the last few weeks he’s been wearing it on his head all the time, even in class. Always on his head, always covering his face. It’s been so long since I’ve seen his eyes that I can no longer remember what color they are. I used to know though, I can promise you that. I used to be able to look into them and recognize the person they belonged to. But that was a long time ago.

He’s by himself, like usual, but he doesn’t look lonely. He never does. Sometimes I think that he wouldn’t notice or care if everybody in the world died but him. Not that he hates people, just that he doesn’t need them. He has his own world, one which he shut me out of a long time ago.

He shuffles from painting to painting. I take that back. Shuffle is the wrong word because it implies a lack of confidence and purpose. He lacks neither of these. He moves, albeit slowly and with his hands in his pockets, with a self-assuredness that no other boy I know has. It’s neither self-confidence nor arrogance; just a certainty in his steps, like he figured out what life was all about a long time ago.

He turns the corner and looks at a painting. I wait to see what he thinks. It’s my favorite one in the gallery; a girl with creamy, pale skin, honey-streaked hair and pink lip-glossed lips looks out from the painting with navy blue eyes ringed by a smear of black eyeliner. She rests her chin on a dining room table. You can’t tell if she’s smiling or not but it doesn’t matter. You don’t know her name or why she’s looking at you, but you know that she’s beautiful. He wrote that once, in a paper of his a long time ago.

Blue. Now I remember. His eyes are blue. I used to look into them and see my friend. But that was a long time ago.
Reflections Under the Dock

Melanie Worley
Cold Air on Bare Skin

Before me the curve
we trail through space
the crest and fall of ages-
and grace
is the pressure of your hands
the gravity waves on sand
that guide my hips
against yours.

Lulu Liu
Toy Soldier

Amanda Poteet
Severance

what’s it like to jump off a building, to see the ground come up to meet you like an old friend, on a first-time-only basis? what’s it like to struggle up the dune for your strength, and drink from that distant, desired oasis? what’s it like to desire a branch for a fire, and die seeing your last breath on the cold-hearted wind? what’s it like to fight back against cancerous jack and in a chemical year die from growing within? does it fall into my hands when you’re passed out on the couch to evade the police and turn everyone out? does it fall into my hands when you’re walking out on me to talk you down and bring you in, and plead patiently? when that hurricane comes knocking on your chamber door, was it the wind and nothing more? there are subtle signals everywhere to leave and never look back. what kind of drink shall i make to give you the power to ignore the electric buzzing around your head?

so she turned to him, marvelous dainty him, in the diner at 1 a.m. when the neon sign saying “24 hours” is flash-flash-flashing at an oh-so-random rate. she was pushing around the food on her plate, two eggs and a piece of french toast that was getting syrupy soggy.

she said: YOU DON’T LISTEN TO ME ANYMORE.

SURE I DO. YOU’RE TALKING RIGHT NOW, AREN’T YOU?

YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND. she flicks her paisley translucent misty blue-spiked eyes up at him, all 6’ 2” journeying blitzkrieg of a boy, the mainland, the peak, and something inside her said wait, look at that, don’t give it up just yet. you can make it work, you can pull anyone together and change, and chain the mountain of dragonfly dreams before you into a something-something-Control. flick of the wrist and it’s all under Control.

LET’S GO.

BUT YOU HAVEN’T EVEN TOUCHED YOUR FOOD.

COME ON. IT’S LATE. I HAVE WORK TOMORROW. beautiful bright little lies carry her and him through the day, hiding the fucking in the closet where some people, some skeletons, some dynamite soldiers believe it should remain. miniskirts are out of style now. she wears pants and a t-shirt, she’s one of the guys in her misty mountain mystique, surveying and drinking lagers by the amplifiers, can’t say she’s filled with desire, no sir, can’t say she’s filled with something more than football talk and so what if she’s a bit out of touch with thanks but no thanks, sir, thanks a bunch? they all get drunk on beer and pool tables, dark scratching voices down in your spinal cord that tug you towards the exit before you get a chance to catch one more for the road. she could say: I don’t love you, I want out! she could leave by the back door and catch a train to West Faraway-from-here, thank you very much, but who leaves the sure-fire passion of being wanted and touched? they leave and walk out towards the blue chevy truck, rust reflected in the girl’s plastic eyes like a thousand lullabies. ten miles to home, a duplex/split-level/apartment/doesn’t-fucking-matter.

she said: YOU DON’T LISTEN TO ME ANYMORE.
SURE I DO. YOU’RE TALKING RIGHT NOW, AREN’T YOU?

FUCK YOU! she flicks her timeline cigarette in his fucked-up general direction, that shivering placemat sitting across the table, that magnet of a lingering boy, the downlow, the ultra-hip, and something inside her said come on, look at that, don’t give it up just yet. you can get a good run in before you go, don’t fuck it up now, you can make it work, you can pull one last stand at the mercy of Control. chain this mystery thing into a final dancing spin, fuck-me eyes and it’s all under Control.
COMING ON, LET’S GET OUT OF HERE.

BUT YOU HAVEN’T EVEN TOUCHED YOUR FOOD.

WE’RE GOING. total control, now. seductive interface to Computero el Stupido, press the button and take the ticket and see the whole show and hit the ground running. can’t say she keeps it hidden, where the sex is all forbidden. don’t show it to me, don’t show it to anyone who thinks they are yours, don’t show it to anyone who thinks they know what’s good for you. sitting by the guitars writing diaries in the mud, he said she said he said she said fuck fuckfuckfuckfuck FUCK FUCK FUCK and that’s all she wrote. down in her legs, down in your legs you can feel they want to run. who gives a shit about obligations, about people’s feelings when you have the power to feel that vital mist and wind running through your back, down your hair, under and over and power to you! down and about and around it and through! light insects chattering in your mind, take it and run, she could say: I don’t love you but I want to fuck! she could leave by the back door and catch one thousand men’s eyes, one thousand diseases of self-esteem, thank you very much, but who stays by the sure-fire passion of everyone pushing to touch? they leave and walk out towards the blue chevy truck, they get in the back and fuck fuck fuck!
dust reflected in the girl’s distant eyes like one single, silent goodbye.
ten miles to nowhere, a train/automobile/car/doesn’t-fucking-matter.

she said: YOU DON’T LISTEN TO ME ANYMORE.

SURE I DO. YOU’RE TALKING RIGHT NOW, AREN’T YOU?

YOU JUST DON’T GET IT, DO YOU? she flicks her tangerine shoes across her legs in the feminine all-star dance of I-don’t-give-a-fuck, looking at that mindless go-for-it across the pinnacle breach, mind drowning in hormonal floods of ecstasy and perfect connections, that pendant of the last statue, that seizure, that mind-control soldier, and something inside her said: OK, that’s it, come on, look at that, you don’t need that, you can do better without trying. you can get out before your heart gets damaged, you can finish the race without losing the grace, don’t fuck it up now, get out while the getting’s good, you can pull one last night at the bastion of Control. parse this fuckery data into a voodoo mindset sugar popsicle, full of candy so no one will know that the Sweet has gone oh so very Sour. it’s all under Control.
IT DOESN’T MATTER. LET’S JUST GO.

ARE YOU SURE? YOU HAVEN’T EVEN-
YEAH. I’M SURE. LET’S GET OUT OF HERE. perfect bliss, managing sexual desire and fragrance devoid of sex on the scale, balancing truth and trust against sex and lust. press the button and take the ride, but get out quick on the other side. go tell it on the mountain, go shout it to the elders, go prance about it at the gates of you’re-so-goddamn-right and sing the song of sixpence, pocket full of lies. sitting in the bar, wishing on that final star, that this drink is your last and you’re finally out of cash. but no. you have to drive home. you have to wash the whites separate from the reds. you have to vomit when you’re sick. you have to eat something, darling, you have to get something down. here, try a cracker. a nice popsicle perhaps. some carbonation is good for you, it’ll settle your stomach. better? great. now try and get some rest. don’t forget to drink lots of fluids. yes, i’ll be right in the other room, watching tv and listening for you. if you’re going to be sick, here’s a trashcan. no, i don’t mind, those towels were old anyway. all right? all right. and then you sneak, sneak, outside the back door and run, past and up the old stone stairs, past that field where you lost your virginity to a little indiscretion - feed a fever, starve a cold. and she could say: I’m not satisfied in this relationship. she could walk away with no confrontation, call a cab out in public, make it known without words that it ends now! right here, no second chances, no turning back, thank you very much. but who turns from those last fighting words, that last longing glance and touch? they leave and walk out towards the blue chevy truck. a slap in her face, now she’s down on her luck. blood reflected in the girl’s cold eyes, a meaningless spider in a world of flies.

ten miles to reality, a sleeping/crying/touching/laughing/doesn’t-fucking-matter.

what’s it like to be settled, curled up and done in, when the fire finally burns down the wall separating you from despair? what’s it like to hold in your dead hands a warm piece of her once-vibrant, enchanted soft hair? what’s it like to parachute through the sky for the loot and discover at last that the clouds are not cotton? what’s it like to start dying because you’ve stopped trying to remember why exactly it is you’ve forgotten? does it come down to a wait at cold heaven’s gate because you wanted all of the answers too soon? does it come down to a spin at the fifty cent bin to check if the midnight you once loved is now noon? does it fall into my hands to make you believe that my time isn’t up and I don’t have to leave? does it fall into my hands to keep you from crying when the world outside you once loved is now dying? when that earthquake comes shaking down your bedroom door, was it the ground and nothing more? there are subtle signals everywhere to leave and never look back. what kind of drink shall i make to give you the power to ignore the electric buzzing around your head?

Graham Woolley
Autumn Leaves

If only to conceal what ought not to be
A truthful façade that which the winds of truth
Blow into the place, scattering
The shaken leaves
Nudging them from the comfort zone
Care not the ones who trample with their soles
Those that never stop to think twice
Or thrice or more.
And on the continuous waves, not one
Pauses…
To observe the brushstrokes of the artist
Nor the blending of the pigments—
For who would notice silhouetted beneath
The yellow a tinge of green
That had never left.

Jessie Wang
I was a sell-out

It is with sadness which I can admit that at some point in my poetic career—which has been, at many points, neither poetic nor ever a career—I have used the word “semen” in a piece to turn heads, and it worked—so don’t scorn me before you do yourselves. I have talked about love generically and used universal specifics, taking the easy way out. I have used obscenities to emphasize my (god damned) points when they wouldn’t articulate themselves and my calloused fingertips could not win against the tinkling of the keys or the high pitched screeching of graphite on paper lined in blue and fuscia. There have been times when I inserted line breaks, not for the betterment of the prose, the point, or even suspense, but to be aesthetically pleasing to my readers. I would not refer to myself as an artist in this light, I suppose, but sometimes at dusk I like to think that a different light catches my eyes and hands in just the right way, so as to appear more beautiful and true, and who would ever guess I was a sell-out.

Shaunalyynn Duffy
space + age

Maggie Nelson
Three

Three-1
i live each day
in a dream
tossed with every breath
Fate sends to me.

Three-2
my friend, you are in tears
shunned by the light of tomorrow
left alone by Venus’ aura
soul ridden with her indelible marks

Three-3
ephemeral like the twinkling
of the stars in the sky
my love, my reluctance
subsides
enigmatic as your smile
suppresses the urges to lie
evanescence traces of our past
ringing in our minds.

Amy Wu
the relatively, almost wind

i watched the sky for you last night because i thought, against all thoughts, that you might go flying again. soaring through clouds to feel the moisture, like it was... soft and cool and memorable, i remember the feeling. i remember the way your curls threw themselves, against you and your demands, into the artificial wind. i liked the relatively, almost wind, but the air was still, as we were the ones that moved and you were still here, and there for me in a way that felt true and real. sometimes i think that i might stretch my arms to fly, alone into the world and the now dank sky, i could... if only you were easy to forget, the way i seem to be, dribbling like rain from the moistened clouds, dripping drops of me, (w)aning to the earth, gashing it and leaving clods of wretchedness where they fell into the dirt. i feel silly to say, these tempestuous tears are nothing to mourn the loss of love and words and touch, in touch the way conversation is connection in the right mouths, and you were the right mouth-heart-mind-body-soul. sometimes when i look up to the places we flew through, riding gentle wisps of understanding and glowing from the inside, the paths try to tell me that you too feel the great encompassing abyss. now, though, i feel that i cannot believe the places i have been over the things that i feel now, encompassing, like convenience was the true connector and, once gone, you flew- away.

Shaunalynn Duffy
3030 O’Clock

Somehow dis-sociated doesn’t seem
To cut it. Living a-drift away in the sky.
Staring at the glaring window
And typing with someone else’s hands.

Instability
Is the endlessly recurring picture
Of the pencil standing
on its tip, And me at
8:00 AM (3000 military -
personnel don’t do this).

note:
Write a conclusion that
doesn’t trail of

Matthew Spencer
Sunset at the Center of the World

In the North, there is desert. A fault line between desert and sky splits empty apart from empty. Telephone poles, barbed-wire fences, wheel ruts, and trees are the stuff of some other planet’s dreams.

In the East, there is desert. Small spined plants and needles of grass belong to the ground. They are not here to be looked at. The sky is draped over their dimpled silhouettes. It is soft, supple, lush. It could, if it pleased, grow plants too.

In the South, there is desert. At the end of sight the air is thick with heat and, in its delirious dreams, imitates opaque clouds. It ripples the sleeping hills, and they roll with nightmares of motion.

In the West, there is desert. Solar flames are nectar here, scaling a wide desert tongue that licks up orange and savors heat with spiky cacti taste bugs. The sun puts life in a long, low spotlight, marks its stark presence, and obligingly, indifferently, burns.

In the sky, there is desert. The clouds have found a land that desires shadows, and the birds are gone to play in them. Stare as far into the bleeding velveteen valley as you wish: It is too shallow to pierce and too deep to conceive of escape.

In the ground, there is desert. Every pebble has its monolith shadow. This heat-cracked earth accepts no footprints, gives life no purchase. Your own sandaled feet look pretend. Ten dirt-dusted toes do not dare wiggle, for fear of becoming real.
Myopia

The next line of code
hung heavily over his nose,
(which was wrinkled, like mine,
in disgust at the odor
leaking from the trash can)
like the bridge of enormous glasses

He squinted intently,
Bringing all his perceptive power
to bear on shifting pixels:
the center of his present,
somewhat truncated,
universe.

With 270 degree vision
An unusually good perception of color
And the ability to see in the dark
One would hope that the man
Hunched over the computer
Could see a little farther.

Matthew Spencer
Hidden Mirror

Melanie Worley
Sand salt play

Her brown hair curled ringlets in the salt-specked breeze-
soft parted- it
lifted and resettled again-
gently-

brushed from her face by daydream fingers
she laughed as if the tips tickled her freckles.
Now, her smile-
(with the crinkle of her eyes
and the fill of her cheeks)
had a way of running
crisp with youth the space between the
two of you and landing a mirror image on your own...

She wanted a sand castle
We sat with our toes in the lapping waves
a pretty sandy castle
two silhouettes against a fading sun
with seashell kings and story things.
and waited for the tide to come in.

I didn’t warn about its watery fate
nor the haunt of inevitability
we merely took turns building handfuls of sand
into tower walls
marble halls
digging out pebble windows
and arching gateways
smearing our faces each with castle mortar
while her hair tinted blond
then orange.

(I measured footprints and slipping shadows)

We turned to leave just as
the first of the waves licked
the outer edges of our moat
and retreated with a little of our sand.

And so it goes.

I imagine
our king stood majestic
in the rills of a drowning sun
over his fortress
losing piece by piece.
I believe
he traced with his eyes
the curve of the earth meet sky
savored the breeze salty with time
cried a little
as he returned
to the sea from whence he came.

Yesterday afternoon
I made a sand castle with a little girl.

This morning
the sand castle was gone
so was the little girl.

Lulu Liu