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Lulu Liu

sallyellenpeach

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Farah Ghniem

sallyellenpeach

Brian Katz

Amanda N. Poteet
the Wheel

Adele Schwab
The Fall

The dead walk the halls of Surgical Two, a floor no longer used by medical staff, now storage for linen bins, broken beds, and expired records. Gold framed photos of nurses holding babies with opiate eyes still hang on the walls; dust covered and yellowed, the nurses hold the babies tightly as the dead walk by. Down the hall, a security guard falls asleep in a room once used for chemo. He dreams of kids with charcoal stained mouths, ambulance light thrown against waiting families, and a woman kicking at a window, looking for glass to eat. The dead join him, sitting in chairs facing the east, facing the city, a dark crown against the early sunlight. They drift to sleep and dream of the Divine hiding, the Divine hiding from them in a beginning they cannot remember and in an end they cannot imagine, hiding in a sinking seed digging for a colder and colder place in the dirt, hiding in a rotten crabapple, bruised by branches in its fall.

Eric Anderson
Crowd
Home

Home, Omar Abdenour has always been told, is elsewhere. It is not here, it is not in these narrow alleyways littered with overflowing plastic bags and inhabited by cats. Home is not in this dry air and infertile soil. This is the fifth year in a row that I try to make this cherry tree grow and it won’t grow. See? Two leaves don’t make a tree. And how do you grow a tree in a pot of dirt anyway? Home is not in these unsmiling faces. Not in the sour smell of corrugated metal. Home is full of fruit orchards. Its soil is fertile; its air is bliss. The women are beautiful the children are happy the men are strong and handsome. It is full of the mystery of the desert, the grace of the Mediterranean, the magic of the Red Sea. It contains the strength of a river and the calmness of a lake. The graveness of the Dead Sea and the holiness of Jerusalem. Home is infinite and majestic, and it is not here. This, habibi, this is what temporary is. Because one day we will pack up and leave. And see? See this? This is the key that your grandfather brought with him when he walked across the border all those years ago.

Omar’s grandmother still lives out of the suitcase she had purchased as soon as she saved up enough money to buy one.

And so he grew up. Always craving elsewhere. Always dreaming of elsewhere. And of the return: the return to a home to which he has a key, but nothing else. No memories, no initials carved on a tree and no alleyways that he knew like the back of his hand.

Omar, now seventeen, might finally visit home. The possibility of getting a visa is very slim, he knows, and so he is trying not to get his hopes up. But he can’t help it, already something has infiltrated him. Already it is surging through his blood and keeping him awake at night. Just the other day he went to the internet café with the lousy connection and tried to remember how to use the internet to find information. He wished he had paid more attention during the session they held in his school about the internet. The owner of the café only knew how to access chatting rooms and some websites that had lots of girls in their underwear. Normally all of this would have appealed to Omar but that day he only wanted to find out about Haifa: his hometown.

Omar’s sister is getting married. It all happened too quickly. At least that’s what he thinks; everyone else seems to think the speed with which it happened perfectly normal. His aunt Huda came to visit from Haifa at the beginning of the summer. She came with all three of her children: Mahmoud, Shireen and Haneen. Shireen and Haneen are twins, but they are not identical.

Khalto Huda had pulled Omar’s cheeks and shrieked, “Mashallah, mashallah. The last time I saw you I breastfed you. You know, I didn’t want to do it - ” Khalto Huda looked around until she located her daughters and tilted her head in their direction. “- I wanted you for either Shireen or Haneen. Such a shame, now you’re their brother by nursing. But what could I have done? Your mother was at the market and you were”
screaming and we didn’t have formula. Now you’re making me regret my decision! Mashallah, mashallah. One last pat on the cheek after which Khalto Huda had walked straight past him and toward his sister Raneem.

Omar just stood there for five minutes afterwards, trying to make sense of what his aunt was telling him. Haneen and Shireen are two months younger than him. In the living room of his house, there’s a picture of him and two other babies blowing spit bubbles framed on top of the television set. All three of them were placed on a mattress; Omar in the middle, Haneen and Shireen on either side. Omar decided that he was relieved because he couldn’t possibly imagine ever having to marry one of the two babies in the picture.

He looked at his two cousins now: they looked like westerners. They were both wearing very tight jeans and sleeveless tops. They didn’t cover their hair like his sisters did. Taita sat them down as soon as they arrived and gave them a lecture on honor and virtue. He overheard her say something about the honor of a woman being like a matchstick: it can only be lit once. “Don’t learn from those Israeli girls you go to school with. If you bare your arms like this you will burn in hell.”

Haneen and Shireen made Omar nervous, so he avoided them. Yet he shaved more often, did twenty more push-ups before he went to sleep and walked around the house in his undershirt, exposing his muscled arms. His behavior confused him. It didn’t help matters much that he thought that Shireen was very sexy and that he dreamt of her inappropriately and often.

The girls didn’t show much interest in talking to him, either. He had a feeling that he and his family disgusted them in some way. The day after they had arrived, they had woken up and gone to the nearest supermarket. They came back with yellow gloves and bottles of Vetol, the closest thing to Detol they could find. They walked into the bathroom, gloves and disinfectant in hand, and started cleaning. His mother was outraged:

“Huda, why don’t you go and tell your pretty little daughters not to waste their time cleaning my bathroom. They are just wasting water. It’s clean. Raneem scrubs and mops every morning. Even when we run out of water she makes sure the bathroom is clean by borrowing a few buckets from the neighbors next door. Maybe if they’re not so lazy, and they wake up when normal people do, they could have seen Raneem clean it.”

An hour later, red-eyed and sniffling, the two girls went up to his mother to apologize.

“Sorry Khalto, we were just trying to help out,” Haneen said.
“Yes, we were trying to help,” Shireen added.

“We might be poor,” his mother said, “but we sure are not dirty. I’m going to forgive you because you are young and naïve. Oh don’t look so upset,” she said to Shireen who was about to break into tears again, “go and watch some TV.” She gave each of them a kiss on the cheek before they were dismissed.
During the rest of their stay, the girls divided their time between watching Satellite TV and being pampered by their grandmother. At first, his sister Raneem would try to engage them in some conversation:

“So, do you go to a mixed school?”
“Yeah…”
“What’s that like?”
“What do you mean?”
“Do you have friends who are boys?”
“Sure…”
“Do you have boyfriends?”
“Shireen has one. I don’t.” Shireen shot her sister a nasty look for having revealed that secret.
“No I don’t. Haneen just made this up.”
“Yes you do. Yes she does.” The undertones of jealousy were unmistakable.
“What’s it like to have a boyfriend?” Raneem asked.
No response.
Eventually Raneem stopped trying to make conversation with them.

For a while there was much friction in the household. Khalto Huda and her family were essentially fleeing Hizbullah’s rockets. It was their only visit to Jordan in sixteen years. Many fights erupted between Mahmoud and Omar’s older brother, Haitham, because Mahmoud disapproved of Hizbulla’s actions.

“The only people dying in Israel are the Arabs in Haifa. Do you not watch the news? Did you not hear about the two Arab-Israeli children killed by Hizbulla’s Katyusha?”
“Yes I have. And I’ve also heard their father say that if that’s the price of dignity, he’s willing to pay it. Whose side are you on anyway?”
Eventually, though, Mahmoud gave into Haitham or at least pretended to give in, because there were no more fights about politics. The twins never expressed their opinion. Omar guessed that they thought Nasrallah was a nuisance. He drove them to this Godforsaken refugee camp for the summer.

Soon enough there was talk of a marriage between Raneem and Mahmoud. Raneem was not Omar’s favorite sister. That was Lamees, but she had died of Leukemia two years earlier. She was six years older than Omar and perhaps the only person in his family who had paid him any attention on a daily basis. She had introduced him to the joys of reading and when he was younger, she had given him all of her mystery novels. When he became old enough to understand them, she would let him read all the books she borrowed from her friends even before she read them. They had spent many hours together, eating salted melon seeds and reading Mahfouz. Omar was a middle child, and one of too many. Before Lamees died, there were eight of them: four boys and four girls. Palestinians bypassed contraceptives, particularly in refugee camps. They thought there was much strength in numbers. No matter that a young woman of twenty should die of Leukemia because chemotherapy came second to feeding the many children. No matter that a boy of fourteen should lose his best friend.
Raneem is eighteen, two years older than Omar. She had just finished high school last June. They didn’t even wait for her Tawjihi results before the marriage was agreed upon. She didn’t mind, she was not going to go to university, she might as well get married and move to Haifa. Omar had a feeling that Raneem was entirely lured by the idea of their hometown: the sun, the beaches, the Mediterranean. They all called to her and made her overlook the fact that Mahmoud had a drinking problem. Even though no one talked about it the summer his aunt Huda visited, Omar knew about it all too well. Everyone overheard the conversations Taita had with Khalto Huda on the phone every month. Besides, it was impossible to miss his late-night entries into the house, supported by Haitham and reeking of cheap whiskey.

The night before Huda left with her children, a Sheikh came over and the marriage contract was signed. There was a little party but Omar’s sisters didn’t buy new dresses and the neighbors were not invited. It was explained to everyone that although the marriage would be technically official, it would not be consummated until the next summer, when they held the actual ceremony in Haifa. The marriage contract was important though, so they could all use it when they go to the Israeli embassy and apply for visas. So Raneem’s paperwork could be started.

Now it is November, and Omar’s visa request has already been declined once. His father’s has been declined too. In fact, the only males in his family who were given visas were under the age of eight: his two little brothers and his cousin, Khalto Iman’s son. Omar decided to apply for a visa again, this time with one more supporting document: a letter from Khalto Huda. He used the money he had saved up from his summer job in construction to pay for the application fee. He recited verses from the Quran the entire time he was waiting in line, handed over the money and papers and left.

Omar’s friends at school told him to give up. The chances of the Israeli embassy giving a seventeen year old Jordanian/Palestinian male a visa were minute enough even before the war in Lebanon. Now there simply was no chance. “Sister’s wedding or not, they won’t give it to you, man. The way I see it, I’d rather not pay them the visa application fee.”

But hope was a growing creature inside of Omar. It was eating him up. He wanted to give up but every night he would dream the same dream. In his dream he is sitting on a bench on the sand, alone, and he is looking out to sea. He is barefoot and the sand is warm against his toes. He’s never been to any beach anywhere but he guesses the sand must be warm. Omar feels many things sitting on that bench. He is happy, relieved, light-headed almost. Most of all Omar feels like he finally belongs.

When he woke up in the morning it took him a while to shake the sound of the sea from his ears. He knew what the sea sounded like because they have a big sea shell at home, and Lamees had once told him that all he had to do to hear the sea was put the shell next to his ear and listen. She had read it in a book.

And then he once again faced the threadbare mattresses, the peeling paint and the cold trickle of water coming from the faucet when he washed his face in the morning. Water only came once a week and they never managed to store enough of it in their tanks to last them the entire week. Every centimeter of their rooftop was covered by
water tanks and they had some barrels in the basement too, connected to the tanks on the roof by pipes powered by a pump. Inevitably, though, towards the end of every week, everyone in the Abdenour household began to smell. As everyone’s hair got oilier, the sound of laughter slowly disappeared from the house, and the air began to sting with the smell of acidic words.

Every day Omar went to school and fell asleep during classes because he had once again stayed up late at night reading. Omar wanted to choose the literary Tawjihi track but his father snorted and said, “Literature? You think you can read a book that will earn us money to buy bread?” That was all the conversation Omar has ever had with his father about his future. Unless his father’s long and drawn out lectures that followed every grade report counted as conversation. Omar tried very hard to understand differentiation, but he simply couldn’t fathom the concept. He found that this lack of understanding almost crippled him academically. He didn’t know what he was going to do next year, when he was supposed to sit for his national examinations. More than ever, he missed Lamees.

Eventually Omar’s visa request was declined a second time, and he decided to give up. He didn’t have enough money for a third application, and what was the point anyway? They might have the key to the house his grandfather left, but the house no longer stands. Khalto Huda had only managed to go back to Haifa by marrying one of the Arab-Israelis who weren’t kicked out after 1948. After her marriage, she had gone back to check. There was no house. On his way back from the embassy, Omar remembered a conversation he had had with Lamees, after she was diagnosed with cancer.

“I was thinking about something yesterday,” Lamees started telling him. “All my life I’ve dreamt of going back and visiting Haifa. Now that I’m going to die—”

“-you’re not going to die.” Omar had cut her off.

“No, Omar habibi, I am dying. But let me finish what I was telling you. Yesterday I was thinking about why it is that I have spent my entire life dreaming of return. And I realized that a large part of this desire was simply inherited. I’ve inherited the right, inherited the desire, I’ve even inherited the grudge.”

“But does that make you want it any less?” Omar had asked her.

“No. I still want it with all my heart. I still want it more than anything. But I started thinking that it might be because we are not happy here, in this camp. Maybe that’s why we’ve been able to inherit the desire and nurture it. What do you think?”

“I don’t want you to die.”

Two years later, sitting on a bus and holding in his hand a visa-less passport, Omar remembered that conversation he had had with Lamees. But he also remembered something else. A memory resurfaced.

In his memory, Omar is four years old or so. He is sitting on Lamees’s lap; his head is resting on her shoulder. They are on a bus, coming back from a relative’s wedding. He doesn’t remember who the relative was, and he has no memories of the wedding.
He remembers the smell of Lamees’s hair though: baby shampoo, still strong because she washed her hair before the wedding. Lamees didn’t like to dance in public, much to their mother’s dismay, but that meant that her hair didn’t smell sweaty like his other sister’s hair when she carried him to the bus. He remembers how he frantically searched for Lamees and sought her lap.

Throughout the entire ride back home Lamees had run her fingers through Omar’s hair, while her own hair tickled his nose. Omar didn’t mind. He tried to regulate his breathing such that it would match that of his sister’s, their chests rising and falling at the same time. He could hear a faint echo of her heartbeat near her neck. He recalls wondering if he could get his heart to beat in sync with hers as well.

That night, Omar wanted to sleep next to Lamees. He got away with it because his mother was too tired from all the dancing to notice that he was not in the boys’ room. Lamees whispered stories into his ear until he fell asleep, giddy with his sister’s love.

Sitting on that bus, Omar began to understand the meaning of his sister’s words. Perhaps, if Lamees was still alive, he wouldn’t have wanted this visa so badly. Maybe it would not have mattered as much. For the first time in many years he felt a constriction in his throat and blurriness in his eyes. Maybe it had something to do with having to take the bus back home. Maybe it was because the ten year old girl sitting across from him had Lamees’s smile. But he managed to hold it all in until he reached the relative safety of his house and his bathroom. And then, for the first time, he properly mourned the loss of the first home he ever knew; he properly mourned the loss of Lamees.

Farah Ghniem
Tulips

Amanda N. Poteet
I Didn’t Know That

I didn’t know that fucking you would be making love, that in the morning I would feel closer to you than to the comforter pressed up between our bodies to avoid unnecessary contact and then the inevitable, frustrated wakefulness. I didn’t know that I would cease to find flaws in your smell just before a shower—like burbling mountain brook, rugged individualist, and sweat, with snowy dandruff on dark shirts and dry skin and huge pores, front teeth that don’t exactly match up and once in a while you say I am so pretty and your breath smells like alcohol on Tuesday afternoons while you study Japanese or pretend to, and insist that you are making progress, but I know you spent the last eight hours playing go or chess or parcheesi or just thinking about the nature of existence or some other equally pretentious, intellectual pursuit, though you will adamantly deny and argue vehemently the subtle inaccuracy of this label. I didn’t know that I would have to rethink my idea of self. I have small breasts and crooked knuckles and dry elbows. I shave infrequently and cut my fingernails too low and often tell long, detailed stories that can take up minutes and minutes and minutes before I realize that, in fact, there is no punchline or purpose or semblance of a point and I giggle when I feel awkward. I also lack social tact. I didn’t know that I would turn semi aqueous and spend weekends dribbling over warm surfaces, quasi gelatinous like the filling of a holiday pie with too many liquid ingredients that won’t set even under the influence of refrigerants. I wonder if my body will die from the inside, like the atmosphere
in response to human anthropogenic activity, when I am old. The bones in my hands will be come frozen and brittle with cold. The friction of rubbing them against each other will merely pain the numbed skin and I will await springtime like pilgrims, for life and warmth and food. Now, at least, that seems the only possible way to die what with you, in a moment of conscious, waking awareness, pressing your cold feet against my legs and holding them there. I cannot help but compress them, firmly between my thighs to warm them, letting the delicate heat of my youth remove the biting cold of impending mortality, taking it into my own body and storing it deep inside my bones so that I will forget that it even exists until I am already half dead with cold age. I didn’t know, I would gladly die a little bit for a comfortable morning afterglow awake with you.

Shaunalynn Duffy
Mount Vernon, NY (A Work in Progress)

Money earner,
Street learner,
Crazy little brother of the Bronx,
New York City’s Gateway to Westchester
(And vice versa)
Well-versed in vice,
Home to both tree and gutter, both church and ghetto;
Slowly commercializing, but
Living up to its history;

Usman Akeju
Peruvian Merchant

Jennifer Caplin
Wiser

Silvus, a connoisseur of pain, would order his suffering poached—lightly salted—every morning at his favourite establishment.

With it, he required a delicate cup of the usual bitter brew—black, altogether unadulterated.

A young waiter had once made the mistake of sugar-coating the whole business!

He did not receive a tip but was otherwise forgiven, for his palette was still understandably underdeveloped.

Mariya Gusman
Black Rivers

Aviv Ovadya

20
The Tomb

When you are dead on the smooth, glinting autopsy table, they will take out all your insides. The oily, yellow layer of fat that keeps your red muscles warm will grow tacky in the air, and your blood will pool in the bottom of you, like puddles after rain. They will ladle out the white, soupy vomit of your stomach contents with the same brand of ladle you have in your kitchen drawer, seeing the bits of carrot and undigested corn from the meal you didn’t know was your last. They will know you liked to swallow your pasta whole, feeling it wiggle down your esophagus in one piece.

You will still be beautiful. Like a sleeping child, your facial muscles will relax angelically, but you will still be you. Your lips will have the same 58 creases, dipping gently like rolling hills. Your ears are still mazes like conch shells, translucently white like coral sand beaches. Your skin will retain its same cottony consistency for a while, smooth and cool under my fingertips as they perceive the curves and wells of you. But only my fingers will tingle with sensation, as you remain breathless and still.

Your hair will be messy and falling in your eyes, and so I will finger comb it, memorizing the texture and color before they split your cranium like a coconut to examine your brain. Before they peel away the skin of your face, I will commit all the slopes to memory, your geometry burned into me. I will be able to see you in constellations and building frames—wherever there are undetermined shapes waiting for your form.

Your nudity is big as an opera. Splayed and spread, skin and hair everywhere, you are art, not pornography.

The heat you once generated, which pulled me in like a moth to your bare light bulb, has now stilled like the blood on your veins. I wish to spread myself out on you, transferring life from my cells to yours via active cellular transport, absorbing as much mortality as I can until we both exist in a place between life and death.

To see the insides of you, they will have to pull you apart. The doctor is really nothing more than a soft-fingered explorer who knows his way around the black lumps and brown chunks of the human anatomy; he knows which juices squish out from where and why. He doesn’t know what a gift it is to hold your purple heart in his latex hands.

He will make you an empty shell of yourself with your breastplate screaming open, loudmouthed. Everyone will be able to look inside you, like the krematoria at a concentration camp.

I want to crawl inside where your heart used to be, and warm up what’s left of you. You will be my cave, your ribs arching over as protection, your sternum the keystone of my tomb. I want them to sew me in there forever and let me go with you, wherever you go, regardless of what rot or pungency or worm should occur. I want to be the stuffing in your turkey and the picture in your locket.

In a thousand years, someone will find you and open you up carefully, lovingly, as the most precious artifact that ever existed, gloved fingertips touching every rotten hair on your putrid head with reverence. In all your gory glory, they will crack you open and find me inside, tiny, and curled up, where your heart once was.

And they will shake me awake. Yawning, I will tell them of you.

Annie Abbondante
Accidental Art: electrophoresis gel
Sea Music

Nina Kim
This is the sound of earth

Anyway.

(i)
I remember a garden that wasn’t a garden:
a patch of sunlight behind the shed
That now, as I recall, had very little sun in it.

The tree: that was the start of the problem:
who plants a garden under a tree?

And mats of roots ripped, hurled, thorned
Nettles seething:
My proud ungloved hands
(Or had they?)
ripping down into them.
Ump, ump, ump.
(That is earth flying.)

But my memory isn’t so good.

I remember a lineage that wasn’t a lineage
a tree that touched the stratosphere
its leaves burning in raging air
That now, as I recall, never grew much past the gutters
Before it rotted clumsy.

The tree: I wanted it so,
so much. I built it.
who builds a tree?

And masses of roots, searched out,
sniffed, uncovered, rinsed of ashes and dust;
My proud fingers interlacing
(Or did they?)
A map: a net: in which to fall
Glory, glory, glory.
(That is me standing.)

But I wish too much.
(ii) 
The garden.

It was:
not. Grass to my knees.
My knees were shorter then, though.
Flowers—zinnias—a red badge—joys explosions—
Imagined; they didn’t grow.

I wanted
The green bits in the rusted fuel barrel
To be spicy and sweet

The only thing:
in a cracked basin of dirt,
dug out by my proud efforts (but only to fill up the cool dark hollow
empty-yielding—) roasted
alive: skinny rows
of radishes.

I hate radishes.
Bitter in a quarter.

The tree: It tangled.
Back and forth,
and went nowhere.
We had forgotten.

No trunk but veins taking up color.
A hint—
No proof of a clearer hue.

I wanted
I wanted
I wanted

The only thing:
ump. ump.

That is the sound of earth.

Sharon J. Gochenour
Monolithic Berlin

Maggie Nelson
Blur

What happens when the distinct line between reality and dream
Crosses and gets tangled with the lines of fantasy and memory
Of when you were holding me and I was holding you and we
Were one

We were one so that the interference of sound wrapped around
Us securing us so my voice found yours and yours found mine
So our thoughts would surround and bound from me to you
Without space

We folded the space around the time where sound moved like light
In which our thoughts got wrapped up in and moved in flight
So that the rest of the world fell away from sight until between us
There was no line

Andrew Jones III
Me in Purple

Naomi E.G. Stein

28
Gullfoss, Iceland

Dheera Venkatraman
Sound Decision

If Neil grew his hair out, he could probably convince everyone it was still the seventies. Evidently, he had that kind of power. He had the ability to predict any trend, any movement and any social catastrophe with the ease of a gypsy but the class of a scientist. People listened to him not only because he was correct most of the time, but because he was confident in himself when others around him were scared.

One morning, a few weeks ago, Neil woke me up telling me to get out of the house. I’d been renting out his basement as a rehearsal space for the band for years and had never ran into any trouble. I stayed out of his women and work, he stayed out of mine. He shook me from a beautiful dream—I was traversing through mid-July Finland upon my deep red motorcycle with Beth, of course, stopping only occasionally to pick flowers and taste the local air. By the time I was snapped back into my damp Seattle basement, Neil had already gathered my things and was out the door loading my van.

“Most of the instruments will have to stay; you have no time. Pick them up next week. Leave now, please. There isn’t much time and I need you to leave.”

“What the hell is going on?” I grabbed his gigantic figure by the shoulders, almost a half-foot above my head, and demanded an explanation. He stared me right in the eyes, and with one vigorous and immediate shake of his broad shoulders he was free of my grip and I was nothing but a heap of confusion skirting his monstrous feet. Using his left foot he rolled my body aside, and glanced around to check if he had grabbed everything.

“Unplug everything. Just leave.”

I managed to get up to my feet. Neil was helping me put on my coat and handed me my own car keys.

I followed Neil’s directions and drove about thirty miles out to the Puget Sound. It was dark and I didn’t turn on the radio so I don’t know for how long I was driving. I didn’t take the direct route I had always taken to the Sound—once again, per Neil’s request. At the shore, I opened the back of my van and saw my things, yet in an unrecognizable form. Some of my clothes, guitars, photos of old girlfriends and works of art were clumsily thrown into matte, white boxes. Each box donned a small post-it note label written in pink high-lighter. I first pulled out the large box which held two of my guitars. In that same bright high-lighter was written a message. Perhaps more directions from Neil?

I cursed out loud trying to find my keys. Dropping instantly to my knees, I groped the fine sand of the shore in search of cold metal. I remembered that I kept a small key ring flashlight.
The keys felt warmer than expected in my hands, and I held the small light up to the top of the box:

_Throw out everything in this box. Throw out everything in all of these boxes. Throw each one into the water and drive back to the house. The basement is yours, Perry, all yours. Just get rid of these things and its all yours. I won’t bother you ever again._

This was no dream. I don’t even know why I listened to Neil anymore. I heaved each box from the back of the van, and one by one, dragged them to the shore. I didn’t even care to open them and take one last look at what I was forever throwing away. First, I kicked my guitars into the water. As they floated off, I cursed every song I ever wrote on those guitars, crying out into the night sky. Even the moon wasn’t around to watch Neil’s ridiculous crime. After all, this was his fault; I was just following orders. As I kicked in the last box, I navigated back to the van. Yet, I noticed a small light by the front bumper.

Leaning with his back against the fender, with a cool grin on his face, sat Neil. He was flicking a cigarette lighter, on and off. On and off. He didn’t even smoke, but he was taking a drag of what looked like a cigarette. Next to him, in the dim light of my flashlight coupled with the end of Neil’s cigarette, I could make out Beth’s figure. She stared at me in disbelief.

I froze, held in place by the threatening handcuffs of time and space. Beth took the cigarette from Neil and whispered something in his ear.

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Standing up, Neil glared at me. “I can’t count on you anymore, Perry. It’s rather useless to have you around but I realize that you cannot think for yourself. So I’ll leave. I gave Beth the keys to the house, and two tickets to Finland. Enjoy your trip, and your new motorcycle. They’ll know what to do with you when you land.”

He wandered off into the distance, just as some semblance of sun poked out of the distant horizon. With what little light was in the sky, I could make out Neil’s outfit. He wore my shirt, my jeans, and my shoes.

Balaji S. Mani
Mama

It was there that I learned
how two hearts converse
in silence.

Mama’s lap
is the only place
where time is not allowed
nor the worries of time.

To be there
is to be surrounded
by perfume.
My brother always thought it much too strong,
I loved the scent:
sweet, like vanilla
and generous
like the curves
of Mama’s body,
that rise and fall with her every breath:
rocking, soothing:
a silent lullaby.

I still go there,
to revisit a time
when I lived on swings
feeling light, almost weightless.

Farah Ghniem
A Vertical Shot of the Horizon

Lulu Liu
The Musician

Jennifer Caplin
The Audience

Shakespeare was wrong.
All the world is an audience,
An apathetic crowd of spectators
Watching a black and white silent film
Sitting at round tables
In a dimly lit room.
They lean back in their seats
As school shootings and nuclear weapons
Flash across the screen.
“Waiter,” they say lazily
and order in more wine.
The world rumbles and roars
While they exchange dirty jokes and pointless stories.
Bored, they stumble outside
Into the bright lights of the city.

Helen You
Above a Station of the Bart

I rode the CalTrain north to the S.P. Depot where I first met you who rode that yellow and white Muni bus down Van Ness. You wore an iridescent silk scarf wide wrapped about your lean waist over your faded blue jeans, your soft brown hair pulled straight back. Freckled cheeks and nose shone in sun and wind as we walked out to end of Fishermen’s Wharf, the new Pacific out beyond the wild Bay that day. Later we sat on the grass near Ghiradelli Square and smoked Canadian smokes, Wisconsin and Nebraska at your back, Massachusetts and Vermont at mine. Nights we sat full of wine on the basement floor of City Lights then waiting for the bus wind kicked up and I held you near sleep wrapped in my arms.

Months after our first date you moved north to North Beach and I lay beside you all night listening to you breathe, and the sea storm wide-awake out below the moon tides. Our last kiss was at Christmastime beside the wooden gate of that back garden porch, then Spring night after met by chance de-boarding BART then riding up shining escalator; as we rode those silver moving stairs to sky you joked, “I’m so tall!” before smiling, turning, then stepping into my empty arms.
Bird

Lulu Liu
Man On The Cross

The man on the cross scratched under the plastic ring of thorns holding the wig on his head.

It’s made from dog hair, the set designer said during the rehearsal, that’s why it looks real, and that made the man uncomfortable. His left foot rested on a wooden block and he held his right foot in front to show the spike and blood, both shining in the stage light. Nothing looked real, not Jesus’s fat belly, not the stolen hotel towel covering his waist, not the dog hair wig. Nothing looked real, except the skulls: three skulls found in the prop room, stained with shoe polish and coffee, the wear of a burning sun and desert sands, placed at the base of the cross, staring up at their God.

Eric Anderson
CXVI.

That true love can by any force be stopped
Is something that you’ll never hear me say.
A thing’s not love is, when a hat is dropped,
That thing would change, or wane, or shake, or sway:
Oh no! love is permanent, like a stain
That, though you wash and wash, won’t ever fade;
It’s the glowworms in Marvell’s third quatrain,
With which the mower’s path to home is laid.
Love’s immortal, though mortal beauty lasts
Only as long as Time allows it to;
Love differs Now none at all from the Past’s,
As Future’s love be constant through and through.
When one proves love’s governed by other rules,
Call me illiterate, and lovers fools.

Usman Akeju
Coupled

A couple
of lines lying across the page,
sleeping together as one,
in mutual freedom
from the lives we lead when we’re awake.
But if I do
wake
in the middle of the night
and touch you gently, or
however I may touch you,
will you stir?
Does the other line always respond?
What resolution can one find
in the completion of a pair
of lines?
I wish that when I kissed you
your body sighed in satisfaction,
and roused itself from perfect sleep
for not-so-perfect
“something else”. . .
I wish that when I didn’t know where to go from here,
you’d help me find resolve,
if only on the next line.
Half of a broken couplet can stand alone—
Can I?

Jaime Kentosh
Rune 28

Slide

Robin Stewart
While Robert Morris is Asleep

Sofia Ponte
Try

A broken picture frame, a notebook, the bloodied arm of a child. Things over which you can stumble and fall. So watch your step, but try not to look the broken faces in the eye.

You will need a mask to damp the stench of death for they don’t have the capacity to remove the bodies, yet. They said so on the news, they’re even calling for volunteers.

And sturdy boots, for you are going to climb through mountains of rubble. Here a kitchen sink, and there what used to be the bedroom of a child.

You will need ears that are indifferent. For off in the distance, in a neighboring village, another explosion may sound. Worse still: you may be cornered by a mother, who wants to explain to your camera exactly what it felt like when she found her daughter’s shoes protruding from beneath that sink, but who has no words for what has passed.

Broken columns, too, may litter your path. Runny nosed children wondering why there is no school again today, might run into you so watch your step but try not to look the broken faces in the eye.

There is not much else that I can tell you. You are going to encounter the dead who, underneath blocks of cinder and planks of wood, and despite the patches of drying blood, will look more intact than the living, who already are, more broken than the dead.

Farah Ghniem
Miles Davis

Naomi E.G. Stein
I reach my arms out, and braid them together behind my mother’s back
Her muscles stiff, she resists the offering,
“Go to bed, I’m fine!”

But then she stops
And the silence is as clean as the shiver before your bare foot touches dew

For a moment we stare at each other; then,
Our shoulders, arms, necks and chests wrap like dough—
the curling pieces of a bread loaf before baking

Her hands that have held me so many times, ball into fists upon my shoulder
blades against a foe that only now am I allowed to know
she fights

I rest my hand atop her bent head, her cheek against my shoulder
It’s a little awkward, my hand and wrist are bent around
I am taller than her, now
But they remain there, and I smooth my mother’s locks
Like a child

Elizabeth R. Ricker
When I Grow Up

To Be Left-Handed
MIT’s Journal of Arts and Letters

pi.love

sallyellenpeach
Nothing New

“You mustn’t eat its fruit,” spake He,
Pointing to the Forbidden Tree;

And with that Eve awoke and thought,
“Hm, which tree was it?” She forgot!

That somber Speech still in her head,
She got up from her flower-bed
Shaded under the greenwood tree
And felt her curiosity
And hunger both begin to grow;
She knew that it was time to go.

“Well, better safe than smote” said Eve,
Who thought it would be best to leave,
When, just as she’d have called Adam,
Came a hiss from above: “ssMadam?”

The lowest branch held a green snake
Who offered Eve a “gift” to take
Before she made her exodus
From the garden; he proffered thus:
“Tassty, unparalleded fairnesss—
Would you like to try thiss pear, misss?”

But the Speech echoed in her brain:
“You eat the fruit, you suffer pain.”
Eve’s hunger almost betrayed her:
“I’ll have Adam try it later.”
She didn’t yet know what lies were—
For that was one—otherwise her
Face would have then begun to blush;
Eve turned to go. “Hey, what’sss your rush?”

Further up, there was another
Snake—perhaps the first one’s brother?
On his branch hung another treat:
“The finessst grade of Nature’sss meat:
It’sss sssoft and fuzzy to the touch—
I think you’d like it very much.”

Eve paused at this and looked confused;
Forgetting now the Speech, she mused:
“But do I dare to eat a peach
When there’s a pear within my reach?
And then, “What if this fruit is cursed?
I’ll have to go ask Adam first.”

Then yet again a hissing came;
The snake (or one that looked the same)
Had scaled the tree, clear to the top!
This alone convinced Eve to stop.
His lofty bough was snowy white
(Wind frosts the branches at that height)
With no leaves, just “A juiccccy plum!
They’re deliciousssss—won’t you have ssssome?”

The famished Eve heard words once more:
“That’s a raven, and that’s a boar...”
But the voice was Adam’s this time!
Pointing to the tree, Eve asked: “Climb?”
After Adam named the last beast,
He climbed to claim their fruity feast.

Toward heaven he climbed with much care;
He picked the peach and plucked the pear,
And from Pandora’s Icebox took
A dozen plums as the tree shook
And bowed to bring him back to ground.
He held out a plum, smooth, dark, round—
Eve took it, then bite! chew! swallow!
(After her, so did he follow.)

They waited to behold their fate,
But nothing became of their wait—
None were cast out from the garden,
No flaming sword, no winged warden;
That tree, it seemed, was not The One,
So they sighed and sat in the sun,
Feasted and laughed at their mistakes:
“How silly to not trust the snakes!”

A tree with fruit you shouldn’t taste?
To Eve, that seemed an awful waste
And a bit strange for what had seemed
To be a fertility dream.

The other fruits began to mold,
So they ate plums, so sweet, and so cold.

Usman Akeju
One Day You Too May Fly

Lulu Liu
[Untitled I]

Jasmin Baek
F-16

1
What does it feel like to get raped by an F-16?
The question went unasked, but answered
by his kiss, by the gentle bruising of my lip,
the taste of ashes on his tongue.
By his passion, suffused with so much anger.
And as he whispered in my ear
Hilweh, inti kteer hilweh,
I blushed.
And yet,
Somewhere not too far away,
a little girl was pleading with fate, asking:
Please let me go back home to die.
Hilween Uyoonek, he said.
And all I could think was that the beauty of my eyes is irrelevant,
as he traced and retraced a Lebanon on my skin.

2
My friend, Salah,
is a lecturer of Drama at the American University of Beirut.
When the two soldiers were captured
and the war broke out,
he decided to hold theatre therapy sessions for
the children of southerners
seeking refuge in Beirut.
For one of the exercises,
the children had to say
what they wanted more than anything in this world.
And so that little girl,
just shy of four years old
said:
please let me go back home to die.
Upon further investigation,
Salah found out
that Ayah’s mother –
for Ayah was her name –
was killed in the south of Lebanon
in an attack of F-16s.
Shajan, he said. The exquisite marriage of ecstasy and misery, smiles adorned by tears, a sense of beauty that nothing less than the utterly grotesque could create. A luxurious by-product of having seen enough suffering to regain vision, but not enough to have become too blind, to all that is still aglow in the world. For sometimes, when an F-16 strikes, it doesn’t leave you with any vision in its wake.

Farah Ghniem
saxofree

sallyellenpeach
In Mourning

Again, she yells, “Revolting! Mistkafer!”

“Wending”  
—a poem by William Schwartz

The sky is full of holes.

William steps from his hovel and into a world he thought was lost: joy and loss, the excitement of a new day coupled with the anticipation of the next day, the dexterity of a body not waiting, not sitting—a catch with a father or a brother—, and the failure to focus on his heart long enough to actually forget its pounding and breathe, breathe, breathe. And then as if planned by the same divine cliché that makes him a teacher, the sun makes a brief appearance only to disappear—post-apocolyptic beams of light scatter in the distance—and he begins to lament his connection to weather.

He has been so routine in his life for so many years—this this this and that, there at this time here—leading a rather hopeless existence since leaving the seasons of New York City—here, a sunny moment is unpredictable. The intrigue of other voices had escaped him, and his once insatiable desire for the company of peers, peers of women, men, a woman, sometimes any woman, or a man of any means became an androgyny of a listless sorts—lazy and without category. He doesn’t know why all this came upon him so suddenly, but his life is about repetition: teaching, walking the dog, sitting in traffic, renting movies, and trying to do something and not and spending his nights online playing backgammon with unknown or unknowable people in their own different states sitting at their computers, smelling his fingers, and eventually falling asleep on the couch and waking to teach to walk the dog to sit in traffic, sitting in traffic, trying not to do something or writing a letter to her to try to write to her to write “no” and to spend time inging himself into a passive existence.

In his slumber he can hear a familiar voice calling him by his last name, “Schwartz,” and... and the repeatedness of his actions invaded dreams, stops, and he stalls.

“Is that you, Bill Schwartz?” but the mouth, the expunging mouth that calls his name as he tries to cross the threshold or step into oncoming traffic; before he can feign a death, the voice is upon him.

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What’s left wanting

Dear Bill,

Lately, a young man who regularly visits the library—a small library a few blocks safely removed from my neighborhood—has been, I believe, checking me out. Really, checking me out. I can feel his eyes on me.
His name is Leo—I know this from his library card—and he tends to borrow books from authors I avoid and others I am completely unfamiliar with. He always sits near wherever I am placing books on shelves strictly adhering to the system. His quiet advancements make me uncomfortable and I feel the weight of my hair tied back. I try to hide behind the stacks.

On this Thursday I am again in Leo’s sight, I think, as I place books on a lower shelf. My blouse untucks from my green linen skirt. I can feel the cool, dusty elements of the library on my exposed backside. “Modesty is paramount,” mother says, but I would gladly remain undone if his intensity did not make me so uncomfortable; but it does. I retreat to the restroom to adjust myself.

through something

The winter shifted and snowstorms were a product of youth. The canoe that capsized stayed underwater with its canoers, and when summer arrived, it felt more like winter.

something like mercury

Sitting by the scene of his accident—waterfall in Manhattan... espiritus calmness—a car rocks the metal plate that covers hell, rattling a filthy doom of forgotten stove pipes—he has been drinking a lot of beer and so little seems so much to admire and so much seems so little to admire, Like paper bags, he thinks.

missing like mercury

Bill works at Beth Jacob Torah Academy, a Jewish high school of orthodox and conservative girls—a Yeshiva, not a Bais Yakov, not a prep school. Some of the orthodox girls are very religious—they’re shomer nagia and will probably don shietels when they marry; but the majority—despite their Jewish faculty’s attempts to convince them otherwise—the majority is Shabbos observant if not wholly religious—they fall into the “have to” category: they “have to” be religious because their parents are and thus exist as an underground of operatives on Friday night, just as their parents before them; and there are a few blatantly rebellious kids—a clique of Deceptacons that wage a silent war against the Fromes; and then there are a few sibylic personalities, crossing all lines.

(a short poem on the smallest part of the fish—its brain)

The Wollomsac river, Vermont, spring thaw, green canoe, young man, no life vest invested and the waterfall’s turbulence pulled him into its thunderous mist, a hidden brick wall collapsing onto itself endlessly. The winter silence unearthed itself in a series of fits, all hysterical. Nothing came across the border. Sitting by the sight of his accident, there is no waterfall, only blocks of wood, stones on stones, and trash. The trout fish skating bugs.
extraordinary fish, he thinks

Turning over rocks, the crayfish flee in a burst of reversal—neither scientist, nor naturalist, he contemplates the supposed end.

now dust covered

“Remember the Psychedelic Furs?” she asks and he remembers her looking at him grooving to Mirror Moves; then he wonders how he lost track of time.

William notices that she lost even her little hips and remembers the time she wrote his last name as her last name, Denise Schwartz, on the return of a letter she sent to him.

“I still listen to them occasionally,” he says. “But for sentimental reasons. I think I liked that I was the only one who liked them.”

“I liked them too.”

becomes what’s left

He fancies the extremes of self-isolation in this, a city of enormous expanse and unreasonable layout. He had long ago turned the ringer off, relying solely on a sporadic checking of messages.

“Admit it,” he says, “you’re waiting for the ‘but then.’”

of him drowning

But then Bill didn’t even know who his father was when he was and in the blur of days trying to breathe and go to school, the image of his beard, his gray eyes, his uncontrolled mane atop a stone, corporate figure encasing a slumped and cracked soul slipped further and further away. It was years before he recalled recalling his name, and when he did in moments comparing his life to another’s, the pleasantness and reassurance of his return became a curse and he quickly washed his mouth out with soap.

[Keriyah]

of her tearing her blouse

Dad, a.k.a., “Terrible” Ivan Schwartz, an absent and now dead father...

[pulse-checking]

As she gently pulls his hand up her legs to the meeting of her thighs, she whispers in his ear, “First base is not a kiss.”

Brian Katz