



LAMP

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American Dream

Teenagers do not smoke in shadows
because there are no trees to mother them.

I prop my bike against a mailbox
to touch my bleeding knee with
popsicle and earthworm hands.
No band-aids please, Mama.

I've never gotten the sticky red off my fingers.

I remember Brown Thrasher Court.
Where birds did not sing
about birdlike things
as birds are wont to do
on streets named after them.
They sang about mortgages.

I've never seen a Brown Thrasher.

The cul-de-sac hosts a party.
Fireworks and toddlers shriek
in circles with empty beer bottles.
I tear home, past the searing
shadow of my house, where I spy
a cigarette
glow.

At Summer's End

T. L. Guillot

my uncle used to carve wood out back
he would rescue wooden eagles from broken trees
and use iron tools from medieval dreams
like Da Vinci dressed in black
he used to smoke several packs
of Air Force brand cigarettes
in a desolate shed built out back
by the weeping willow tree

and my aunt left one summer day
i knew she would never come back
the house fell into the kind of decay
that stays with you when someone dies
and there were no more reasons why
the medieval eagles should ever stay

i pretend that I can hear them fly
back to their families and willow trees

several months later and I've grown remote
my uncle sat down and had a stroke
but I never woke up from those summer days
that I had buried beneath his decaying shed
his shed out back by the weeping tree
that does not seem so willowy to me
someone else moved in to erase his tracks
and keep John Deere tools perfectly stacked
but nowhere by my memories
they are as dead as that tree

i'm not even sure which house it was
there are many trees way out back
hiding from industrial smoke
it takes more than an eagle to find those dreams
and more than a lifetime to let them go

Unsent Letters

Olivia Matson

Unsent letters,
Unwritten thank-you's,
Typed-up texts,
Torn-apart drafts

Missing assignments,
Empty to-do lists.
Out of alignment,
Blame the planets

Unfinished business,
Not just for spirits.
Much to do and nothing done
Defines Executive Dysfunction.

Output's incomplete,
Un-taken-care-of,
Keeps coming, keeps coming,
What are You afraid of?



I Listen to Rachmaninoff Because I Want to Write Poetry Like Frank O'Hara

and see love through cherry-colored Coke glasses
with the kind of furrowed sensibility
that only makes sense in dreams.
Because love is mostly like that, anyway:
only romantically sensible—
creating its language through
sucking air from lungs
with the bravado of a trendy cigarette
then stamping those lost breaths
out into letters
of an alphabet that's unknown
to its designer
and its prospectors that
still seek its syllables in every
gut-sputtering moment and
teeth on them when they find them
like a shovel's head does when it strikes rock.

Those lost breaths
are now these silences
that I am chewing on
in the corner store
like they're some
ballooning bubblegum
standing in a line

where you used to be
in front of me
another hundred of
mouthless moons ago

Foster McNece

Blood Typed

Kendall Covington

The air in the clinical lab tasted sour. Despite the pervading stench of bleach and bleak white walls, Emma's mouth smacked with the nasty acrid taste she got when her mouth was both very dry and she had forgotten to brush for a couple of nights. The stiff leather of the chair stuck to the skin of her thighs as Emma took the quick moment while the nurse wasn't looking to try to wiggle into a more comfortable position. The blue-green leather made a loud and low squeak as she dragged her skin across its surface, finally letting go of her sweaty but unfortunately not-sweaty-enough leg with an obnoxious, slurping "pop!"

Emma flinched and watched the gap of light beneath the door shift and sway with the passing of people's shadows. Inside of her jean shorts pocket, the small receipt she'd taken from her father's desk last Friday crinkled like a cosmic warning.

On her left, the nurse shuffled around in her turquoise scrubs, snapping on clear gloves until the latex shimmered with the light from the long fluorescent tubes hanging above their heads.

"Which arm, sweetheart?"

"My right one," Emma instantly replied. "I— I just like it better there," she told the nurse, feeling small. "Please." The nurse gave her a small smile as she sat down.

"No need to convince me, darling." She winked and wheeled herself around the leather chair. Emma gnawed on her lower lip as the nurse wrapped a blue rubber band around the upper area of her arm and twisted until it stuck.

"Do you want to have Dad in here with you?" the nurse asked her and turned slightly toward the door.

"No!" Emma yelped, unable to stop her eyes from flying to the door handle. It didn't budge. Emma cleared her throat and tried to salvage the situation. "No thank you, ma'am."

The nurse nodded absently. Emma rubbed at her hot cheeks with her left hand, as if she could scrub away the red glow on her face. Chill out. You're a "dime-a-dozen," Em. The words echoed in her mind like the TV static in the living room after 10:00 PM. Her hand dropped back to her side as the nurse peeled open a small, square packet. The distilled, caustic stink of the alcohol wipe wafted into her nose, slinking down her throat and into her lungs like it owned them. Emma's nose scrunched up as the older woman

rubbed the skin of her other elbow with the wipe and then produced a small needle with plastic wings on either side and a long, translucent tube that corkscrewed out behind it.

Emma felt her stomach lurch and her heartbeat pick up.

It was a good thing she hadn't eaten this morning. The nurse told her to make a fist, but Emma could barely hear over the thudding of her blood and the wailing in her ears. She couldn't help but think that the second that needle touched her, her very skin would turn black and reveal some festering rot.

As the nurse took hold of her arm beneath the elbow, Emma whipped her head in the opposite direction, unable to look at the moment when the thin needle pierced her

skin. The nurse patted her reassuringly on the wrist, and Emma bristled.

"Now stay still for just a moment, dear, and keep your fist clenched. I'll let you know when we're done." The nurse squeezed her wrist, and for just a moment Emma could feel the ghost of her mother's hand beneath the rubber grip.

Emma turned her face, and out of the corner of her eye, she caught the slow but steady siphon of her blood through the clear plastic tubing. She was faintly surprised by the color.

It wasn't the bright red she'd imagined all blood to be but instead slid dark and dull through the tube. Like foul, murky liquid peering through a curved wineglass.

"You're doing so well," the nurse said, rubbing her thumb in a soothing pattern

against her skin. "We're almost done."

Emma realized that her breathing had gotten short as she sucked air in through her nose in sharp staccato bursts.

"There, all finished! You did great." The nurse patted and pulled, and suddenly Emma's arm was her own again. Well, nearly. Keeping a thumb on the gauze pressed to her elbow, the nurse set down the syringe and reached to grab a band-aid.

"Oh darn, it looks like they didn't restock

the regular band-aids. Is the princess okay with you, darling?" Emma looked at the purple-themed bandage and chewed on her lip, weighing the consequences. She nodded with a small and shy tilt of her chin. The nurse gave her a conspiratorial grin and another wink. "Don't worry, I like them too." She pointed to a sticker wrapped around the curve of her stethoscope, which was peeling with age and a lack of adequate surface area. Emma could barely make out the same theme that matched the purple band-aid now being stripped from its sticky paper packaging.

As she watched the woman lean down to stick the band-aid over the gauze, Emma's eye caught on the white corner of the slip sticking out of her jeans pocket, and she realized now was her moment.

"Excuse me, ma'am? C- Could you tell me my blood type?" she asked. The nurse looked faintly bemused.

"Project for science class? Or just curious?" the nurse inquired.

"J-just curious! We learned about it in class the other day, that everybody has their own blood type, and I wanted to know mine..." Emma mumbled. The nurse gave her another winsome smile.

"That's right! Did your teacher tell you that blood type is genetic? It's passed down from your parents, just like the color of your eyes and hair. You know, your nose looks just like your daddy's." The nurse gave a final pat to the band-aid to make sure everything was okay and stood to

reach for a file.

"Yeah. People have told me I'm just like him," Emma said. The nurse hummed as she flipped through the pages, before holding out a single piece of paper.

"Well dear, it says right here that your blood type is A," she said and pointed to the damning line. Emma's mouth flooded with the metallic, sour stench.

"Oh."

"What's the matter, honey?" the nurse asked, returning the page to its proper place, eyebrows crinkled in concern. "Do you feel dizzy?"

Emma felt the little A printed in black ink on the crumpled sheet in her pocket like it was burning a hole into her skin. Her cheeks had gone cold.

"A little," she whispered, nearly inaudible. "I was just hoping it'd be different."

The nurse squeezed her wrist, and for just a moment Emma could feel the ghost of her mother's hand beneath the rubber grip.

Breakfast Time

T. L. Guillot

The scrambled eggs were still getting cold.
I had no intention of eating them.

“Do you ever think about the people we used to know in middle school?”

Not the kids who sat too close to the chalkboard

Or the ones you were
friends with

Or the first person you ever had feelings for

But like

The really freaky people?”

My bacon tasted weirder today. I think the coffee
Affected everything,
More than I could truly know.

“The freaky people?”

Like that one guy who would put his legs behind his head

And yell at the teachers

And yell at the birds

And spell out why drinking straws are inadequate in every possible way?

Do I remember him?

Do I know if he’s dead?

And why do you ask anyways?”

I hadn’t touched anything else on my plate.
Some syrup oozed through the bottle
Searching for pancakes that would never be found.

“Well, it’s just that

I had a dream last night

That everyone hated.

The one who couldn’t talk to people

Without wiping an indecent joke

On their cheek or sleeve or mangled constitution.

The one that asked me to buy him a poptart,

To which of course I refused,

Because he asked everyday

And I couldn’t pay for all of the poptarts in the

World.

I couldn’t pay for everything, but I tell myself I tried to.

It was hard to sleep last night.

I hope neither of them are dead.

But life is cruel that way.”

Her shoulders shrug in dug out agreement.

Breakfast is over. The memories of Christopher

Shannon and Jonathon Parcels are over. Neither of us stumble on these harsh dreams again.

They are cold and dry and wading through oceans till other icebergs die.

But no amount of ice should ever verge

Like those of the middle school hallways.

My wife has to drive the kids today, but I will pick them up.

I ask them how their day was.

They smile, feeling loved.

They smile because their dreams are real

And miles from everything else,

Miles from the frozen sea.

When You Speak

Let's reimagine ourselves back at that party,
the one where conversations throbbed against the walls
almost enough to where the sentences broke through
the ceiling and left us bare. Don't you remember?

How so much sentience filled the room
that for a second,
I believed the Moon was going to come screaming down
and swallow us whole.

But then you speak.

And though it is just a side remark,
I still slip away and transfigure
into a net that tries to catch
every single speckled pattern of your words,
of your unassumingly sleek vowels and diffident consonants.
How can your voice be so small but remind me of constance?
Of a middle-of-nowhere stream that still sends chills
when Summer is singing her warmest notes.
I let my ankles feel your current,
the successions of your intonations lapping against them.
they long to be swept when your sentences run long and high,
and stand in wait when it dries with your periodic pauses.

Because of you—
I'm reminded to remember the watershed.
And all the hills of people
that choose to channel their buried words
into someone else's eager tributary.

Common Grace

May's end and the fireflies
already flash against the tree line.
A blink of gold like a coin's twinkle
amidst twilight's purple-lined shadows,
edging the sky like a queen's robe.
I just thought you should know.

I watch the early summer rains while
my hands polish plates over the sink.
No thunder. Not yet. I haven't seen
lightning sink western teeth into
fat black clouds
or heard the wind
push the misty cold air into the east.

The honeysuckles are back, though.
Rimming the edge of the burned-out road
like waxy candles, white and gold, they
flicker with each swish of a passing Sonoma.
Do you see them, bursting, glowing, petaled
stars? Am I the only one who stops to taste?

And the blue woven between the crisp green
leaves, newborn lilies, pushing their petals
into the heavy air like orange ruffled fists?
I am never lonely here on this bruised, irresistible
earth, this world clothed in robes of curious grace.
Can you hear the thunder now, coming close?



After disappointing another father figure

The poem stalked up my spine,
Sprawled in my frontal cortex,
And surveyed me with wide, daring eyes.

My self-pity pricked her ears;
My anger's head cocked slightly;
My pride cracked her neck;

The poem stretched out a soft hand,
Offering an array of sightly little metaphors—
My hurt imagined herself tucked between them like rose petals in old Bibles.

I feel the poem's throbbish heartbeat—
My grief reflects like gold on its skin—
I hear my melancholy crouching, poised, greedy for a dwelling place—

Then I rumble from somewhere deeper within me—

"I will not write you."

Kaley Hutter

hereafter

marigold's beautiful hands
push plush through the farmhouse's
white bones, and roses
grow
through ruptured glass with silver moon
petals and thorns like a sore throat.
the ruin
of my family is here
among the vines and blooming grief
I grow
tulips by her headstone—yellowpink
starfish red. orchids crunch and
shivel
in winter. I kiss them
and forge this shattered home
into a greenhouse.

Lilli Wright

Why I Don't Like Reading "Dover Beach" Anymore, If I Ever Liked it to Begin With

Vivian Silva

I always knew my mom was going to have cancer. When I found out she did have it, it felt natural to me that she would have cancer. Sometimes, I feel like I know certain things that will happen, even if I'm not consciously aware of it. Like, for instance, I'm quite sure that I'll die in a car accident, but that's a story for another time, and a prediction that, if all goes according to plan, I assume I won't be able to prove right. My mom's diagnosis was like that for me, as if it had always been meant to happen, as if it had already happened and I had already known it, in a different life. I remember, as we were sitting around my dining room table, my four brothers and I, my dad said we needed to talk. It was serious, of course. (Our dining room conversation has no place for serious. I've heard that there are two types of people at dining room tables: ones that are serious—all news, all existentialism, all death—and ones that are not. I think my family is big enough to never be able to achieve that solemnity. On Father's Day one year, I remember, my older brother had a cold, was pretending not to be able to open his eyes. We spooned sauerkraut into his hands. He never saw it coming. We were adults, at this point. My brother would have been twenty, myself nearly nineteen. My mom was mad at us and yet, nothing in the scene differs from what might have been considered regular at my house.)

So, when my dad said we needed to talk, without a trace of a smile, my heart dropped. I knew. I think after he told us, we sat there in silence. No one knew what to say. My family is about as well equipped to handle serious news dropped at dinner as we are to have a pleasant Father's Day, as we are to go around and say one nice thing about someone on their birthday. (That never goes well. "One thing I like about Vivian is she's stupid, so she makes me laugh.") We just sat. I think I remember someone making a joke about it. Even then, I wouldn't have caught it. My blood was pulsing. I could hear my heart hammering in my ears. They could not seem to pick up anything but that rhythm, fast, demanding—I remember thinking, "I need to get out of here, I need to get out of here, I need to go." I couldn't sit

there. I couldn't hear what my dad had to say. Because, despite of how naturally—horribly naturally—it all felt, I was shocked.

I had a paper due the next day. That, I do remember. Poetry analysis. (I never liked poetry—still don't. I can't grasp it right. Slips through the fingers of my mind like water that tastes like impostor syndrome and 'I don't know what I'm doing'.) So, I sat. I was in my green chair. (I always called it green. My mom called it blue. Really, it was probably a shade of sea green, with a velveteen cover that reflected different shades based on the aggravation of the fabric. Always loved that chair; my mom hated it. As soon as I left, she threw it to the side of the road. Bought me a new chair—circular, gray, no armrests, objectively worse—to atone for the sin over which she never felt guilty. My dog used to sleep in that chair, the green one. Mine was the only room she'd sleep in, go to when she was scared, which was often. She was obstinate, didn't present herself well to others. Everyone thought she hated them and we'd have to explain that she didn't. Tina. I loved that dog. She died this past year. Cancer. I never really said goodbye. That part of my life is gone now. It frightens me how quickly the memories fade.)

I sat in my chair, the green one. I'd tell you that I know the poem I was staring at—blindly—was "Dover Beach." Matthew Arnold. If it actually was, I don't know. And yet, my memory has attached itself fastidiously to that one. (Even if it wasn't "Dover Beach," it is now.) The pounding of my heart deafened the waves the poem was asking me to hear. Visions of the wooden ripples in our dining room table blocked out the sights of cliffs. My body sank deeper and deeper into my velveteen green sea, drifting, untethered, from the stormy waters of "Dover Beach."

I couldn't get it down. It meant nothing to me. (Why should it, when I myself was sitting on my own beach, hearing the wash of my own waves, beating, crying out in a language

of distress that I'll never be able to articulate?)

But it was due. It was due, and I couldn't come to class with nothing. I loved English. I loved the class, the teacher. (My high school English teacher. Always had lamps on, never overhead lights. Classroom smelling faintly of coffee.) Couldn't let him down. So, I just sat in my chair that smelled like dog, not understanding.

My mom came in at some point. I wasn't writing anything, of course—there was nothing I could have written even if I wanted to. She sat on my roll-y chair. (Turquoise blue, badly stained for reasons I never could remember. Had a habit of decompressing without user assistance. My mom had picked out that chair. It didn't match the rest of my room anymore.) She was uncomfortable.

"How are you doing?" She ducked her head. (My mom has never liked any type of conflict, dissension. The older I've gotten, the more I've noticed it. Confrontation of any problem is difficult for her. And yet, she does it anyway. Standing her ground, meeting my eyes, she does it anyway.)

"I dunno." I didn't know. As if the meager matter of minutes that had passed had clarified any of it. (It's been years now—three—and in many ways, I still don't know.) "It sucks," I told her. I didn't look at her. (I don't remember if I didn't, but I know this fact to be true. I can never look.) The chair turned bluer as I pushed the



velvet against its current.

"Yeah," she agreed. Slowly, her chair began to sink down unprompted, a ghostly hand decompressing the lever for her. She laughed, the smile not meeting her eyes, as she drifted down to my level. I smiled. A moment of light in a sea of darkness.

"I don't know why it does that." I nodded at the chair. It must have broken at some point.

"Weird," she conceded. Paused. Then, sighed. "Don't give up hope, though. We don't even know how bad it is yet. It might be almost nothing at all. It's not decided yet!" My frayed sense of rationality found fault with this statement, pushed away its strained comfort. I knew this is what she intended it to be. It wasn't decided yet. Her death. That was what she meant.

"I'm here though, if you ever want to talk about it," she continued, her voice soft. "You can talk to me."

"Okay."

I didn't want to talk to my laptop. "I have tomorrow," I told her. and I regretted the them. Faintly, a voice ed—she could be dead you're worried about felt my throat con- of control, stability ("I need to get out of alone.")

I guess she left after that. And then I continued to sit. My thoughts, however, had cracked open a door that I was unable to close. What if my mom died?

her. I hadn't closed to write a paper for It was a poor excuse, words as I spoke in my head object-within a year, and the paper? (I was.) I stricting, any sense washing away again. here, I need to be

"Okay." She smiled. It was tentative. It occurred to me I might not see that anymore. I felt numb. I guess she left after that. And then I continued to sit. My thoughts, however, had cracked open a door that I was unable to close. What if my mom died? Suddenly, all the futures I had taken for fact grinded to a halt. My mom could die. Of course, I had always known in some off-handed way that my mom— my parents—would die at some point, but I had never taken it seriously. Just like, if I had known my mom would have cancer, I never confronted it. And the knowledge all came crashing down on me, all at once. I felt a desperate need to take a shower.

(I like crying in the shower. It's a method of grieving I've used on many occasions. I think it's something about being surrounded by water, wrapped in it, while you weep. The feeling of water on your back, water on your face—total encompassment. When you

cry, it's as if the water cleanses you, purges you of sorrow, a baptism of grief. And once you've dried off, you're clean again, salt stains wiped from your cheeks. There is an act of completion in crying in the shower.)

I wanted to cry. I did. I wanted to feel the pain, process it out. This was natural, a rite of passage. I became presently aware of a choking in my throat, tears that needed to be felt to be purged. I might never see my mom again. See her smile. I felt the water on my back. My mind moved systematically through situation after situation. Would my mom even live to see me defend my thesis? Even live to see me graduate at the end of the year? It wasn't even all immediate, I realized. It wouldn't fade. When I got married, she wouldn't be there. If I had children, she wouldn't be there. She would just be dead, and I'd keep on living. The thought burned, harsh and terrible, in my mind, but I viewed it numbly, with a second pair of eyes not my own. The tears did not come. The emotions I needed floated dully around in my mind, not fully present but also not diminishing. They just were. Soon, my mom might be confined to live only in my memory. She would slip away slowly, water through fingers—lines of poetry—until even the idea of her was marred, artificial, a ghost kept alive by an IV drip of photographs and home videos. (“Wow, I forgot she smiled like that. Isn't that awful?”) She would cease to be, slowly and steadily. Tide pulled back from the shore.

I stared, stony-faced, ahead. The sky was dark. (There's a window by our shower. You can see through the slits in the blinds.) I'd wasted so many words, so much anger on her. If I had known this was all the time she had, I wouldn't have done it. Realization's boney fingers were cold upon my neck. I felt nothing. I got out of the shower. I wasn't even clean. I didn't feel clean. Nothing had been washed away. I couldn't even cry.

I finished my paper. Somehow. I knew as I was writing that it was bad. I knew it, but I couldn't care enough to change anything, to offer any genuine attempt at revision. I had nothing left in me for that. I had nothing to be proud of.

I think that the next day, the same day my paper was due, I told my best friend. I should have waited. We didn't even know what type of cancer my mom had yet—could have been anything. We wouldn't have known. It could have been brain cancer, and we wouldn't have known. (It was lymphoma, though. Stage two, I think. And this was a blessing, a needle in a row of knives.) Those days were the worst. I'll never forget them.

“It'll be okay,” she told me. Speaking it out loud made it so much worse, actualized it. Spoke it into existence. I was shaking. Terrified. That was the closest I ever came to crying, I think, right there in the middle of the senior lounge after lunch, where everyone could see. (Would have preferred it be in the shower.)

“It'll be okay.” She told me, said it over and over. “It'll be okay, it'll be okay.”



Comfort, I guess, was the intention. I felt none of it. I began to shake, instead, with rage. Couldn't she see? Couldn't she hear what she was saying? Couldn't she taste the lies in her mouth? “It's not, though.” I remembered feeling shocked at the vehemence in my voice. “It's not okay. My mom could die.”

(Much of this, really, has moved beyond me. Feels like a different person's life. Not those words, though. I've never stopped being angry about that. She and I are still friends today. I wish we weren't.)

And so, I grieved alone. It became apparent to me that my brothers were unwilling to talk about cancer, at least not to me. My friends were always there to tell me everything was okay, and I did not want that. I remember how my school chaplain prayed for my mom at matins and how I wished he didn't know this aspect of my life. How I wished he hadn't prayed. It wasn't his business. I remember how my cheeks burned and that I was glad everyone's eyes were closed. They meant well, but they couldn't understand—I did not want them to. I learned quickly how happy my middle-class relatives always were to refer to cancer as “sickness,” to keep it happily vague and wish it all away. How everyone seemed scared to use the real word, like the cancer could somehow infect them too if they let it in their mouths. I had my mom, but I would not dare to lean on her for comfort, when she was bed-ridden, hair falling out on the floor, fingertips blue. And so, I turned in on myself. I kept moving. Kept writing essays, kept trying to capture poetry in my hands, no matter how desperately it tried to slip away. Kept getting in the shower and waiting to be clean. Kept waiting for the tears to come. They never did.

I cried twice in high school, I think. I remember sitting down with my friends at lunch, telling them I didn't think I could cry anymore, with cheeks stained pink from shame. Those two times were the exceptions in a four-year famine, expressions of emotion I devoured to quench my emaciated soul. The first time, I remember, was my junior year. Failed a Latin test I had spent days studying for. I lost thirty points on an outline for Books Two and Three of the Aeneid, which I had studied till I thought I knew it

backward and forward. When I got my grade back the period before lunch, I sat there in stunned silence. And then I cried before going to lunch.

I cried over my essay on “Dover Beach.” That was the second time I cried, the only time I ever failed a paper. Haven’t before or since. I remember sitting in my family’s minivan and crying, seeing all the red ink. My teacher had left comments all over it. Nothing made me feel worse. (This is bad, Vivian. I know you can do better than this.) I was ashamed, devastated, because of the paper. It wasn’t cathartic. It wasn’t a vessel for grief, a way for me to approach pent-up emotions in other aspects of my life. I cried over my paper.

I think about my analysis of “Dover Beach” sometimes. I still don’t understand poetry, “Dover Beach” less so. I think about how I failed, how my teacher’s red pen bled through the pages, how I cried. Sometimes, when it crosses my mind, I think about how my mom had cancer. (She’s been cancer-free for years now. Sometimes, when she coughs, though, it still makes me nervous, like she’ll drop dead right in front of me.) Sometimes, I remember that my mom almost died. I mentioned it to my friend just a few days ago. (“Really? Stacey had cancer? I had no idea! When was that?”) And, sometimes, when my mind moves that way, I remember that I never cried over any of it.

But much more often, I think of my analysis of “Dover Beach” and crying in the minivan in the middle of the afternoon. And, I’m afraid, I’ve found that hurts more.

Our Argument

Foster McNeece

For a moment
can we just be
yesterday’s news?
and not find
ourselves knotted
in this implacable rope
 of conversation
where your teeth—
my teeth
bite down
and pull
on the ends of our
 existences
like there is no threshold
no give,
no “you,”
just “I”
 without a me
just bitter locks of hair
 and tongue
that are stuck
looping over and
 rooted within
a skull
 that’s framed atop more
helplessly subliminal body
like the flesh
 that seethes in us now
myopically seeking to divide
two into
one
 with each
unstrung palpitation—
 each cry
that leaves out
from the lungs that
compose them
these hearts
we call “ours”

**A vow
elicited by
the bride
and her
four failed
marriages**

Ella Campbell

Ardent
paramours stay
rain or rainbow, always.
Actors flatter when the stage
yawns awake.

Ergo—
let fresh hearts be
weary of the prepared
scene, the refrain of deceit per-
formed here.

“Ill, ill,
ill-fated,” cried
they. “Fiction,” riposte I.
His piece rings sincere, as I live and
believe.

Object
of love, object
of overt emotion—
our congregation before us—
Outlast.

Unchurch
us not, husband.
Unconcealed, undisguised,
under God, denouement of our
drama.

Sea Burial

If you were capable of delusion
You would tie their corpses fast.
But familiar faces
will become waterlogged and
blurry as the moon withdraws.

It is inevitable.
Caskets reclaimed by tide.

When you cannot keep their eyes before you,
the lights to show their color fade.
Each night you find
your mind forgets something.

You cannot recall
the structure of their cheekbones
or the bridge of their nose.
You reach out for the shape of their shoulders,
the sound of their voice is already distant and muffled.
Their laugh is foreign,
their gait misplaced.

Months and years compound the leagues between you
until they are lost,
sunk beneath the waves of your consciousness.

The water is rising, rising.

You cannot go anywhere
but further from the start.

Hannah Klose

Viridescent

That July night echoed with childlike cries
of delight, such squeals and squalls barbaric
as my father peered with twinkling eyes.

“Watch closely,” said my proverbial knight,
and snatched a mote of light, blink hypnotic
that July night. Echo. My childlike cries

of ecstasy spilled out, unlike the prize
which could not escape the large, callous grip
of my father, who speared with crinkled eyes

the innocence of that small soul, gleam
bright and in the dark, its green stuff narcotic
that July. Night echoed my childlike cries

as he pinched off its rear, blaze brutalized,
stuck it on my knuckle, contract chronic
like my father. My lingering eyes peer,

I wish to hear him speak. Apologize.
I am made of swollen shards ceramic.
That July night echoes. A childlike cry
belies condemnation in both our eyes.

I am teaching myself to format a poem

I am teaching myself to format a poem
Translating syllables into ink
Persuading pauses to become punctuation
Pleading with the future reader to be able to grasp the rhythm –
To hear my voice caged in their head
As they move their lips silently, fixed on a fossil of what was once watched and heard

I am typing
But I cannot write a vocal crescendo into iron margins
I cannot teach this page to throb at the throat
My words are not meant to be spoken in the click clack of a keyboard
Echoing like guards’ heels on stony cell floors
My words are meant to be spat not read
I stop typing

Dear silent reader
Please note that there was a brief silence before this stanza
Which was only filled by the air conditioner humming
And the heartbeat in my thumb
Pulsing against my forefinger,

Like a bird throwing itself against the bars of a cage



Cafecito

“Mamá, hazme un cafecito porfa.”

The perfect ratio is in her blood.

There’s no recipe for me to follow.

All my cups leave me dreaming of home.

My childhood was in this kitchen,

Hearing her sing of two lovers in the campo.

Her movements always so fluid,

While the coffee pot molds to her hand.

“Mamá, no olvides el azúcar.”

I know she never would,

Pouring it until it’s more sugar than coffee

Until it becomes the rich color of her skin.

She hands me a mug of sugar and coffee.

The heat of my cup

Matches the warmth of her smile.

“Mamá, gracias.”

Elena Mackey

Basket of Tangerines

Ella Campbell

Katie loved it when the sky was the same tangerine color as the oranges growing on her tree. It was rare and perfect. This morning, the tangerine sky was sagging with rain, but that would not stop her from caring for her tree like a doting mother on her child. Her tangerine tree was the crowning jewel of the backyard. It hadn’t always been this healthy, but Katie had taken over when they moved in. A new house, new backyard, new country. Being so far from their old life in America, Katie needed something to do all summer. This was the solution.

When her mom had first seen the tree, she had bemoaned its haggard state to her husband. Mama wanted a beautiful backyard. “Let’s cut it down.”

Katie’s heart twisted. She had run to her room, grabbed her garage-sale gardening almanac, and flipped it open to “Tangerine Tree.”

“Can I have it?” she had begged.

A shrug. “Sure. If you take care of it.”

Now, all she did was care for it and care for it, all alone in the sun. Watering, pruning, cleaning the dusty leaves. With a goal, a purpose.

The afternoon before her very first day, she emptied a decorative basket onto the counter, lined it with her baby blanket, and began picking her best oranges off the tree. She washed them in the sink and dried them with a towel and nestled the babies into their basket to sleep until the next morning.

Now for herself. She laid her clothes on the edge of the bed, meticulously folded. Brushing her teeth, she danced. Combing her hair, she jumped up and down. Tomorrow was going to be the best day of the year. She had a backpack filled with brand new school supplies and a basket of her home-grown oranges and she just knew. She couldn’t lose.

As she laid in bed, she swore she would never be able to fall asleep.

When her mom woke her up the next morning, she said, “Remember, baby, they don’t speak the same way you do. You’re going to pick it up quick. Just watch them and learn.”

She nodded, yes mama, but the words went in one ear and out the other.

In her mind’s eye, she was picturing what would happen. An orange peeled, one slice for me, one for you. Yes, I grew this myself. I’m glad you like it. Of course, we can be best friends. Want to come see my tree?

It replayed over and over as she biked down the dusty roads with Mama. Pristine oranges were tucked in the basket swinging from her handlebars. At the school gate, her mom was biting her nails. Bye, Mama. Kiss on the cheek. Yes, I’ll share my oranges.

In the concrete schoolyard, Katie sat herself on the bench and unveiled her shiny treasures. She expected all her classmates to flock to her basket and coo over them, but no one approached. In fact, they seemed splintered across the schoolyard. Jumping rope, clinking marbles together, wrestling, throwing pebbles at dogs behind the chain link fence. Unfamiliar territory.

No one approached. She decided she would approach instead. She tucked the handle of her basket in the crook of her arm and tapped a girl with a book in her lap.

“Do you want a tangerine?”

The girl’s eyes were seeing, but not understanding.

Katie set down the basket and started peeling one of her oranges, wiping juicy fingers on her shorts. “Here, I’ll have a slice, and you’ll have a slice.”

She popped a slice in her mouth and offered one to



**Bye, Mama. Kiss
on the cheek. Yes,
I’ll share my
oranges.**

Book Girl. She shook her head, speaking gibberish and waving Katie away with her hand.

“Fine,” Katie snapped, her cheeks reddening with rejection. “I’ll take these to people who want them.”

No one in the schoolyard wanted an orange. Lips curled, eyebrows furrowed, everything seemed to scream NO, NOT FROM YOU.

They kept on saying those confusing words too. The meaning was clear—“American girl.”

Tears welled in her eyes when even the teacher rejected her. “No, Miss America. Put these away. Pencil out.”

She tried to learn, to understand. The boy next to her kept pulling her hair. Finally, she slapped his hand away, and he laughed. Like it was a game, he punched her shoulder. She yelped and hit back harder. He shrieked with laughter.

They were both given a stinging rap on the wrist by the teacher. “I want to go home,” she sobbed.

The teacher patted her shoulder and sent her back to her seat. The bell finally rang, and she was the first out the door. Her mama was at the school gate. No stopping, Katie grabbed her bike and rumbled down the dusty road.

Oranges threatened to spill onto the hardpacked earth as the basket swung back and forth from her handlebars.

Mama called her name. Her heart pounded.

Hot tears streaked her cheeks.

A pebble caught in her tire chain. A twist.

Crash.

Her knees ached, but her beautiful tangerines—her babies, her hearts—were littering the ground. Brown with dust. No longer golden treasures. One was bleeding pulpy juice beneath her bike. Sobs rocked her chest, and she began gathering them up into the broken basket.

A hand pressed to her shoulder. No, Mama, I've got it.

The dusty hand wiped her tears away. It was a girl. She spoke nonsense kindly, which calmed the tears and left Katie sniffing and curious.

The dusty-handed girl had a basket too. She pulled back the lid and showcased her own babies. Perfect ruby I-don't-know-whats. She selected one and gingerly sliced off the top. Over her knee, she cracked it. Juicy seeds spilled into her hands.

The nonsense seemed to mean, "Do you want some? One for you and one for me."

Mama caught up. "Are you hurt, baby?"

Her daughter showed her sticky red fingers. "Yes, but I'm okay."



LILLI WRIGHT

endocarp

When the rain rages sweet I sow
Something new maybe good. I peel
Open my chest. Mango-like I search
For stones. Hold them up
To angry light. The air and water
Polarize on my tongue. I crack
The bitter stone. My neck pops in time.
The pit in my chest is
Not hollow. I plant it
In my pain's muddy soil.
And wait.

Tootsie Roll

Are we not but the thorax of an ant
perched on a melted Tootsie Roll?
Stuck between the cracks of a
retiree's driveway.

Yet we believe we are so big and mighty,
instead of a scratch on an old DVD.

Aren't we just creatures walking each other home,
as people disappear like beautiful sunsets?

Without the thorax, the ant would collapse under the pressure.
The thorax is vital for the ants' survival.

Stop wishing you were the claws on a lion.
Life isn't a buffet.

Life is a Tootsie Roll with an ant perched on top,
stuck between the cracks of a retirees' driveway.

CONFESSION

Rebecca Pickard

You told me many times
I mustn't lie, I mustn't

curse, I mustn't take too much
Communion wine—

is whispering
a sin? You see,

a wind is sighing into me,
and something wells

inside me at the call.
I know that joy lies

in an empty chest, a heart
unmoved by changing winds,

but this whisper bids my breath
into the heavens—

and all I can describe it as
is gulping down the goblet,

wine dribbling down my chin,
elation on my lips.

The House of Gulliver

Micheal Bose



The Boy remembered falling. But before that, there was a hut—a hut filled with bones. And some deal, a deal between mommy and daddy and...a witch! Then there was laughter, and a tunnel of green fire. Before he could cry, his parents were gone, and then he was falling, falling through that creepy green light to end up...here. Wherever here was. As his memories came back to him, the Boy huddled in the corner of the room, eyes fixed wide on the back of a plush leather chair centered in the room. Ordinarily, he would have enjoyed this space. The floor was smooth polished wood, cleaner than most places he had slept on. But this was a witch's mansion. And so, the Boy hadn't moved for the better part of an hour—he didn't dare. He timed his breaths to the creaking of the logs in the fireplace, and his muscles ached dearly from being curled up in the same, crouched position. But he was getting hungry, and thirsty, and he needed to stand up soon before his legs cramped.

In the chair, a slender hand turned the page of some unseen book. A tome of horrible rituals, the Boy was sure. Forbidden magic, meant to steal children away from their families, just like him. Though he could only see the snarls and tangles of her twisted black hat peaking over the top of the chair, the Boy could picture the rest of her. Gnarled fingers, ripe with open sores and knotted knucklebones. Teeth filed into horrid fangs that were complemented by slitted, yellow eyes. The eyes of a witch.

But the Boy hadn't eaten in a while. The fire was quiet. And at the worst possible time, his stomach growled.

The book snapped shut with a resounding thunk. The witch stood up from her chair, but the Boy was already moving, his short, grubby legs springing on the rich hardwood floor. Even running, the Boy made little noise—he had learned early on in life that if he was quiet, he wouldn't be hit. But his legs were tired, aching from crouching in the same position for all that time. He stumbled, nearly fell, and quickly picked himself up again. He was close—so close—but just before he made it to the door, his calf seized up in a vicious cramp and he collapsed. He tried to roll with the momen-

tum and spring to his feet, but he was too close to the door. All the Boy earned for his efforts was an aching shoulder and a light dent in the doorframe.

He had to keep moving. The witch was here, in this room, and if she caught him... But it wasn't the witch.

As the boy looked up, he saw instead a girl a little bit older than him, maybe eleven, wearing strange bright clothing and clutching a book in one arm. She crouched in front of him and held out a hand. As she helped him up, the Boy noticed that what he had taken for a dark witch's hat was instead a thick halo of tightly woven curls that bounced every which way as though the laws of physics were mere suggestions.

"Hi!" said the girl, smiling cheerily. "My name's Chloe! We haven't met yet. What's your name?"

The Boy remembered the witch's filed fangs, and he shivered. After that moment of horror, a dozen questions sprang

to his mind. Being young and full of knowledge, he asked the most important one. "What are you wearing?"

Chloe looked offended. "They're just pajamas." She sniffed. "There is nothing wrong at all with Cookie Monster pajamas."

The Boy's brows furrowed. "What's that?"

"The Cookie Monster? You haven't seen Elmo before?" Her voice had a pleasant, gentle twang to it, like the strumming of an old guitar.

"No." The Boy struggled to remember the strange word, "What are pajamas?"

Chloe looked him up and down, a strange expression on her face. She put a thumb through the holes in his shirt and winced at the purple blotches on his arms. "Oh, honey." She drawled, smiling at him, but it seemed sadder than before. "You're the new kid, aren't you? Rosa mentioned that we would get another one today."

"Who's Rosa?"

“Hmm? Oh, she’s the witch.” Chloe answered, distractedly frowning down at her pajamas. She glanced up, seeing the panic on the Boy’s face, and clapped a hand up to her mouth. “She’s not what you think! I promise. She’s a really sweet lady.”

“She won’t... you know,” the Boy’s voice cracked, and he paused, brushing a lock of tangled brown hair out of his eyes. In the quietest of voices, he whispered, “She won’t eat me?”

Chloe laughed, her nose wrinkling. “Ew, no! Of course not!” She considered him a moment, then held out her hand. “It might be easier if you just meet her. Rosa will answer your questions better than I can.”

Hesitantly the Boy took her hand, keeping his fingers close together in case he needed to slip away quickly. “You promise?”

Chloe gave his fingers a gentle squeeze. “Promise.” She opened the door, and the pair stepped out into a long, well-lit hallway, lined with pictures of smiling men and women. “Say, how did you get there anyways? I thought I was the only one who could access the Quiet Room.”

The Boy shrugged. “Dunno. I remember a creepy old hut and falling through a tunnel of green light, holding the hand of the witch. I was scared. I like to be alone when I’m scared. I blinked, and when I opened my eyes again, I was in that room.”

Chloe pouted. “It took me months to figure out how to control the House. Say, what was your name again, kid?”

The Boy wiped his nose on his sleeve, taking care to avoid the bruises. “Don’t have one. Daddy called me Boy, unless he drank the yellow water that smelled like bread. Then he called me other names, but Mommy said not to repeat those.” The Boy didn’t notice Chloe’s shocked expression, so he plowed onwards. “What’s that book you’re carrying? What did you mean control the House?”

“Huh? Oh, its Gulliver’s Travels. Something of a guilty pleasure of mine. It’s about this young man who explores this magical island and goes on all sorts of adventures.” She paused, noticing his crossed eyes and scrunched up nose. “It... you don’t care. Moving on.”

“No, it’s not that!” The Boy exclaimed in protest, and there was a desperate hunger in his tone. “I’m just trying to... I want to be able to picture it. A magical island, I mean. I... wasn’t allowed to go outside much.”

Chloe flashed him a comforting smile. “Tell you what, when I finish, I’ll lend you my copy, okay?”

**A melodious voice
echoed out from
nowhere, seeming
to come from the
very walls.**

“Okay!” The Boy nodded vigorously, “Gulliver. Yes. I like that name. It sounds brave.”

“I’m glad you like it!” Chloe smiled at him. “Rosa’s been trying to get me to read the ‘classics’ for a while now, and if I let her know that I actually enjoyed this one, she’ll try to get me to read stuff like Moby Dick, or heaven forbid, Huck-leberry Finn.” Chloe shuddered. Then her eyes lit up and she said, “Oh, but you mentioned the House! And Magic! Watch this!”

Chloe pursed her lips, then asked aloud, “House, where are we right now?”

A melodious voice echoed out from nowhere, seeming to come from the very walls. “Spatially speaking, we are somewhere between the third Pool and the New Zealand retreat. Would you like a view?”

“Aww, just the third Pool?” Chloe stopped in her tracks, “Wait, is it that time of night in the New Zealand branch right now?”

“You’ll be catching the tail end of it, but yes.”

“Give us a view!” Chloe blurted. She looked at the Boy and squealed. “You’re in for a treat!”

Slowly, one side of the hallway began to fade, until it became transparent, almost like they were looking through a bubble. On the other side was a tableau that the Boy couldn’t even begin to describe.

The first thing the Boy noticed was the more ordinary of the two. In front of him, on the other side of the transparent wall, was the most massive pool he had ever seen. Children and teenagers of all ages splashed around in a giant tile basin, and faint laughter carried on the wind, passing through the filmy wall to fill the comfortable silence of the hallway. Fountains arced through the air, and the place was ringed with strangely colored plastic tubes.

Slides, he remembered. That was what they were called. He had seen them before on a pamphlet his mother brought home once—a big boat that his mother swore she would leave on and never did.

But the Boy's ruminations disappeared from his mind the second he saw what was behind the pool. Or rather, above it.

Lights.

As best the Boy could describe it, it was like a star had descended to earth and unfurled itself into ribbons. Streaks of color danced across the sky in shades of luminescent hues of blues and greens. They were accompanied by flashes of pinks and purples, twinkling among the innumerable stars as though the heavens were playing a secret melody that only they knew.

"So, this is magic," the Boy breathed.

Then the Boy's stomach rumbled, and the moment was dispelled with gentle laughter.

"Come on, kid," Chloe drawled, and the

wall turned solid again. "Let's go get you some food."

The Boy looked at the walls of the house expectantly. "Can the House give us food to eat? Also, I want to go there. New Zealand or whatever."

"Well, to answer your first question,



we can ask the House for all the snacks we want. It is magical, after all. But Rosa likes to cook, so we don't stuff ourselves in between meals. Also, if you want to go somewhere, you can open a door and travel anywhere in the House as long as you think of the location. And I mean anywhere."

Chloe pointed a thumb at the now solid wall. "We could visit New Zealand and see the northern lights right now if you like." She cast a sideways eye at his stomach. "But let's get dinner first. Um, let's see, what else can the House do? You can also change the dimensions and furniture of a room. One time, someone moved all the beds on the east wing to the attic as an elaborate prank, and Rosa was so wroth that she didn't bake cookies for a week—"

"The doors will take you anywhere?" the Boy asked. A tentative thought crossed his mind. "Even outside? I could...leave?"

"Of course, honey, none of the doors are locked unless you want them to be." Chloe drawled. She looked at him closely, glancing at his torn clothes, his bruised arms, and the shoddy condition of his clothes. "Sweetie, you can stay here as long as you want to. Do you really want to go back?"

The Boy thought about it for a moment, then he shrugged. "Maybe. I like it here. And you're nice, but...what about my parents?"

Doubt and longing warred in his mind. He thought back to his brief time in that creepy old hut, before he was transported here. Had his parents really sold him off? Did they miss him? did they even look back?

But he didn't have time for those thoughts right now. They reached a doorway that was almost completely covered in stickers. On each of those "Hi, my name is __" stickers, there were names. Chloe wrapped her fingers around the handle and hesitated. "Kid, your parents never even gave you a name. That's no way for a child to live, much less a family." Chloe knelt down in front of him and ruffled his hair. "I think, if you want it, we can be your family too."

The Boy thought for a moment, the northern lights playing over and over again in his mind. He thought of the photos on the walls, and the laughter of the children in the pool, and he brightened. It was so different from the old alleyways, filled with needles and bottles and a different kind of shouting. "You know, I think I'd like that."

Chloe smiled. "Come on." She wiggled her fingers dramatically, "Let's go meet the wicked witch of the woods!"

As they stepped through the door, there was a part of the Boy's mind that still expected some evil lair. Maybe there would be eldritch patterns scrawled across the walls and floors, and bronze braziers with sickly green flames. Maybe there would be animal bones in odd corners or twisted, writhing branches poking through the windows like he had seen in the hut. But instead, as the door came to a gentle stop, the Boy found himself in a kitchen.

An older woman stood by a rustic wooden countertop, mixing some kind of dough with an electronic whisk. Little chunks of batter splattered her gray hair, and even in her intense state of focus there was a softness to her face. The wrinkles around her eyes spoke of a lifetime of laughter instead of the weary lines that crossed the faces of the Boy's parents. Rosa looked happy.

The Boy didn't know that older people could be happy. In his mind, joy died with age. Rosa noticed the two of them, and the whirl of the mixer gave way to cries of joy and open arms. "Chloe! So good to see you again. I simply adore your new pajamas." She tried to wipe a glob of batter from her cheek but just ended up smearing it even further. "You know, if you ever want to try out a different reading spot, the House just added a lovely little shelter on top of the big oak tree by the west garden. Just knock three times on the tree trunk, and you can find the hidden ladder."

Chloe's eyes were wide as saucers "Wicked," she breathed. "Oh, um, the big chair in the Quiet Room—"

"Way ahead of you girl," Rosa chuckled. "Take some cookies before you go. You're all skin and bones."

"Thanks Auntie Rosa!" Chloe turned to leave and then looked over at the Boy, a questioning look in her eyes. He gave her a grateful smile in return but motioned for her to go.

After the door closed, Rosa sat down in front of the Boy, looking up at him. He was surprised by the gesture; no adult had ever spoken with him before, just at him.

"Would you rather have Chloe stay?" Rosa asked. The Boy hesitated and then shook his head. Rosa gave him a comforting smile. "It's alright to be scared. I'm a stranger to you, but I figured that meeting a witch ought to be like ripping off a band-aid. Best to get all the fear and misconceptions out of the way all at once. So." She reached up to the island table, grabbed a cookie, and placed it in his hands. "Do you have any questions for this old woman?"

"Just two," the Boy started. His voice was too shaky for his liking, so he took a bite of the cookie. The chocolate melted on his tongue, and he sighed. "Actually three. What is this?"

Rosa laughed merrily. "Oh sweet child, that is a chocolate chip cookie, and there are plenty more where that came from." She cast a discerning eye at him. "Never had one before, have you."

From her tone, it wasn't a question, but the Boy nodded anyways.

Rosa scooped her finger into the cookie batter and dapped a glop onto his nose. "Well, now you can have as many as you want." She smiled and reached out into thin air, her hand disappearing up to her elbow. "I know your first question. 'You look so different from the witch in the cabin, Rosa, how did you do it?'" she pulled out a bundle of black cloth and unwrapped it. "Dentures work wonders." She clacked the fake pointy teeth, and up close they seemed like cheap props instead of the frightening fangs the Boy saw in the wood cabin. "Also, makeup, a crazy hat, and a little bit of magic. I did some theater before Margot took me in, and it rubbed off on me."

"Margot?"

Rosa waved her hand, smiling fondly.

"The witch before me. We keep up a tradition here in the House. We take in the children whose parents abandon them or give them away, and then when we get old, we pass on our magic to someone else. Which brings me to your second question. But I won't pressure you for it. If you aren't ready for the answer now, or ever, my lips are sealed."

The Boy hesitated only a second before pushing through his fear, and it was to his credit that his voice only trembled a little. "Why? Why did they leave me?"

Rosa sighed. "People can be cruel. And the people who claim to be family can be the cruelest of all. Family isn't defined by blood. It's forged by love that endures

and is not broken, and that can be found in anyone. Family does not abandon you when the going gets tough, or to make life easier on themselves. Family doesn't try to hurt you. And we," she touched her hands on the Boy's arms, and the bruises disappeared, "We will not abandon you. We will never hurt you. And you can find your family here with us. So, tell me child." Rosa smiled, handing him another cookie. "What should we call you?"

The Boy stared at the cookie in his hands, and it looked so much like a tiny island. Like paradise. As he ate it, he realized that if Rosa was telling the truth, he had the rest of his life to explore every nook and cranny of this strange place. "Gulliver," he said. "Call me Gulliver."

"Gulliver it is." Rosa stood and dusted off her hands on her apron. She pulled a roll of stickers out of a pocket that seemed far too small for it and wrote down the name. "The House is yours, Gulliver. What would you like to do first?"

Taking the sticker, he raced over to the door and stuck his name tag on it, right beside Chloe's on a little spot near the hinges. When he re-entered the room, he pondered for a moment, then stood on his tiptoes and grabbed a whisk. "Can I help?"

DEDICATION

Year fades to minute fades to knowing
your shoes won't
last without some serious
sewing. Their soles ripped and polished shells
cracked while passing
through the past that went up in smoke.
And as the fires in the libraries
wave their tireless
hands through pages of code,
their secrets will smolder
with a whispering hiss
that the world is no longer quiet.

Staggering through the ashes
of memory
Evil will continue to wear childish disguises
and only show his face
when cornered in the wings.
When the shuddering orange shadows
unveil his grin
and the match's flare crawls
and devours,
the singers will scream their ends as

their stages ignite
and be remembered through
sad critics
typing dedications to
the corpses.

When the traveler asks you
“friend or foe?”
silence is the last known safety.
And as the flames rattle and
shatter the sugar bowls,
bitter tea infused with the soot
of the wreckage
will sustain you
as you follow the purple beam of the
faltering lighthouse
that must always lead you caveward,
never home.

Erica Fox

Sensehear

I think of white noise as
thickness.

I think maybe I could touch it.
Each sound has a texture in my mind,
but I feel it first in my skull, through my jaw.
The shaking metal humming of a radiator—
a slow electricity that stings my temples.

A wicker fan on a July evening
feels like swallowing gelatin.
My favorite is the nonsensical
every-voice
that comes from the late-night news
when I try to sleep with the television on.
The every-voice enters my dreams
like a raindrop cut up in a screen
door and scatters into the voices of many
characters created against my will.

These dreams stay
in my skull.
They cannot swim through the
vibrations.
I find my dreams in
the corners of my room.
They take shape and
stand. Stare. Press on my chest.
I cannot grab on
to anything. There is nothing
firm in silence. I lie still until I
awake to the sounds of the morning.

Megan Kehoe



Be Yonder

Kendall Covington

Sitting silent out my window,
that sparse, isolate plateau
of coarse flaxen grass, still fertile
despite its barren burble, wiled
with a color I do not know.

The heavens' torch set it aglow,
and with bushes bathed in merlot
I sip, breathe its haunting herbal,
sitting silent.

“Royalty,” the name I bestow,
— to call it thus seemed
apropos. Orange cooled with the eternal,
that queer acquaintance of purple.
I wait. My body can't let go,
sitting silent.

Saint

All that was bland will soon be Technicolor.
Colors seen only during asphyxiation
Will paint the lenses of your eyes.

Everything is music so far,
All math with tears, etc.
Everything is music so far...

When my dreams of a Jazz-Protopunk outfit are cast aside,
I spy a bag of mangoes at my bedside.
I simultaneously want to dance
And purchase a train ticket to the untouched Midwest
Where I can disappear innocently.

I will bring my guitar and arthritic fingers
And my not-yet-mangled voice box.
I will develop a rusty growl if it kills me,
And I will tattoo the things I dream of on my legs.

And in an ending unforeseen, I will be a saint.
High-strung and half-holy,
I will make war with circumstance
And I will save you from a distance if it kills me.

L a c e d

by

SOPHIA ELLEN JANTOMASO

How many things we run over in the dark
and in the morning are repulsed at the scar,
fetid on some face we loved.

We forget that it was us—
The thing we killed, the death in daylight,
turns our dainty bellies.

Be gentle then
if looking in my eyes you find
them bloodshot—
how can I tell the hand that struck me
a story it has forgotten?

Let your own wounds plead my innocence. No more of this
you, you
and me, me—
but both of us.



What Is Hidden

Take me to a hollow willow,
and let me scream
into her flesh.

Then carry me away.
Yes, carry me away
into the sighing evening

Rebecca Pickard



Amityville Horror: *A Local Perspective*

Kelsey Bundrick

It was six years before the murder. One second my mom, about ten years old, and her friend Michael Martusciello were sitting on a dock on the Amityville Creek lazily feeding the ducks. The next second, a roaring pop broke the silence, and a bullet whizzed past them, mere inches above their heads. Mom looked up quickly and saw a man with a shotgun standing on a dock across the creek. She and Michael began to scream and cry as they jumped up and ran away. Another bullet harmlessly ripped through Michael's jacket, leaving a small tear. They ran straight to my mom's house and called the police. The Amityville detectives rushed to the site. Papa, mom's father, was a detective for Suffolk County. Although he could not officially join the case, he was there to find out who had shot at his daughter, and he enlisted my uncle to help him. Mom could not remember which house she had seen the man at; it had all happened so fast. With the measurements Papa made, and his knowledge of ballistics, he conjectured that the bullets most likely came from the DeFeo's dock. My uncle, who is now a dock builder, worked on the very same dock four years ago. He surveyed the scene again and firmly believed that Papa was correct. Papa specifically believed it was Ronald DeFeo Jr., also known as Butch, a seventeen-year-old troublemaker. This was never proven, but Butch would soon prove to be more than capable of such a crime.

On Wednesday, November 13th, 1974, at around 6:30 p.m., twenty-three-year-old Butch ran into Henry's Bar and declared that someone had shot and killed his parents. A few men followed him back to his house on the creek, and they soon discovered that his parents and four younger siblings were dead, all lying helpless

in their beds surrounded by pools of blood. One of the men, Joe Altieri, called the police. The Amityville police department was not large enough to handle homicide. The case was thus turned over to Suffolk County, where Papa was now the captain of the homicide department. The police investigated the scene for the rest of the night and took Butch in for questioning.

Early the next morning, it was raining as my Aunt Laura rode the bus to school. There was a stop sign at the end of Ocean Avenue, and as the bus came to a halt, all the children's eyes were on one house. One of Aunt Laura's friends recognized Papa and asked what he was doing. The children crowded at the windows and watched as six dead bodies were carried out. A homemade sign that read 'High Hopes' stood out in stark contrast. The bus driver was too stunned to continue until the last body was taken away.

Meanwhile, detectives Butch had told the night his statement. Butch stayed home from work due to stomach troubles on Wednesday, he woke around 4:00 a.m., and still asleep. He worked Brooklyn that was owned work he could do as he

to leave at 1:00 p.m. He visited friends, shot heroin in his arm, and drank at Henry's bar. He complained to his friends that he didn't have his house key and that he tried calling his house but did not get any answer. Finally, he went home and broke in through a window only to find his parents dead. He rushed back to Henry's Bar at 6:30 p.m. Butch claimed that the murderer must be Tony Mazzeo, a former family friend who had a key to their house. Supposedly, Mazzeo was a mafia hitman who recently had a falling out with Butch's father.

The story soon unraveled. The police had found many guns in the DeFeo household, and notably there was an empty box for a .35-caliber Marlin rifle in Butch's bedroom. They had already determined that the family had been shot with a .35-caliber gun. The police had also narrowed down the timeframe of the murder to be between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m., meaning Butch would have been present at the time of the murder, unlike his version of the story. With this information in hand, interrogators put more pressure on Butch. Butch began to cave, admitting he was present

The children crowded the windows and watched as six dead bodies were carried out.

investigated the story before, reading through recounted that he had on Tuesday the 12th and slept all day, but up extremely early, left for work, his family at a Buick dealership in by his grandfather. At pleased, and he decided

for the murder. He claimed that he had been forced to watch Mazzeo kill his family. However, Mazzeo was out of state and had a rock-solid alibi. As Butch's story continued to fall apart, he broke.

He admitted that he murdered his whole family.

No one knows exactly what happened in those early hours of November 13th and how the murders were executed. Butch changed the story many times over the years. Questions were raised over how none of the neighbors heard any gunshots, especially since no silencer was found with the gun. Also, all the victims were lying face down in their beds, and no signs of struggle were present. Even if the sound of gunshots escaped the neighbors, how did the family inside the house not hear them and awaken? As news of the murder spread throughout the country, many made their own theories. Some speculated there must have been a second shooter, and Butch ran with the story. From prison, he claimed to have many different accomplices over the years; most recently, he claimed it was his own sister Dawn who committed most of the murders and that he only killed in self-defense. The police department has no faith in his claims. They maintain he was the single murderer. My mom, who only knew of Dawn as a kindhearted neighbor and who was fully aware of Butch's reputation, saw no reason to question their conclusion.

There are many possible explanations for the lack of a silencer. My uncle believes Butch covered his gun with a pillow to muffle the sounds. My aunt, who has been inside the house since, noted that the walls are very thick. According to the New York Times, Butch allegedly told the police that he slipped sleep-inducing drugs into his family's dinner Tuesday night, and although the medical examiner could not prove it, he commented that it was very possible. This would easily explain the family's lack of struggle. Considering the fact that Butch was home "sick" all day Tuesday, he certainly could have prepared for his attack in the privacy of his third-story bedroom. Butch was also knowledgeable about drugs, frequently experimenting with heroin and LSD. Perhaps one or all of these explanations together can illuminate a thread of truth from that night. As for Butch's claims of a second killer, it seems more likely that he was trying to make any story stick, to find any way out of prison. Or perhaps he simply liked the attention the media gave him.

The murders have attracted gross attention ever since the Lutz family moved into the DeFeo's house a year later in 1975. George, Kathy, and their three children stayed in the house for twenty-eight days until they claimed they could not stand it anymore and moved out. They worked with author John Anson to publish a book

about their short time at the DeFeo house. Its title was *The Amityville Horror*, and it later inspired dozens of movies. It reported horrors such as green slime dripping down the walls, a flying pig with red eyes, and the Lutz children levitating. George and Kathy Lutz claimed the house was filled with evil spirits. According to ABC News, the Lutz couple believed the evil house played a part in Butch's murdering spree. Butch had allegedly heard voices telling him to kill his family, and he was urged by his attorney, William Weber, to pledge insanity. The Lutzes reached out to Weber for his opinion before working on their book. Weber claims to have worked with the couple in contriving their story over many glasses of wine. The main motive was, of course, money. The Lutz couple attacked Weber as a liar and maintained that their story was true. However, Kathy's son (and George's stepson), Christopher Quarantino, told the *Seattle Times* that much of the story is exaggerated, and some of it is completely fabricated. He also noted that George was deeply interested in the occult and actively tried to summon spirits in the house. Also, none of the owners of the house since the Lutzes have ever experienced anything out of the ordinary. The current owners joked with my aunt that the only strange noises they've ever heard in the house were those of their own children. Nevertheless, the house has been branded as a haunted house,

**None of the owners
of the house since
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ordinary**

and every Halloween brings multitudes of unwelcome visitors. The locals find these spectators extremely irritating. My uncle says the real story is not with the Lutzes, but with the locals.

Papa denied that there was ever anything supernatural about the murders or the house. To be fair, he was a skeptic of everything supernatural. He believed that Butch himself was simply born evil. The murders were certainly a shock, but Butch was never a straightlaced boy. He was constantly on drugs, and at the time of the murder, he was on probation for stealing an outboard. He was obsessed with guns, and it's possible that my mom and her friend were nearly his first victims. No one has ever discovered Butch's motive in absolute certainty, but Papa did not think it had to do with any demonic voices. One common theory is that Butch was motivated by his family's life insurance policy. Another theory is that he was angry with his family, especially his father, who Butch claimed was abusive. It is hard to comprehend that either of these motives could have taken Butch so far as to kill everyone in his house so casually. However, reported by the New York Times, Dr. Harold Zolan testified that Butch had antisocial personality disorder. This would explain his indifference in committing such a horrendous act. However, Zolan maintained that Butch could not plead insanity since he was fully aware of his actions and understood they were wrong.

My aunt and uncle agree with Papa that Butch was evil but not possessed.

However, they are more open to ideas of the supernatural. After the Lutzes moved out, the Cromartys moved into the 'Amityville Horror' house. My uncle was a good friend of theirs, and one night he slept in their basement. He didn't see any flying pigs, but he felt uneasy and heard questionable sounds. Of course, it's hard to distinguish whether there was anything supernatural to that or whether it was paranoia. It certainly must have been eerie just to be in a house with such a murderous past.

Last year, a mirror in my aunt's house exploded unexpectedly without any reason. It was a mild day in March with no extreme temperatures. The next day, she heard that Butch had died in prison. She immediately felt that there must be a connection between the two strange events.

A family friend of mine, a police officer, was tasked with transferring Butch between prisons. He says that when he looked into his eyes, it was like Butch could see right through his soul. It was a feeling he's never forgotten.

At times, it can be hard to believe that a human being would knowingly choose



something entirely evil, whether in choosing to summon evil spirits or in choosing to murder an entire family. It's easier to blame the devil, to blame the supernatural. The Lutzes painted Butch as a possessed man and blamed his house as the source of evil. They had never even met him. However, the locals knew the real Butch. I think Butch knew exactly what he was choosing. He wrote to Marvin Scott, a news reporter, "There was no demon. You know who the demon is. I am the demon."

